

FULLER THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY

THE INNOCENT SUFFERER IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

A Dissertation submitted to
the Faculty of the School of Theology
Fuller Theological Seminary
in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Philosophy

BY

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PASADENA, CALIFORNIA
MAY 1998

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Center for Advanced Theological Studies
School of Theology, Fuller Theological Seminary
Dissertation Approval Sheet

This dissertation entitled

The Innocent Sufferer in the Book of Proverbs

written by
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and submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

has been awarded by the Faculty of Fuller Theological Seminary
upon the recommendation of the following readers:

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5/27/98
Date

Acknowledgments

It is difficult for me to thank everyone who deserves credit. My friends and family members deserve recognition for the role they played in offering unswerving support.

First on the list are my parents, Paul and Therese Bricker of Sherwood, Arkansas. They provided me with support in many ways, and I can never repay them for all they have done for me, both in relation to this program and in almost every other area of my life as well. Then I would like to thank all my friends who are far too numerous to mention by name. I would not have made it without their prayers and encouragement.

I must make special mention of the late Dr. David Allan Hubbard, my first mentor in the program, who provided me with the guidance and encouragement that I sorely needed. I was admitted to the program with a nine-year gap between my master's degree and the start of doctoral work, and I had a lot of catching up to do. I regret very deeply that I was unable to present him with a finished copy of this dissertation before he passed away June 6, 1996.

I would also like to thank my primary mentor, Dr. Ronald F. Youngblood, whose advice was helpful in many ways. Dr. Youngblood was kind enough to take over about halfway through the program when Dr. Hubbard retired in 1993. I appreciate his patience due to the length of time it took me to complete the program because

of financial restraints and a whole host of computer and word processing problems. My secondary mentor, Dr. Fred Bush, also offered some extremely helpful advice and I wish I had been able to incorporate some of his thoughts and insights into this study a little earlier in the process. My external reader, Dr. Duane Garrett also deserves recognition. This study interacts with Dr. Garrett's commentary at many points and I feel honored that he was willing to read and evaluate my dissertation.

And special thanks go to Dr. Francis I. and Dr. Lois C. Andersen, who treated me like family, offering advice and practical help in many ways that I could not have done without as I drew near to the end of this project.

I would like to dedicate this dissertation to the memory of my close friend, Zane A. Mills, who died tragically on March 3, 1996. He was like family to me for nearly twenty years and no one could have asked for a better friend. He knew more about innocent suffering from personal experience than anyone I have ever known.

It is my sincere desire that this dissertation not be left on the academic shelf, but that someday it will contribute toward the ministry of the Church. If this dissertation adds to the knowledge of Proverbs and makes a contribution to that ministry, whether mine or anyone else's, it will have been worth it.

Outline and Table of Contents

Acknowledgments	iv
Outline and Table of Contents	vi
List of Abbreviations	xiv
Chapter 1: An Examination of the Issues	1
Introduction	1
I. The Issue of Theodicy	3
A. Definition	3
B. OT Books Related to Theodicy	6
1. Job	7
a. The Prologue	7
b. The Dialogue	9
c. The Divine Speeches	10
d. The Epilogue	17
2. Qoheleth	18
a. 3:16-17	19
b. 4:1-3	20
c. 6:1-9	22
d. 7:15-18	24
e. 8:9-9:12	26
II. Suffering in the Literature of the Ancient Near East	28
A. Mesopotamian Literature	29
1. Sumerian Literature	35
a "Man and His God"	36

b. Letter-Prayers	38
2. Akkadian Literature	42
a. <i>The Pious Sufferer</i>	42
b. <i>Ludlul Bel Nemeqi</i>	44
c. R.S. 25.460	49
d. <i>Babylonian Theodicy</i>	50
e. The Poem of Erra	54
B. Egyptian Literature	58
1. The Absence of Theodicy in Egypt	64
2. Suffering Is Due to Perversion of <i>Ma'at</i>	65
a. <i>Admonitions of Ipuwer</i>	66
b. <i>Dispute of a Man with His Ba</i>	67
c. <i>Tale of the Eloquent Peasant</i>	70
d. <i>Teaching of Amenemhet</i>	73
3. Inequality or Injustice was Often Rectified in the Afterlife	75
C. Conclusion	75
1. A Clear Sense of Right and Wrong	77
a. Egypt	77
b. Mesopotamia	78
2. Significant Individual Worth	79
a. Egypt	79
b. Mesopotamia	80
3. Conflict Between Deities	82
4. Judgment in the Afterlife	83

a. Egypt	83
b. Mesopotamia	83
 Chapter 2: The Lack of Discussion Related to Innocent Suffering in the Book of Proverbs	 86
Introduction	86
I. Past Assumptions	86
A. Proverbs is Conventional Wisdom	87
1. Reflection of a "Divine" Order	87
2. Doctrine of Retribution	96
a. Forensic Retribution	100
(1) Proverbs 3:32-35	101
(2) Proverbs 5:21-23	103
b. Dynamistic Retribution	105
(1) Proverbs 11:31	106
(2) Proverbs 24:15-16	110
B. Job and Qoheleth React Against the Dogmatism of Proverbs	111
II. A Current Proposal	116
A. Many Proverbs Refer to and/or Assume Innocent Suffering	116
1. Parental Suffering	116
2. Emotional Suffering	117
3. Suffering Due to the Words/Deeds of Others	117
B. Job and Qoheleth are Not Necessarily in Opposition to Proverbs	118
C. Correctly Understanding the Proverb Genre Negates Dogmatizing	122

D. Conclusion	124
Chapter Three: Parental Suffering in Proverbs	126
Introduction	126
I. Parents in the OT	126
A. Social Structure and Duties	127
1. Structure of Kin Groups	127
a. Tribe מִטָּה, שֵׁבֶט	128
b. Clan מְשֻׁפָּחָה	128
c. Family בֵּית-אָב	130
2. Roles of Individuals	132
a. Father	132
b. Mother	133
c. Children	136
B. The Family as a Setting for Wisdom	137
1. The Origin of Family Wisdom	138
a. Parents as Teachers	145
b. "My Son(s)"--Literal or Figurative?	147
2. The Purpose of Family Wisdom	149
a. Proverbs Directed Toward Children	150
b. Proverbs Directed Toward Parents	151
II. Analysis of Individual Proverbs	154
A. Parents of Fools	154
1. 10:1 (כָּסִיל)	156

2. 15:5 (אָויל)	159
3. 15:20 (כָּסִיל)	160
4. 17:21 (כָּסִיל, נָבֵל), 17:25 (כָּסִיל)	162
5. 19:13 (כָּסִיל)	165
B. Parents and Public Shame, Mocking, Disgrace, etc	167
1. Shame (מִבְּיֹשׁ) and Disgrace (כָּלֵם)	167
a. 10:5 (בֶּן מִבְּיֹשׁ)	167
b. 19:26 (מִחְפִּיר/בֶּן מִבְּיֹשׁ)	171
c. 29:15 (מִבְּיֹשׁ)	174
d. 28:7 (כָּלֵם)	176
2. Cursing (קָלַל)	182
a. 20:20	183
b. 30:11	184
3. Mocking (לְעַג) and Scorning (בִּוֵּז) 30:17	186
4. Robbery (גָּזַל) 28:24	189
C. Conclusion	191
Chapter 4: Emotional Suffering in the Book of Proverbs	193
Introduction	193
I. The Somatic Expression of Ancient Hebrew Psychology	193
A. Pre-Scientific Terminology and Broad Meanings	193
1. Heart (לֵב/לֵבָב)	193
a. לֵב as the Anatomical Organ	194

b. לֵב as the Center of Inner Life	195
c. לֵב as the Center of Ethical and Religious Life	195
d. לֵב as Representative of the Whole	196
e. לֵב as a Remote Place	196
2. Spirit (רוּחַ)	196
3. Soul (נֶפֶשׁ)	197
B. Similar Uses in Egyptian, Akkadian and Ugaritic	198
1. Egyptian	198
a. Heart (<i>ib</i> and <i>ha.ty</i>)	198
b. Spirit (<i>ba</i> and <i>ka</i>)	199
(1) <i>ba</i>	199
(2) <i>ka</i>	199
2. Akkadian and Ugaritic	200
a. Akkadian	200
(1) <i>libbu</i>	200
(2) <i>napistu</i>	200
b. Ugaritic	201
(1) <i>lb</i>	201
(2) <i>rwh</i>	201
(3) <i>nps</i>	201
II. Analysis of Specific Proverbs Related to Emotional Suffering	202
A. Heart (לֵב)	202
1. 12:25	202

2. 13:12	206
3. 14:10, 13	213
4. 15:13	217
5. 25:20	219
B. Spirit (רוּחַ)	225
1. 15:4	225
2. 15:13	226
3. 17:22	227
4. 18:14	229
C. Soul (נֶפֶשׁ)	230
1. 14:10	231
2. 28:17	231
3. 29:10	232
D. Conclusion	236
Chapter 5: Innocent Suffering Due to the Words or Deeds of Others	238
Introduction	238
I. The Legal System	238
A. Judicial Process in the Ancient Near East	239
B. Judicial Process in Ancient Israel	244
C. The Legal Process at Work	245
D. Proverbs and Legal Action	246
1. False Witness/False Accusation	246
2. Reversal of Justice	247
3. Value of the Legal Process	248

4. Royal Justice	249
5. The Legal Process and Everyday Life	251
6. How Can Justice Be Understood?	254
E. Analysis of Individual Proverbs Regarding Innocent Suffering and the Legal System	255
1. 3:30	255
2. 13:23	257
3. 17:15	259
4. 17:26	260
II. Damaging Words 11:9, 11	263
III. Harmful Actions	265
A. 1:8-19	266
B. 3:27-35	268
C. 6:16-19	272
D. 16:29	274
E. 17:13	278
IV. Conclusion	279
Chapter 6: Final Summary	281
Bibliography	293
Curriculum Vitae	318

List of Abbreviations

This is a list of abbreviations commonly used in this dissertation. They are the standard abbreviations found in most scholarly publications, but are listed here for the reader's convenience. For full documentation see the bibliography. Abbreviations for books of the Bible are standard.

AB	Anchor Bible
<i>ABD</i>	David N. Freedman, ed., <i>Anchor Bible Dictionary</i> , 6 vols.
<i>AEI</i>	Miriam Lichtheim, <i>Ancient Egyptian Literature</i> , 3 vols.
AfO	Archiv für Orientforschung
ANE	Ancient Near East(ern)
<i>ANET</i>	James B. Pritchard, ed., <i>Ancient Near Eastern Texts Related to the Old Testament</i> , 3rd ed. with supplement
<i>AnSt</i>	<i>Anatolian Studies</i>
AOAT	Alten Orient und Altes Testament
<i>BA</i>	<i>Biblical Archaeologist</i>
<i>BASOR</i>	<i>Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research</i>
BDB	Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, <i>Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament</i>
BHS	<i>Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia</i>
Bib	<i>Biblica</i>
BibSac	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar, Alten Testament

<i>BWL</i>	W. G. Lambert, <i>Babylonian Wisdom Literature</i>
<i>BZAW</i>	<i>Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>CAD</i>	I. J. Gelb, ed., <i>The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago</i> , 21 vols.
<i>CBQ</i>	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
<i>CTA</i>	Andrea Herdner, <i>Corpus des Tablettes en Cuneiformes Alphabetiques Decouvertes a Ras Shamra-Ugarit</i> , 2 vols.
FOTL	Forms of Old Testament Literature
HAL	Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, <i>Hebraisches and Aramaisches Lexikon zum Alten Testament</i> . Dritte Auflage; 4 Bände
<i>HS</i>	<i>Hebrew Studies</i>
<i>HUCA</i>	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
<i>IDB</i>	G. A. Buttrick, ed., <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i> , 3 vols.
IDBSup	K. Crim, ed., <i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible, Supplementary Volume</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
ISBE	Geoffrey Bromiley, ed., <i>International Standard Bible Encyclopedia</i> , rev. ed., 4 vols.
JANES	<i>Journal of Ancient Near Eastern Studies of Columbia University</i>
JAOS	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
JBL	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
xv	
<i>JETS</i>	<i>Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>

<i>JNSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
JSOTSS	JSOT Supplement Series
<i>JSS</i>	<i>Journal of Semitic Studies</i>
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
KAT	Kommentar zum Alten Testament
KJV	Holy Bible, King James Version
<i>LA</i>	W. Helck and E. Otto, Hrsg., <i>Lexikon der Agyptologie</i> , 7 Bände
<i>LAE</i>	William K. Simpson, ed., <i>Literature of Ancient Egypt</i>
<i>MDOG</i>	<i>Mitteilungen der deutschen Orient-Gesellschaft</i>
NAC	New American Commentary
NCBC	New Century Bible Commentary
<i>NIDNTT</i>	Colin Brown, ed., <i>New International Dictionary of New Testament Theology</i> , 4 vols.
NICOT	New International Commentary on the Old Testament
NIV	Holy Bible, New International Version
NASV	Holy Bible, New American Standard Version
NKJV	Holy Bible, New King James Version
NRSV	Holy Bible, New Revised Standard Version
OBO	Orbis Biblicus et Orientalis
OT	Old Testament

OTL	Old Testament Library
<i>Or</i>	<i>Orientalia</i>
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>RQ</i>	<i>Restoration Quarterly</i>
RSV	Holy Bible, Revised Standard Version
<i>RTP</i>	<i>Revue de theologie et de philosophie</i>
SBLDS	Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series
SBL SBS	Society of Biblical Literature Sources for Biblical Study
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>TDNT</i>	G. Kittel, ed., <i>Theological Dictionary of the New Testament</i> , 10 vols.
<i>TDOT</i>	G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, ed., <i>Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament</i> , 8 vols.
<i>ThZ</i>	<i>Theologische Zeitschrift</i>
<i>TLZ</i>	<i>Theologische Literaturzeitung</i>
TOTC	Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries
<i>TQ</i>	<i>Theologische Quartalschrift</i>
Tr./tr.	translator
<i>TWAT</i>	G. J. Botterweck and H. Ringgren, Hrsg., <i>Theologisches Worterbuch zum Alten Testament</i> , 8 Bände
<i>TWOT</i>	R. L. Harris, G. L. Archer, and B. K. Waltke, ed., <i>Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament</i> , 2 vols.
<i>TynBul</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>

<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
<i>Ug</i>	<i>Ugaritica</i>
UT	Cyrus H. Gordon, <i>Ugaritic Textbook</i> , 3 vols.
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
VTSup	Vetus Testamentum, Supplements
WBC	Word Biblical Commentary
WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zu:m Alten and Neuen Testament
<i>ZAW</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
<i>ZTK</i>	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie and Kirche</i>

CHAPTER ONE

AN EXAMINATION OF THE ISSUES

Introduction

The main issue of this dissertation is the topic of the innocent sufferer/suffering as it appears in the book of Proverbs. It will be my purpose to identify the various proverbs that refer to or imply this issue and categorize them in their collections according to subject matter and literary form.

To the best of my knowledge, a study of this topic has never been undertaken at this level.¹ Analyses of the innocent sufferer or righteous suffering have frequently focused on other portions of the OT such as Job, Qoheleth, Jeremiah or Habakkuk, and that is appropriate. However, there are certain assumptions held by scholarship that exclude the book of Proverbs from this discussion. Part of this dissertation will examine these assumptions and show why Proverbs should be given its proper place in the Biblical treatment of this subject.

In order to begin the discussion of these assumptions the first issue to address is that of theodicy. We will briefly define the term and discuss how the matter is expressed in Job and Qoheleth, in keeping with the classification of these two books as wisdom literature. This discussion may

¹ There are studies which are similar; note J. A. Gladson, "Retributive Paradoxes in Proverbs 10-29" (Ph.D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1978), and K. T. Kleinknecht, *Der leidende Gerechtfertigte* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1984). The former author takes a different approach to the topic than I do, while the latter hardly mentions Proverbs at all.

seem to cover ground that is already very familiar but it is important for this study in relation to the topic of the dissertation.

The second major section of the first chapter will analyze innocent suffering in the literature of Mesopotamia and Egypt. It will be my contention that the documents recovered to date do not show a willingness to place the blame for suffering on anyone but the individual involved, and the reason for the suffering is almost always sin.

At the end of chapter 1 there will be comparisons and contrasts of Mesopotamian and Egyptian culture as expressed by the pertinent primary literature on suffering. These will serve as a basis of comparison in chapter 2 with the literature of Israel and how the wisdom materials approach the topic of suffering.

Chapter 2 will examine the assumptions of scholarship to discern why the book of Proverbs has been left out of studies of innocent suffering. I will argue that the exclusion of Proverbs from these studies is due primarily to the classification of Proverbs as conventional wisdom, with Job and Qoheleth reacting against the perceived superficial positions of conventional wisdom.

The practice of placing Job and Qoheleth in opposition to Proverbs arises partly as a result of some inadequate views of order and retribution. Until recently it was virtually a given among scholars to equate the world view in Proverbs with the Egyptian concept of *ma'at*. This is now in question and, in my opinion, inaccurate. It was also thought that Proverbs expressed a world view that held a doctrine of retribution tied to an "act-

consequence" relationship. This is also in need of revision, as the study will show.

After these discussions, I will set forth suggestions for viewing the innocent sufferer/suffering in Proverbs. The first thesis is that there are many proverbs that show an awareness of an innocent sufferer/suffering. This should come as no great surprise, but the fact is that it has never been explored in any depth. The second thesis is that the assertion that Job and Qoheleth stand in opposition or contrast to the wisdom of Proverbs needs revision.

I. The Issue of Theodicy

The discussion here will focus on defining theodicy and exploring some of the issues this term implies. The definition of Max Weber will be evaluated and shown why it is not an acceptable working definition for this study. Then I will examine the four elements of theodicy suggested by Wolfram von Soden which show the conditions that must be present for theodicy to occur. The last part of this section will be a very brief look at the OT books which contain wisdom literature.

A. Definition

Theodicy is a term popularized in *Essais de theodicee* (1710) by the German philosopher G. W. Leibniz.² It is an attempt to defend divine

² L. E. Loemker, "Theodicy," in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas*, ed. P. Wiener, 4 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1973), 4.378-379. The term "theodicy" was known before this in Leibniz' earlier work but it gained more widespread exposure through this essay.

justice in the face of aberrant phenomena that appear to indicate the deity's indifference or hostility toward virtuous people.³ The problems of evil and suffering may be solved philosophically for any theological system if a theodicy is successful, since it will show that the existence of suffering is not incompatible with the belief that a moral deity created the world and has sovereignty over it. In other words, a theodicy seeks to reconcile contradictions within a theological system by explaining why things happen as they do.⁴

Another approach to the discussion of this issue is to redefine theodicy. This is the approach of German sociologist Max Weber, who referred to any situation of inexplicable or unmerited suffering as a theodicy problem, and said theodicy itself was any rationale for explaining suffering.⁵ While this broader definition may have some value in allowing for a comparison across a wider range of religious experiences,⁶ in my opinion it will not serve in the present study. The reason is that it "beheads" the word theodicy by removing God (or a god) from the equation. While this might be acceptable for some modern philosophical systems it is

³ James L. Crenshaw, "Theodicy," *ABD*, 6.444.

⁴ John S. Feinberg, "Theodicy," in *Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, ed. Walter A. Elwell (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1984), 1083; in more detail idem, *The Many Faces of Evil* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); and in general from the perspective of several different cultures, David Parkin, ed., *The Anthropology of Evil* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1984).

⁵ Max Weber, *The Sociology of Religion* (Boston: Beacon, 1963), 112-115, 138-150.

⁶ Gerald L. Mattingly, "The Pious Sufferer: Mesopotamia's Traditional Theodicy and Job's Counselors," in *The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature*, ed. W. W. Hallo, B. W. Jones, and G. L. Mattingly (Lewiston, New York: Mellen, 1990), 313.

clearly inappropriate for any discussion of the cultures and religions of the ANE, since religion was an extremely important part of society.⁷ The result of this, as I intend to show, is that a true theodicy is not found in either Egyptian or Sumero-Babylonian literature. It is only in the literature of ancient Israel where this term truly applies, for example, in Job and Isaiah.⁸

The next question to be dealt with is that of the conditions required for the question of theodicy to be raised. Wolfram von Soden has listed four basic elements that must be present:

1. a clear sense of right and wrong, so that a sufferer could reasonably claim to be suffering undeservedly;
2. significant individual worth, so that personal suffering must be justified;
3. minimal competition within the godhead or pantheon, so that suffering cannot be blamed on one deity due to human loyalty to another; and
4. a limited view of judgment in the afterlife.⁹

⁷ R. E. Clements, "Israel in its Historical and Cultural Setting," in *The World of Ancient Israel*, ed. R. E. Clements (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 9; James K. Hoffmeier, "Egyptians," in *Peoples of the Old Testament World*, ed. A. J. Hoerth, G. L. Mattingly, and E. M. Yamauchi (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 283, who cites Herodotus' words regarding the Egyptians being the most religious people on earth; and Gladson, "Retributive Paradoxes," 100, who calls attention to the "pervasive religiosity" in Mesopotamian thought.

⁸ See Isaiah 40:27, where the question is implicitly posed.

⁹ Adapted from W. von Soden, "Das Fragen Nach der Gerechtigkeit Gottes im Alten Orient," *MDOG* 96 (1965): 41-59.

If any of these four elements is lacking, the tension which generally leads to a theodicy can be relieved. This is because the absence of any one of these components can negate or qualify the principle of equitable or just retribution. The presence of these four factors in any given situation may not answer the question of suffering but it allows the deity to be absolved of responsibility and therefore accusations of divine injustice are no longer appropriate.¹⁰

B. OT Books Related to Theodicy

Not surprisingly, the book which most often comes to mind in discussions of innocent suffering in the OT is the book of Job. A vast amount of literature exists on this topic, far too much to summarize here. Other books which refer to this theme are Ecclesiastes (or Qoheleth), certain psalms (especially 37, 49, 73), Isaiah, Jeremiah and Habakkuk.¹¹ While there are quite a few other scattered references to pain, suffering, sickness, etc. in the OT, I will limit the study to those passages in the Wisdom books which contribute to the current topic.

In relation to the topic of theodicy one of the most common ways to view the wisdom corpus of the OT is to see Job and Qoheleth reacting against the strict dogmatism of Proverbs regarding the doctrine of retribution. This will be taken up in some detail in chapter two, but I mention it now in order to form a backdrop to the later discussion on the literature of

¹⁰ John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context*, rev. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 180.

¹¹ See James L. Crenshaw, ed., *Theodicy in the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), for discussion of many of these texts. Also idem, "Theodicy," *ABD*, 6.445-446.

the ANE. The following discussion of Job and Qoheleth will be specifically focused on how they deal with the issue of theodicy.

1. Job

Job's claim to innocent suffering went against the conventions of virtually every religious system in the ANE. The response of the three friends and Elihu to Job's assertions of innocence shows their disagreement and disapproval of Job in his protestations of unmerited suffering.

In the discussion which follows I will refrain from matters of dating, structure, and the like. For these background issues the commentaries of Hartley,¹² Clines,¹³ Rowley¹⁴ and Habel¹⁵ will be sufficient.

The issue of theodicy as expressed in the book of Job is very complex, with a huge amount of secondary literature that can only be summarized here. The topic will be analyzed in Job by literary division.

a. The Prologue

In the first two chapters the narrator goes to great lengths to portray Job as a man of integrity, one completely undeserving of all the woes that befall him, bringing Job's experience into conflict with the doctrine of retribution, which is assumed to lie behind the book. It is surprising that two of Job's statements in the prose introduction go counter

¹² John E. Hartley, *The Book of Job*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1988).

¹³ David J. A. Clines, *Job 1-20*, WBC vol. 17 (Dallas: Word, 1989).

¹⁴ H. H. Rowley, *Job*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1980).

¹⁵ Norman C. Habel, *The Book of Job*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1985).

to the reward/retribution *theologoumenon* that those who fear God are guaranteed divine blessing and protection from misfortune and tragedy.¹⁶ First, in 1:21 Job states that Yahweh gives blessings to the righteous and may take them away; second, in 2:10 he says that wellbeing (טוֹב) may attend the life of those who fear God or they may suffer misfortune (רָעָה). The latter statement comes in reaction to his wife's charge to "curse God and die" (2:9). In this she apparently believes that the righteous will prosper and the wicked will suffer.¹⁷ Since Yahweh has allowed the righteous Job to suffer, Yahweh is no longer worthy of the adoration and worship which Job gives. She places the blame for Job's misfortunes directly on God. One might have expected a theodicy, a justification of God here, but Job does not attempt to acquit God of the responsibility for his tragedies. Job's reaction is to affirm his loyalty to Yahweh.¹⁸

Job's declaration can be viewed at two levels. When viewed "from above," it vindicates God's confidence in Job against the Satan's accusations (1:9-11; 2:4-5). However, when it is viewed "from below," i. e., from a standpoint which has no knowledge of the conversations which took place in the heavenly court, it is a stunning admission of the fact of innocent suffering, since not even the righteous are guaranteed safety from life's misfortunes and tragedies.¹⁹

¹⁶ E. W. Nicholson, "The Limits of Theodicy as a Theme of the Book of Job," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*, ed. J. Day, R. P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 72.

¹⁷ Clines, *Job 1-20*, 51.

¹⁸ Nicholson, "Limits," 72; Hartley, *Job*, 84.

¹⁹ Nicholson, "Limits," 72.

b. The Dialogue

According to Nicholson the declaration at the climax of the prologue in 2:10 sets the agenda for the rest of the book.²⁰ In the discussion of the problem of suffering in the poetical dialogue issues of divine justice would be shown to give meaning to life in the midst of suffering. As will be argued below, those in surrounding cultures believed that suffering was almost invariably due to the sin of the sufferer, not the fault of some deity. This is essentially what Job's three friends are claiming, especially Eliphaz (chs. 4-5), who offers three explanations for Job's predicament. These three theodicies are expounded by Eliphaz and the other human speakers but never added to. Thus Nicholson sees Eliphaz' first speech as more or less "programmatic"²¹ for the rest of the following dialogue between Job and the three counsellors:

1. No innocent person has ever perished (4:7-8).

This pronouncement is intended to encourage Job, in the sense that he needs to have patience and endurance. This axiom is based on a conditional assumption, viz., if he is innocent then he will not die. It is an affirmation of the doctrine of retribution but does not explain Job's suffering, since Job's integrity is not being questioned yet,

2. All human beings are sinners (4:18-19).

Since God charges his angels with error how can Job believe that mankind is without fault? If Job is not without fault, then he should not

²⁰ "Limits," 73.

²¹ "Limits," 74.

expect to be exempt from punishment. This view is met very clearly in Sumero-Babylonian literature, e. g. "Man and His God," addressed below under II.A.1.

3. God chastens people with the intent to correct shortcomings (5:17-27).

This aspect of the theodicy is not taken up again until the speeches of Elihu (33:19-28; 34:31-37; 36:7-13, 15-16), but the previous two elements are frequently discussed with increasing fervor and intensity.²²

Without a doubt, the principles of retribution and reward are affirmed time and again in other places in the OT, just as the three friends do, but their primary mistake was in the misapplication of these principles to Job's particular situation.²³

c. The Divine Speeches

The logical place in the book of Job to seek answers to the problem of innocent suffering is in the divine speeches. There is no shortage of material from which to draw opinions, so the discussions here must be limited to some of the more meaningful suggestions.

Unfortunately, there is no unanimous opinion on how the speeches of Yahweh are to be viewed in relation to the issue of theodicy. At one extreme of the spectrum are those who claim the speeches ignore Job's complaints of injustice and show Yahweh to be a "blustering deity" who humiliates Job

²² Nicholson, "Limits," 74. Discussing this in detail takes us too far from the primary topic; for a brief treatment see Nicholson, "Limits," 74-79.

²³ Michael L. Brown, *Israel's Divine Healer* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995), 173. One of the lessons Job learned is that serving God cannot always be reduced to a mathematical formula, as if trouble and tragedy could never happen in the life of a God-fearer (cf. 1:2).

into submission.²⁴ At the opposite extreme are those who attempt to solve the problem of innocent suffering by dissolving it. According to this view, the world is not founded on the retribution principle whereby righteousness is rewarded and wickedness is punished. This view portrays the world as "amoral" and thus it is absurd to expect a fate which morally corresponds to one's deeds.²⁵

Both of these views are unsatisfactory. The first view portrays God as an incompetent deity who is incapable of answering Job's accusations of misgoverning the world. Because Yahweh has been called into account and found wanting, Job is bullied into submission. The author therefore is declaring Job's case unanswerable, and Yahweh stands guilty as charged. The main problem with this view, in my opinion, is that it shows God to be immoral, petty and abusive.²⁶ Job's righteousness is of no value to God, who uses and manipulates Job to prove a point. Then in the concluding prose passage this same God restores Job to wellbeing once the point has been made.²⁷ This seems hardly credible or likely.

The second view suffers from the problem of Job's previous rejection

²⁴ E. g., J. L. Crenshaw, "The Shift from Theodicy to Anthropodicy," in *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, ed. J. L. Crenshaw (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 9; and D. Robertson, *The Old Testament and the Literary Critic* (Philadelphiaa,;Fortress, 1977), 48-50.

²⁵ Matitiah Tsevat, "The Meaning of the Book of Job," *HUCA* 37 (1966): 73-106; and more recently Habel, *Job*, 65, 534-535.

²⁶ Cf. Nicholson, "Limits," 80.

²⁷ See Habel, *Job*, 533, and Nicholson, "Limits," 80, for a critique of this position, which arises from a naive identification with Job on the part of the commentators.

of the dogmatization of the reward/retribution doctrine. It seems unnecessary for Yahweh to simply endorse what Job has already maintained all along, especially since the divine speeches censure Job.²⁸ However, according to some, Yahweh's speeches are not intended to humiliate but to educate.²⁹ Job is enlightened and comes away with knowledge that he had not previously possessed as a result of the divine speeches.³⁰

Nicholson's view of theodicy in relation to Yahweh's speeches is based on the ANE *Chaoskampf* also reflected in Psalms and Isaiah,³¹ where God's primeval victory over chaos is referred to or invoked in contexts in which chaos seems to persist.³² His premise is that chaos, represented by Leviathan, the Sea, or Rahab, etc. has been confined but not eliminated.³³ This, for Nicholson, raises the possibility that the enemy's defeat may be reversed and it revives all the anxiety that goes with this idea. The claim is that these texts acknowledge the "jarring disjunction between present experience and belief in God's absolute sovereignty."³⁴ It is only due to God's intervention and vigilance that disaster is prevented. Creation

²⁸ Nicholson, "Limits," 79.

²⁹ E. g., F. I. Andersen, *Job: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1976), 269.

³⁰ Note the emphasis on the use of the root עָדָה in Job's confession in 42:1-6, and the comments of Habel, *Job*, 578-580.

³¹ Pss 74:12-17; 89:10-13[9-12]; Isa 51:9-11; cf. Job 38:8-11; 40:25-41:26[41:1-34].

³² Nicholson, "Limits," 80; building on the studies of Jon D. Levenson, *Creation and the Persistence of Evil* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1988), and John Day, *God's Conflict with the Dragon and the Sea* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985).

³³ Nicholson, "Limits," 81.

³⁴ Levenson, *Creation*, 24.

endures because God has pledged it so (the Noahic covenant), and compelled obeisance toward the great adversary (Leviathan, the Sea, Rahab, etc.).³⁵

To react briefly to Nicholson's position, it must be pointed out that the passages cited do not always contain a reference to a "confined" or "persistent" chaos other than people (as opposed to primordial forces or creatures). In other words, the breakdown of society enumerated in Ps 74, for example, is not due to the continued existence and activity of Leviathan, who was crushed and its body parts fed to the desert creatures (Ps 74:13-14), making it difficult to see how it could continue to cause chaos. The enemy (74:18) is identified as "foolish people," and those who do violence to the oppressed, the poor and needy (74:20-21). Animal symbols are prominent in 74:19, with Yahweh's enemy symbolized by wild beasts and the covenant people symbolized by a dove. This is hardly the same thing as Job, or another human being, feeling anxiety over threats from primordial creatures. The symbolic language of Ps 74 serves to express realities of life in the language of human imagination in the form of mythical images.³⁶ A similar observation can be made regarding Ps 89:10-13[9-12] where Rahab is crushed. The use of the Canaanite myth is to emphasize Yahweh's victory over Rahab in the past, and forms a basis on which to call on Yahweh to assert control over present circumstances.³⁷ It is also important to note

³⁵ Nicholson, "Limits." 81; Levenson, *Creation*, 17.

³⁶ Marvin E. Tate, *Psalms 51-100*, WBC vol. 20 (Dallas: Word, 1990), 254-255.

³⁷ J. Day, *God's Conflict*, 26.

that the "chaos" brought upon Israel is from Yahweh himself (89:39-46[38-45]), even though it is possible that this is an instance of double agency, with Yahweh allowing the forces of chaos to have temporary domination.³⁸

This may be the case, but this psalm places the responsibility for Israel's "chaos" solely on Yahweh. A similar observation may be made regarding the Satan and Job's tragedies. Yahweh never blames the Satan in his speeches, accepting full responsibility for the governance of the world, and Job's misfortunes along with it.

This sense of agency is the main problem with Nicholson's view, in my opinion. One of the emphases in Yahweh's speeches is divine control over nature. In Job 38:8-11 Yahweh has the Sea firmly under control with fixed limits and boundaries, and Job can no more control the Sea than he could bind Pleiades or loose the cords of Orion (38:31). Leviathan, a frighteningly powerful creature compared to Job, is simply one of Yahweh's pets (40:29[41:5]) and numbered among several other phenomena from the natural world seen as part of Yahweh's creation.³⁹

Thus I cannot agree with Nicholson and Levenson that the presence of chaos in the world indicates a failure on the part of God,⁴⁰ especially when the divine speeches show these natural forces and amazing creatures to be directly under Yahweh's control. Yahweh's defense of the design of

³⁸ Cf. Day, *God's Conflict*, 26, n. 70.

³⁹ See Ps 104:25-26, where the vast sea is the playground for Leviathan, which Levenson (*Creation*, 24) humorously refers to as God's "rubber ducky."

⁴⁰ Nicholson, "Limits," 81; Levenson, *Creation*, 24.

the cosmos takes, place in a legal setting,⁴¹ keeping continuity with the judicial setting of the dialogue.⁴² Many studies have shown the importance of the legal metaphor for understanding the theology of the book,⁴³ and in my opinion it is the best way to understand the unfolding argument of the dialogue and the resultant divine speeches, as well as the theology behind the speeches. Job had appealed to God to answer him in a lawsuit and the two divine speeches do just that. The details of this are too complex to enter into the discussion here and Scholnick has done this already.⁴⁴ Scholnick's study places the entire book in the legal genre but it is not necessary to limit this book to a single literary form. It is probably more accurate to see several different literary forms within the book, and recognize it as a masterful blending of genres.⁴⁵ The book of Job is better

⁴¹Sylvia H. Scholnick, "Poetry in the Courtroom: Job 38-41," in *Directions in Hebrew Poetry*, ed. E. Follis (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 186.

⁴² See B. Gemser, "The Rib- or Controversy-Pattern in Hebrew Mentality," in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, ed. M. Noth and D. W. Thomas, VTSup 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1969), 134-135; J. Limburg, "The Lawsuit of God in the Eighth Century Prophets" (Th.D. thesis, Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, 1969); M. H. Pope, *Job*, AB vol. 15, 2nd ed. (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1973), lxxi; H. Richter, *Studien zu Hiob* (Berlin: Evangelische Verlagsanstalt, 1959); and C. Westermann, *Der Aufbau des Buches Hiob* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1956).

⁴³ E. g., Richter, *Studien zu Hiob*, and more recently S. H. Scholnick, "Lawsuit Drama in the Book of Job" (Ph.D. diss., Brandeis University, 1975); G. Many, "Der Rechtsstreit mit Gott (Rib) im Hiobbuch" (Diss. Kath.-theol. Fakultät der Ludwig-Maximilian Universität, Munich, 1970); M. B. Dick, "Job 31: A Form-critical Study" (Ph.D. diss., Johns Hopkins University, 1977); and J. J. M. Roberts, "Job's Summons to Yahweh: The Exploitation of a Legal Metaphor," *RQ* 16 (1973): 159-165.

⁴⁴ Scholnick, "Poetry in the Courtroom," 185-204.

⁴⁵ See Hartley, *Job*, 37-43.

classified *sui generis*.⁴⁶

More to the point, the Yahweh speeches do not deny innocent suffering. In the divine speeches Job is assumed to be innocent but uninformed.⁴⁷ He has doubted both the plan⁴⁸ (38:2) and justice⁴⁹ (40:8) of Yahweh's universe. In seeing a legal background as the setting for the divine speeches in which Yahweh is shown to be both Owner and King of the world, I believe we come closer to their true intent. Job is informed of Yahweh's right of ownership due to his role as Creator, and administration of the world is Yahweh's right by reason of his role as King.

In the divine speeches Job is shown the paradoxes of the cosmic creation which operate under Yahweh's control and by his design.⁵⁰

⁴⁶ James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 120; and Pope, *Job*, xxxi.

⁴⁷ The reverse is usually true in Sumero-Babylonian literature, with sufferers assumed to be ignorant of their offenses but not innocent. This will be shown in more detail below in the discussion of that literature.

⁴⁸ "Plan" here is תַּצֵּי also "design." Yahweh's first speech answers the charge of a disorderly world, see S. Scholnick, "Poetry in the Courtroom," 185-186. This Hebrew word is used in the creation poetry of Isa 40:13 to speak of God's design for the universe. It is used to refer to the divine plan for mankind in Isa 5:19; 46:10; Jer 32:19; 49:20; 50:45; Mic 4:12; Ps 33:11; 73:24; 106:13; 107:11; Prov 19:21. For a chart of Job's doubts and Yahweh's responses see Habel, *Job*, 530-532.

⁴⁹ "Justice" מִשְׁפָּט is an important term in the book, which is replete with legal terminology, see S. Scholnick, "The Meaning of *Mispat* in the Book of Job," *JBL* 101 (1982): 521-529; and in more detail her *Lawsuit Drama*. Job had accused God of misgoverning the world and turning justice upside down. Thus Yahweh challenged Job to match his ability to control evil in 40:9-14.

⁵⁰ See Habel, *Job*, 534-535. In my opinion Habel's discussion of the Yahweh speeches is an excellent treatment, see 526-535; cf. also Hartley, *Job*, 515-517.

There is no failure on the part of God, but an assertion that Yahweh governs the cosmos by means which include the law of reward and retribution but also by standards which go beyond its mechanical application.⁵¹ Job must recognize his creaturely limitations, and realize that he is not in a position to doubt Yahweh's orderly design of the world, nor his just governance of it.⁵² In my opinion the speeches of Yahweh demonstrate just the opposite of Nicholson's view--viz., rather than showing Yahweh to be a failure at controlling the forces of nature, he is in sovereign control over all.

d. The Epilogue

The epilogue of this book has no direct bearing on the issue of theodicy but it is extremely problematic in relation to this topic except for those who view it as a reaffirmation of the doctrine of reward and retribution. Job is restored to health and prosperity, seemingly as a validation of the dogma that teaches that the righteous will be rewarded.⁵³ This is all the more surprising when it seems that the retribution dogma had been marginalized, or as was shown above, to be only one of many factors in God's governance of the world.

In 42:12a (cf. 8:7) we are told that Yahweh blessed the latter part (אַחֲרַיִת) of Job's life more than the first (רִאשִׁית). Yet this does not necessarily mean that this was a reward for his perseverance, as Hartley says:

⁵¹ Cf. Habel, *Job*, 535.

⁵² For a discussion on the difference in perspectives and perceptions in the book see Stuart Lasine, "Bird's-Eye and Worm's-Eye Views of Justice in the Book of Job," *JSOT* 42 (1988): 29-53.

⁵³ Clines, *Job 1-20*, xlvii.

the doubling of Job's estate does not mean that he received a bountiful reward for the endurance of undeserved affliction, but rather that Yahweh freely and abundantly blessed him. The blessing proves that Yahweh is a life-giving God, not a capricious deity who takes pleasure in the suffering of those who fear him. In his sovereign design he may permit a faithful servant to suffer ill-fortune for a season, but in due time he will bring total healing.⁵⁴

The retraction⁵⁵ of the lawsuit by Job (42:6) and his intercession for the three friends (42:8, 10) led to the doubling of his former wealth by Yahweh, and abundant blessings are poured out on him. Had Yahweh been committed to a strict dogma of retribution the wealth given to Job would have equaled the amounts listed in 1:2-3 rather than doubled.

2. Qoheleth

There may be less agreement regarding the interpretation, message and meaning of this book than any other in the Hebrew Bible.⁵⁶ Though higher-critical issues may influence the interpretation of the various passages under consideration, the discussion will be limited to the issue of theodicy.⁵⁷ This issue has been ably dealt with in Michael V.

⁵⁴ Hartley, *Job*, 540.

⁵⁵ The translation of מַאֵם is complicated by the lack of an object. If the legal framework of the book is accepted there may be a clue to the object of the verb in 31:13, where Job claims that he did not "dismiss/reject the case (מִשְׁפָּט)" of a slave. The implied object of מַאֵם in 42:6 would be Job's case against God, which he "dismisses/retracts," cf. Scholnick, *Lawsuit Drama*, 303.

⁵⁶ In the view of R. Gordis, *Poets. Prophets and Sages* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1971), 326; and David A. Hubbard, *Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon* (Dallas: Word, 1991), 19, 23.

⁵⁷ For those interested in these background issues see, e. g., R. E. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, WBC vol. 23a (Dallas: Word, 1992), and his bibliographies; also G. S. Ogden, *Qoheleth* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987); and J.

Fox's work on Qoheleth⁵⁸ and to some extent I follow his lead. However, the approach taken here will be to analyze specific passages, in contrast to Fox, who treats the issue topically.

The passages in Qoheleth which specifically make reference to injustices going uncorrected are 3:16-17; 4:1-3; 6:1-9; 7:15-18; and 8:9-9:12.⁵⁹

a. 3:16-17

These verses are set within a pericope which extends through 3:22.⁶⁰ The main topic is the miscarriage of justice in society, a situation which does not evoke a demand for fair treatment in the courts, or to have dishonest judges removed. This generalized observation of one human's injustice to another will be rectified somehow at an unspecified time and place,⁶¹ apparently saying that God has, as it were,

L. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), although his personal skepticism (53) must be taken into account in assessing his interpretation of the text.

⁵⁸ Michael V. Fox, *Qohelet and His Contradictions*, JSOTSS 71 (Sheffield: Almond, 1989), 121-150, though not without reservations. Fox is overly influenced by A. Camus in his understanding of the book. See the brief assessment, both positive and negative, by Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes. Song of Songs*, NAC vol. 14 (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 275-277, 283.

⁵⁹ Another passage which might be treated in this connection is 10:5-14, but see Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 102-103, and Fox, *Qohelet*, 124-125; both of whom assert that this passage teaches that the consequences of the deeds listed are a danger but not a certainty. The results are portrayed as unexpected, not as absolute causal linkages.

⁶⁰ Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 31; R. N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, NCBC (London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1989), 76-81; J. A. Loader, *Ecclesiastes: A Practical Commentary*, tr. J. Vriend (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 42-47.

⁶¹ Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 36.

"a time to judge and a time to refrain from judging" (cf. 3:2-8 and 8:10-13).⁶² The Hebrew text of 3:17 says:

אָמַרְתִּי אֲנִי בְּלִבִּי אֶת־הַצִּדִּיק וְאֶת־הַרָשָׁע יִשְׁפֹּט הָאֱלֹהִים
כִּי־עַתָּה לְכָל־חַפֵּץ וְעַל הַמַּעֲשֵׂה שָׁם:

This raises the question of the meaning of "there" (שָׁם). Garrett holds to an eschatological usage (cf. Ps 14:5a), with "there" being shorthand for the time and place of eschatological judgment (cf. Zeph 1:14) or referring to Sheol, in which case the ideas of the grave and judgment have been combined.⁶³

This deferment of divine judgment till the indefinite future makes it a foregone conclusion, then, that distortions of justice are a fact of life,⁶⁴ and mankind's only choice is to simply make the best of it (3:22).⁶⁵ There is no encouragement to work for justice or to strive against legal, oppression. Social abuses are unalterable realities.

b. 4:1-3

Many commentators correctly connect these verses with the flow of thought begun in chapter 3.⁶⁶ Human oppression is

⁶² Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 77-78.

⁶³ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 302-303. He notes a related usage in Job 3:17-19 where "there" refers to the grave, an impartial judge that treats the mighty and the weak alike, see 303, n. 86, and cf. Robert Gordis, *Koheleth--the Man and His World* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1951), 235.

⁶⁴ Fox, *Qohelet*, 141.

⁶⁵ Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 77-78.

⁶⁶ E. g., Murphy (*Ecclesiastes*, 28-39) treats 3:1-4:6 as the overall unit,

the subject of these verses, as indicated by the three distinct nuances of the root עִשָּׂק: the first as the abstract notion of oppression, the second as the objects of this villainy ("the oppressed"), and the third as, those who are involved in carrying out the actions ("oppressors").⁶⁷ The repetition of the phrase מִנְחָם לָאֵין shows how utterly hopeless the lot of the oppressed is.⁶⁸ The threefold repetition of the root עִשָּׂק and the double use of the statement regarding the lack of comfort produce an effect of emotional intensity which is rare for Qoheleth.⁶⁹

The writer is not saying that one is better off dead than alive, but that death is preferable to a life made miserable by oppression, since it frees from trouble. A similar thought can be found in Sir 41:2 (NRSV):

O death, how welcome is your sentence
to one who is needy and failing in strength,
worn down by age and anxious about everything;
to one who is contrary, and has lost all patience!⁷⁰

This view is consistent with the general wisdom teaching concerning "life," which in the book of Proverbs is not equated with bare existence.

while Crenshaw (*Ecclesiastes*, 101-107) sees 3:16-4:3 as a unit of thought.

⁶⁷ A. Lauha, *Kohelet*, BKAT 19 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978), 81; cf. Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 105, and Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 81.

⁶⁸ Loader, *Ecclesiastes*, 47. See Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 37-38, and Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 105, for arguments that the repetition is not a gloss and should therefore be retained.

⁶⁹ According to Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 81.

⁷⁰ Murphy (*Ecclesiastes*, 38) observes that the thought of Qoh 4:2-3 is close in spirit to Job 3 and Jer 20:14-18.

Those who were poor (e. g. Prov 14:20; 18:23; 19:4, 7) and those who were oppressed by the powerful (e. g. Prov 28:15-16) were not regarded as possessing "life" in the sense of the fullness of life, which was the goal and reward of those who followed the counsels of wisdom.⁷¹

Qoheleth laments the frequent occurrence of oppression and unjust treatment, thus he is aware of innocent suffering. But the similar understanding of "life" to that of Proverbs shows that his thought here is not unique.

In Qoheleth's reflections on injustice death is a prominent feature. In 3:16-17 death appears as the area of hope for the oppressed; it is "there" that God judges the oppressor. Here death is simply the better alternative to a life of oppression. It is not surprising that in 3:18-22, which comes between these two texts, the subject is death itself.⁷²

c. 6:1-9

This part of chapter 6 contains an extended reflection on the person who is prevented from enjoying all his possessions. The overall point seems to be that it would be better not to have riches than to have to give them over to a stranger to enjoy. The thought of this passage is part of the larger context begun in 5:9[10] discussing the relative value of possessions.⁷³

The specific statement regarding innocent suffering very pointedly

⁷¹ E. g. Prov 3:2, 22; 4:22; 16:22. See Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 81-82.

⁷² Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 306.

⁷³ See Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 49, who considers the broad context to consist of 4:17[5:1]-6:9, and breaks it down as an instruction on conduct associated with the cult in 4:17-5:6[5:1-7], an instruction on officials in 5:7-8[8-9] and on possessions in 5:9[5:10]-6:9.

fixing the responsibility on God is found in 6:2.⁷⁴ Qoheleth's observation may refer back to a similar idea in 5:12-13[13-14], and enlarge on it somewhat. In these verses riches are shown to be of dubious value because of the harm possessions might bring to the owner. In the lines which follow, Qoheleth's meaning is made clear. Wealth lost through some misfortune, be it natural catastrophe or of human cause (theft, vandalism, etc.) means that all the time and toil invested to gain the wealth went for nought. All this was costly to the owner but did not profit him in the end.⁷⁵ Following this is a statement echoed in other places in the Hebrew Bible, notably Job 1:21; Ps 139:15; see also Sir 40:1. The idea expressed in the modern dictum "You can't take it with you" in regard to wealth is similar to a theme prominent in Ps 49.⁷⁶

In 6:2 a slightly different situation is pictured. The wealth is not seen as lost so that a son, a rightful heir is deprived, but that it is taken by a stranger.⁷⁷ This would cause distress since the owner is denied not only the enjoyment of his possessions but also the satisfaction of seeing his accumulated wealth passed on to his son, thereby keeping it in the family. This would have touched a raw nerve among some within the wisdom

⁷⁴ Fox, *Qohelet*, 219.

⁷⁵ Loader, *Ecclesiastes*, 64.

⁷⁶ Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 52; and note Loader's pointed comment: "There are no pockets in a shroud," *Ecclesiastes*, 65.

⁷⁷ It is probably useless to attempt to identify the stranger beyond that of an unknown person who is not a family member. The point may be only that someone is enjoying the wealth who has no legitimate claim to it, cf. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 104, and Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 126.

tradition, according to Ogden.⁷⁸ Material success and tangible possessions were viewed as evidence of the divine blessing which was the consequence of living a life pleasing to God (Prov 13:21, 25; cf. Deut 8:10). Here Qoheleth casts doubt on this belief by suggesting that a wealthy person may not be allowed to derive any pleasure from material possessions, thus inferring an anomaly in human experience much like Job's, or that the fate of a wise man in this situation is little different from that of a fool. Qoheleth's comment on this is like that on many other sad circumstances: "This is meaningless, a grievous evil."

d. 7:15-18

The traditional view of the retribution dogma is contradicted here in Qoheleth's experience. He claims to have seen the righteous one (קִיָּץ) destroyed in his righteousness, while the wicked one (רָשָׁע) lives long despite his wickedness. The use of the particle שִׁי ("there is") may express the fact that Qoheleth is aware that the righteous do not always prosper and the wicked do not always suffer. The exceptions in his experience show that the doctrine of retribution, one of the most fundamental principles of wisdom literature, has its cases where the exact opposite is true.⁷⁹ The equation of prosperity with righteousness and suffering with sin is far too simplistic to apply to every circumstance.

Verses 16-18 have been misinterpreted at times to teach that Qoheleth advocates participation in some kind of sin,⁸⁰ with the advice not to be

⁷⁸ Ogden, *Qoheleth*, 91.

⁷⁹ Loader, *Ecclesiastes*, 87.

⁸⁰ J. A. Loader, *Polar Structures in the Book of Qohelet*, BZAW 152 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1979), 48.

overly righteous or overly evil. Some have asserted that these verses teach a "golden mean."⁸¹ This view, held by Delitzsch,⁸² Hertzberg,⁸³ Gordis,⁸⁴ etc. says that Qoheleth was encouraging readers to follow an immoral doctrine, that is, to practice sin in moderation. However, this is a misunderstanding, just as it would be wrong to believe that Deut 27:24 ("Cursed be he who slays his neighbor in secret" RSV) approves of murdering a neighbor publicly.⁸⁵ A modern way to say a similar thing would be "Do not be a fanatic."⁸⁶ Crenshaw observes that 7:17 does not claim that sin in moderation is acceptable. The teaching is that sin in an individual's life may be unavoidable, but those who practice evil as a way of life are destroyed by it.⁸⁷ Thus Qoheleth is not dealing with the issue of personal sins as such, but rather, an attitude of life that seeks the benefits of long life, prosperity and personal happiness through strict observation of religious and wisdom principles. The affirmation of fearing God as the

⁸¹ According to Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 120. For an interpretation of these verses which claims the warning here is against being self-righteous and pretensions to wisdom, see R. N. Whybray, "Qoheleth the Immoralist? (Qoh 7:16-17)," in *Israelite Wisdom: Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, ed. J. G. Gammie et al. (New York: Scholars Press, 1978), 191-204. But against this see Fox, *Qohelet*, 233-235.

⁸² Franz Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes*, tr. Easton (1872, repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1950), 324.

⁸³ Hans Wilhelm Hertzberg, *Der Prediger*, KAT 17/4 (Gutersloh: Gerd Mohr, 1963), 154.

⁸⁴ Gordis, *Koheleth*, 265-266.

⁸⁵ Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 141.

⁸⁶ Garrett, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 323.

⁸⁷ Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes*, 140. We could also say that it means that we should not let sin get out of hand. Just because sin is unavoidable does not necessarily mean it is uncontrollable.

advisable route in life is common to the wisdom literature, and shows the contact of Qoheleth with the conventional tenets of wisdom thought.

e. 8:9-9:12

In this larger unit 8:14 is part of Qoheleth's reflection regarding the reversal of the retribution dogma also seen in 9:11-12.⁸⁸ The failure to bring criminals to punishment is the general thrust of 8:9-13. Qoheleth comments that the lack of swift justice leads to increased scheming and evil plans on the part of the wicked, then seems to affirm the conventional wisdom belief that in the end "it will go better with God-fearing men" and for those who do not fear God "it will not go well with them, and their days will not lengthen like a shadow." This affirmation of faith in divine justice seems to go directly against all the evidence Qoheleth has cited. Living a long life is indicative of happiness and divine blessing in the wisdom tradition (Prov 3:2, 16) and his admission of evidence to the contrary combined with the tension seen in 8:14 regarding retribution shows that it is not always possible to align the fact of suffering with the simplistic claim that divine justice distinguishes between the righteous and the wicked.⁸⁹

The conclusion to 9:1-12 affirms the arbitrary nature of life from a human perspective rather than a divine point of view. Five examples taken from different areas of life (racing, war, livelihood, wealth, favor) show that

⁸⁸ Garrett (*Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 328) treats 8:9-9:1 as a section entitled "On Theodicy," with 9:11-12 as transitional statements to another section.

⁸⁹ Cf. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, 85.

the optimistic view of life presented by the retribution principle (the righteous will prosper or succeed) must be moderated against a phony prosperity piety, since regardless of one's talents events beyond one's control may determine the outcome of a venture quite to the contrary of one's moral character.⁹⁰ Another way to state this in simpler terms is that it is difficult for one who holds to a belief in a rigid principle of equitable retribution to make all the facts fit the theory.

To summarize, the treatment of the topic of theodicy in the books of Job and Qoheleth shows the doctrine of retribution to be less than dogmatic. The righteous do not *always* prosper and the wicked do not *always* suffer. On top of this is the problem of equitable suffering. The scale of suffering does not always balance with the degree of the sin, if one was committed. Both books present cases where exceptions are noted, thus removing the stigma of divine disfavor from those who were not prospering or enjoying the blessings of God. In his use of contradictions of conventional wisdom Qoheleth loosens the rigidity of conventional wisdom to come to terms with empirical realities,.

For both Job and Qoheleth, Yahweh is given more respect and credibility than the gods of other ancient societies, which often relegated the relationship between the god and the worshipper to superficial levels. This frequently led to supplicants attempting to cajole or manipulate the god or goddess into blessing them, or, at least, removing the negative situation. Yahweh, on the other hand, simply could not be manipulated. Good deeds

⁹⁰ Fox (*Qohelet*, 260) says the passage does not teach that, e. g., the swift never win, but that they do not *necessarily* win.

and worship were not viewed as bargaining chips, and there was no exchange of material blessing for adoration. This was also asserted in the Torah where Israel was told that Yahweh is not influenced by bribes.⁹¹ Qoheleth acknowledges the justice of God as well as the mystery of God in how justice is worked out.⁹²

II. Suffering in the Literature of the Ancient Near East

This part of the study will focus on the attitudes or views of suffering displayed by some of the more prominent documents from certain cultures surrounding ancient Israel, or Israel's predecessors. Due to the large number of texts which have been recovered it is possible to examine only a sample of the documents, which will, by and large, be representative of the rest. In the analysis of this topic I will discuss the literary works of the ANE under two broad categories, Mesopotamian literature and Egyptian literature.

There is evidence for wisdom literature in Edom (Jer 49:7; Obad 8), Phoenicia (Ezek 28:3, 17) and Canaan but it is in scarce quantity.⁹³ The focus of this part of the study will necessarily be limited to Egyptian and Mesopotamian sources since only Egypt and Mesopotamia have yielded large amounts of this kind of material. Most of the discussion which

⁹¹ See Deut 17:10.

⁹² Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*, lxvi.

⁹³ See M. J. Dahood, "Canaanite-Phoenician Influence in Qoheleth," *Bib* 33 (1952): 30-52, 191-211. A more recent study, Gordon D. Young, ed., *Ugarit in Retrospect* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1981), makes no reference to wisdom literature at all in reference to Ugarit.

follows will break no new ground and risks oversimplification. The purpose is to provide a larger context for the specific problem to be addressed in later chapters, and to show that the texts do not contain discussions that can be called "theodicy" in the modern sense. Gods and goddesses were rarely blamed for human suffering. It was almost always the human who was at fault.

The discussion of Mesopotamian literature will be divided into two groups: Sumerian and Akkadian. In the conclusion I will examine von Soden's four elements necessary for theodicy listed above and evaluate the literature of Mesopotamia and Egypt to see if they meet the criteria.

A. Mesopotamian Literature

A brief discussion of the Mesopotamian viewpoint is necessary in order to appreciate the documents examined below, and the focus here is specifically on how individuals related to the gods. Two groups of texts will be discussed, Sumerian and Akkadian.

To begin with, the Mesopotamians believed in a pantheon of gods. Some were major deities, others played more minor roles. They were essentially personifications of various aspects of reality,⁹⁴ and guided the world according to their purposes and laws.⁹⁵ The gods often displayed characteristics such as spite, lust and rage, and sometimes there was contention between various gods due to competing purposes. They were

⁹⁴ Giorgio Buccellati, "Wisdom and Not: The Case of Mesopotamia," *JAOS* 101 (1981): 36.

⁹⁵ Samuel N. Kramer, *The Sumerians: Their History, Culture and Character* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963), 113.

members of a "divine assembly"⁹⁶ which sought to determine a common course. The interests of the gods ran roughly parallel to that of humanity, since humans were created for the purpose of serving the gods:

Blood I will mass and cause bones to be.
I will establish a savage, "man" shall be his name.
Verily, savage-man I will create.
He shall be charged with the service of the gods
That they might be at ease!⁹⁷

This view of mankind was more a reflection of their society than their theology, according to H. W. F. Saggs:

In the Sumerian city-state,...the characteristic and most significant organization was the temple-estate, in which thousands of people co-operated in works of irrigation and agriculture in a politico-economic system centered on the temple, with all these people thought of as the servants of the god. The myth of the creation of man, therefore, was not basically a comment on the nature of man but an explanation of a particular social system, heavily dependent upon communal irrigation and agriculture, for which the god's estates were primary foci of administration.⁹⁸

The gods needed people to care for them and, provide sustenance through the sacrifices. From this the ancient Mesopotamians derived personal

⁹⁶ E. T. Mullen, Jr., "Divine Assembly," *ABD*, 2.214-217.

⁹⁷ *ANET*, 68. The quote is from tablet VI:5-8; cf. also VI:33-34. In other works this poem is often called *Enuma Elish*, after the opening line of the poem. Much the same attitude is taken during the Old Babylonian period in the *Atrahasis Epic*; see W. G. Lambert and Alan R. Millard, *Atra-hasis: The Babylonian Story of the Flood* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969), 59.

⁹⁸ H. W. F. Saggs, *Encounter with the Divine in Mesopotamia and Israel* (London: Athlone, 1978), 168.

dignity and self-worth.⁹⁹ Dignity and self-esteem for the individual person were determined by function in that society.

The lot in life for the average person was to be quiet, keep the land in good order and attend to the needs of the gods, yet the number of requests for divine intervention show that the purposes and plans of the gods were not clearly discernible.¹⁰⁰ These plans or principles which kept the cosmos running smoothly were designated by the Sumerian word *me*, the exact meaning of which is still uncertain.¹⁰¹ These divinely ordained decrees covered over one hundred aspects of human life and civilization, though many are still obscure in meaning due to the fragmentary nature of the texts where they are listed, translation problems, and the difficulty inherent in attempting to understand a culture that has not existed for over three thousand years.¹⁰² Thus there was a concern on the part of the

⁹⁹ Saggs, *Encounter*, 170.

¹⁰⁰ Karel van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction in Israel and Mesopotamia* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1985), 4. *Atrahasis* gives the reason for destroying mankind in a flood as "noise." The debate over the term *rigmu* has a bearing over whether the flood was justified by human sin; or whether humans are merely a nuisance. It has been suggested that the noise which disturbed Enlil was a metaphoric reference to wicked behavior; see Robert Oden, "Divine Aspirations in *Atrahasis* and in Genesis 1-11," *ZAW* 93 (1981): 197-216, thus the need to keep "quiet." Population control is another possibility suggested by A. D. Kilmer, in "The Mesopotamian Concept of Overpopulation and Its Solution as Reflected in the Mythology," *Or* 41 (1972): 160-177.

¹⁰¹ Kramer, *The Sumerians*, 115. A list of the discernible portions of the *mes* is on 116.

¹⁰² For a discussion of *me*, see Gertrud Farber-Flugge, *Der Mythos "Inanna and Enki" unter besonderer Berücksichtigung der Liste der me* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1973). This book lists previous discussions (116, n. 121); and cf. also W. W. Hallo and J. J. A. van Dijk, *The*

individual to live according to the divine order that regulated virtually all areas of life.¹⁰³

For the ordinary human the more prominent deities seemed remote and unapproachable. Thus the individual's main focus in religion had to do with personal gods, who were seen as intermediaries and intercessors between the suppliant and the great gods.¹⁰⁴ The personal god was intimately involved with an individual's success or failure, as indicated by the following proverb:

The destruction is from his own (personal) god;
He knows no savior.¹⁰⁵

The personal god was often envisioned or addressed as a parent. Under this metaphor the god was seen in four ways: (1) the physical aspect (the father as engenderer of a child or the mother who gave birth), (2) the provider aspect, (3) the protector and intercessor, and (4) the claim parents have upon children for honor and obedience.¹⁰⁶

Exaltation of Inanna (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968), 49-50 for Hallo's view, which is that a me represents a divine attribute.

¹⁰³ See John Gray, "The Book of Job in the Context of Near Eastern Literature," *ZAW* 82 (1970): 251-252.

¹⁰⁴ For a discussion of the personal gods see T. Jacobsen, *The Treasures of Darkness: A History of Mesopotamian Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1976), 147-164, and H. Vorlander, *Mein Gott: die Vorstellungen vom persönlich Gott im Alten Orient und im Alten Testament*, AOAT 23 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1975).

¹⁰⁵ Edmund I. Gordon, *Sumerian Proverbs: Glimpses of Everyday Life in Ancient Mesopotamia* (Philadelphia: University Museum, University of Pennsylvania Press, 1959), 45, 306.

¹⁰⁶ Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, 158.

The metaphor of the parent under which the personal god was viewed made the cosmic powers of the gods more immediate and approachable, and this ultimately led to the paradox of the righteous sufferer in Mesopotamian literature. The personal deities were imaged as parental figures and portrayed in a positive light. Yet when misfortune came upon the individual there seemed to be no way to know what had been done to offend the god other than reading omens or trial-and-error guessing.¹⁰⁷ This is very evident in *dingir.sa.dib.ba* texts:

My god, I did not know how severe your punishment is.
 I frivolously took a solemn oath in your name,
 I profaned your decrees, I went too far,
 I your mission in trouble,
 I transgressed your way much,
 I did not know, much [...]
 My iniquities are many: I know not what I did.¹⁰⁸

In the last line quoted the supplicant appears to portray both parts of the theological problem faced by the one who suffers: an assumption of guilt and an ignorance of the offense.

To these people there was no sharp distinction between the care of the body and care of the soul, as opposed to modern Western societies in which religious faith and scientific medical practice are frequently viewed as mutually exclusive categories.¹⁰⁹ For the ancient Mesopotamians the onset

¹⁰⁷ Van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, 94-97; see also Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature*, 153.

¹⁰⁸ W G. Lambert, "DINGIR.SA.DIB.BA Incantations," *JNES* 33 (1974): 275, lines 23-29. The expression *dingir.sa.dib.ba* has reference to appeasing an angry god."

¹⁰⁹ Brown, *Israel's Divine Healer*, 54; and cf. J. W. Provensha, M. D.,

of disease, illness and misfortune were often seen to have mysterious causes. Speaking specifically of the situation of debilitating illness, Michael Brown says:

If one lost one's health and vigor one became a burden to both family and society, apparently suffering from divine disfavor as well. Thus it was crucial that the deity's favor be incurred and his or her help secured. *To the ancient Near Eastern--and biblical!--mind, it was impossible to countenance a major god /God who did not heal.*¹¹⁰

Another factor in the problem of suffering is that of the human element in healing, i. e., the existence of those who practiced medicine. They practiced magical arts and divination in order to diagnose the cause of the disease or malady, and also prescribed appropriate incantations or other kinds of treatment to alleviate the suffering, or appease the offended deity who would take away the problem. The two most frequent terms referring to those who practiced the medical art were the *asipu* and *asu*. The *asipu* viewed the onset of disease as a chain of events initiated under the influence of "supernatural" powers or forces, which proceeded on a predetermined course to an outcome that could be predicted by the skillful reading of "signs."¹¹¹ The *asu* viewed disease as the complex of presenting symptoms and findings; by his "practical grasp" (intuition plus accumu-

"The Healing Christ," in *Healing and Christianity*, ed. M. Kelsey (New York: Harper & Row, 1973), 361-364.

¹¹⁰ Brown, *Israel's Divine Healer*, 53 (emphasis in original).

¹¹¹ E. K. Ritter, "Magical-expert (=asipu) and Physician (=asu). Notes on Two Complementary Professions in Babylonian Medicine," in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on his 75th Birthday*, ed. H. Guterbock and T. Jacobsen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1965), 301.

lated experience) of the immediate situation he prescribed treatment.¹¹² Treatment most often included herbs, plants, animal parts, etc., mixed with carriers such as beer, vinegar, honey, or tallow, and introduced into the patient's body by means of ingestion, enema or suppository. Other treatments were topical lotions or salves used directly on the body.¹¹³

Mesopotamian medicine shows a highly developed internal system which integrated folk-belief, cultic ritual, and prescribed treatment.¹¹⁴ However it shows change over time, with the *asu* falling out of use in favor of the *asipu*, so one should not expect to see both offices featured prominently in all Mesopotamian medical texts.¹¹⁵

1. Sumerian Literature

Although the Sumerians are never referred to in the Bible¹¹⁶ their language, culture and religion had a profound effect on the Assyrians and, later, the Babylonians, both of which had considerable influence militarily, politically, culturally and religiously on Israel.

¹¹² Ritter, "Magical-expert," 302. For more discussion of these two professions see Brown, *Israel's Divine Healer*, 40-43; and A. Leo Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia. Portrait of a Dead Civilization*, rev. E. Reiner (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977), 288-305.

¹¹³ Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 292.

¹¹⁴ See Brown, *Israel's Divine Healer*, 42-43, and the accompanying documentation.

¹¹⁵ For a brief sketch of the history of Mesopotamian medicine see Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 288-305; and J. V. Kinnier Wilson, "Medicine in the Land and Times of the Old Testament," in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays*, ed. T. Ishida (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1982), 347-358.

¹¹⁶ Walter R. Bodine, "Sumerians," in *Peoples of the Old Testament World*, ed. A. J. Hoerth, G. L. Mattingly, and E. M. Yamauchi (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1994), 19-20, especially n. 1.

a. "Man and His God"

This poem, which is dated c. 1700 B. C. or earlier,¹¹⁷ can be divided into five sections: (1) lines 1-9, introduction; (2) lines 10-20+, description of an individual's sickness and misfortune; (3) lines 26-116, the main body of the poem, a description of poor treatment by his contemporaries (26-55), a lament (56-95) and confession of guilt, sin and an appeal for deliverance (96-116); (4) lines 117-129, the response of the god; and (5) lines 130-140 praise to the god, followed by a one-line colophon.¹¹⁸

Since, in the Sumerian world view, humanity was created to serve the gods¹¹⁹ and blessings and prosperity gained thereby, the penitent sufferer in the poem confesses his sin and guilt in the hope that his present misfortune will be reversed. However, there is no mention of a specific transgression and the sin is never explicitly stated.

In general, offense to the gods, or sin, was more often seen in terms

¹¹⁷ S. N. Kramer, "'Man and His God': A Sumerian Variation on the Job Motif," in *Wisdom in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. M. Noth and D. W. Thomas, VTSup 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 170, suggests it may go back as far as the Third Dynasty of Ur, c. 2000 B. C. This dating has gained general acceptance. But for a list of some dissenting scholars see Mattingly, "The Pious Sufferer," 308-309.

¹¹⁸ Kramer, "Man and His God," 171; cf. *ANET*, 590. Because of numerous lacunae in the text and the obscurity of a number of crucial passages the suggested section division is not quite certain, according to Kramer.

¹¹⁹ See *Enuma Elish* VI:5-8; also Kramer, *The Sumerians*, 123; and Thorkild Jacobsen, "Mesopotamia," in *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*, ed. H. Frankfort et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946; repr. Phoenix Books, 1977), 182, 185.

of the cult and the rituals associated with it.¹²⁰ Moral evil does not seem to have been experienced in any way other than when it was reduced to the "pain of suffering" by the victims.¹²¹ In "Man and His God" this seems to be the case, since the confession of guilt never goes beyond generalization. The only proper recourse the supplicant had "was not to argue and complain in the face of seemingly unjustifiable misfortune, but to plead and wail, lament and confess, his inevitable sins and failings."¹²² A pointed statement in this regard is found in lines 102-103 of the poem:

Never has a sinless child been born to its mother,
.... a sinless workman(?) has not existed from of old.

This belief in original sin¹²³ provided a solution to the problem of suffering without challenging the justice of the gods, thus removing this poem from the ranks of theodicy.¹²⁴ W. G. Lambert has recently stated that in his view "Man and His God" should not be considered part of the wisdom literature

¹²⁰ Some see the Mesopotamian idea of sin tied very strongly to ritual offenses, see G. R. Driver, "The Psalms in Light of Babylonian Research," in *The Psalmists*, ed. D. C. Simpson (London: Oxford University Press, 1926), 136; while more recently, others have pointed out the exceptions to this, e. g. Saggs, *Encounter*, 117.

¹²¹ Jean Bottero, "The Problem of Evil in Mesopotamian Mythology and Theology," in *Mythologies*, ed. Y. Bonnefoy, rev. W. Doniger, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1.162.

¹²² Kramer, *The Sumerians*, 125-126.

¹²³ Saggs, *Encounter*, 115.

¹²⁴ Von Soden, "Das Fragen," 46. Mattingly, "The Pious Sufferer," 312-313, seeks to retain this document as a theodicy by arguing for a limitation of power on the part of a god and a new definition of theodicy, which is related to an explanation of suffering, apparently with or without reference to a divine being.

genre because the Sumerian sufferer confessed sins while asking for release from his sufferings, apparently in the belief that this was more a confession than a struggle over philosophical questions regarding evil and the innocent, since it never questions divine justice.¹²⁵ To put it bluntly, since there are none without guilt there is no such thing as an innocent sufferer, only an ignorant one.

Apparently belief in mankind's inherent sinfulness was justification enough to account for the misfortunes and sickness the penitent in this poem begged to have relieved. The belief in *allgemeine menschliche Sündhaftigkeit* negated any objections a human might raise.¹²⁶ The attitude of the ancient Mesopotamians of "guilty as charged" had the disadvantage of not knowing what the charge was. Supplicants were forced to throw themselves on the mercy of the gods hoping to gain a positive hearing, since the will of the gods was often inscrutable.¹²⁷

b. Letter-Prayers¹²⁸

This type of letter had been previously referred to as "letters of petition" by F. Ali or "Gottesbrief" by A. Falkenstein.¹²⁹ Hallo

¹²⁵ W G. Lambert, "Some New Babylonian Wisdom Literature," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*, ed. J. Day, R. P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 30-31.

¹²⁶ Hans-Peter Muller., "Keilschriftliche Parallelen zum Biblischer Hiobbuch: Möglichkeit und Grenze des Vergleichs," *Or* 47 (1978): 369.

¹²⁷ This is a brief statement of a more complex situation, see Kramer, *The Sumerians*, 126; and in more detail, Mattingly, "The Pious Sufferer," 313-318.

¹²⁸ This genre of literature was so named by W. W. Hallo, "Individual Prayer in Sumerian: The Continuity of a Tradition," *JAOS* 88 (1968): 76.

¹²⁹ See Hallo, "Individual Prayer in Sumerian," 76, n. 32.

suggested letter-prayers for this genre since the term seemed "preferable" to Ali's suggestion and Falkenstein's was "difficult to translate."¹³⁰ He also points out that the letters are not always addressed to a god, but might also be addressed to the king, one of the king's servants, or a deified king who was deceased but addressed as "my god." Two letter-prayers are addressed to private individuals, or at most to officials.¹³¹

In the view of the Mesopotamians, if a personal god was angry with an individual, a sacrifice and the appropriate ritual was necessary to appease the divine anger. Sacrifices were carried out in the various temples dedicated to the gods. But what if, as Jacobsen asks, the god is not present when the supplicant presents a sacrifice to appease the god's anger? Or what if the person is too sick to travel to the temple to present prayers and sacrifices?¹³² The answer was to send a letter to the god which was placed near the statue of the deity, relieving the supplicant of the need to appear personally before the god.¹³³

Many of these letters have been recovered and they essentially follow a similar pattern. They begin with a salutation to the divine addressee followed by the message and a conclusion. The body of the letter has no recognizable structural divisions but most of the contents express complaints, protests, prayers and formal reinforcements of the appeal, though

¹³⁰ Hallo, "Individual Prayer in Sumerian," 76-77.

¹³¹ Hallo, "Individual Prayer in Sumerian," 77.

¹³² Jacobsen, "Mesopotamia," 205.

¹³³ These prayers were originally inscribed on a valuable object belonging to the worshipper, but economic factors eventually led to the development of this literary genre, and letters were deposited, rather than inscribed objects, according to Hallo, "Individual Prayer in Sumerian," 75.

not always in this order.¹³⁴

One of the longest of these letters is one addressed to Enki, the personal god of a scribe by the name of Sin-gamubi, son of Ur-Nim.¹³⁵ He complains of attacks by a hostile deity (line 15) despite his loyalty and proper observance of the offerings at the festivals "to which I go regularly" (lines 11-12). Although there is no question of his guilt (line 17), no omen has revealed the specific nature of his offense (line 14). Following a long list of complaints regarding his physical condition and treatment by contemporaries he promises to dwell in the "gate of Guilt-Absolved," sing praises and proclaim the god's exaltation (lines 46-56) when the sin is cleansed.

As in the poem "Man and His God," there is no specific sin referred to, only a conviction on the part of the penitent worshipper that he was guilty. At worst, the blame is placed on a hostile deity for the illness and the supplicant pleads for his personal god to intervene.

One might also enlist the aid of a more powerful god:

To the god my father speak; thus says Apil-Adad, your servant:
"Why have you neglected me (so)?
Who is going to give you one who can take my place?
Write to the god Marduk, who is fond of you,
That he may break my bondage;
Then I shall see your face and kiss your feet!
Consider also my family, grownups and little ones;
Have mercy on me for their sakes, and let your help reach me."¹³⁶

¹³⁴ Hallo, "Individual Prayer in Sumerian," 76-77.

¹³⁵ Hallo, "Individual Prayer in Sumerian," 85, lines 1, 8.

¹³⁶ Marten Stol, *Altbabylonische Briefe im Umschrift und Übersetzung*, Heft 9 (Leiden: Brill, 1981), 141; Jacobsen, "Mesopotamia," 205-206.

Apil-Adad calls on his personal god to act on his behalf since mankind exists to serve the gods. The logic is impeccable. If the personal god allows Apil-Adad to remain indisposed for an extended period, or to die, then there will be one less person to serve the needs of the personal god. Along with this there is also the pleading for the personal god to consider the needs of the worshipper as well. He points out all the other members of his family who depend on him. The case is argued that a failure on the part of the gods to restore this man to health will have dire consequences not only on the man's family but on the gods themselves. This "spiritual arm-twisting" is a typical example of the manipulations attempted in Mesopotamian literature to cajole or convince a god to act on behalf of a person.

To sum up, in the traditional definitions of theodicy¹³⁷ one seeks to justify the ways of God (or a god) when faced with suffering that is seemingly undeserved. It is an attempt to remove the contradictions in a theological system that holds to a doctrine of a benevolent deity and acknowledges the possibility of undeserved suffering. In my view the claim of Mattingly that "Man and His God" should retain the classification of theodicy fails to convince, since the Mesopotamian gods were not seen as "holy" in the same way Israel viewed Yahweh, nor is there a claim to innocence by Mesopotamians when faced with misfortunes and/or sickness. The very opposite almost always holds true. Guilt is assumed, and the prayers are characterized by the confession of sin and guilt in a "shotgun blast" approach. This method seeks to cover all aspects or possibilities by making

¹³⁷ See Mattingly's discussion in "The Pious Sufferer," 311-312.

the confessions in the most generalized terms, since humans are seen as inherently sinful. This is validated by the world view held by the Mesopotamians which was strongly tied to the act-consequence relationship.

2. Akkadian Literature

The main point of the study here is to get an idea of the content of four representative literary pieces, so the analysis may not delve as deep into all the issues as one might like.

a. *The Pious Sufferer*

This text is stored in the Louvre, where it is designated AO 4462.¹³⁸ It was published by Jean Nougayrol in 1952 and dates from the seventeenth or sixteenth century.¹³⁹

After the introduction (lines 1-11) the suffering one speaks, addressing his master, saying that his affliction is due to no known sin:

Maitre, j'ai bien reflechi en moi-meme:

... de faute volontaire,

Et de faute involontaire commise par lui, je n'(en) connais pas!¹⁴⁰

The speaker in this text is obviously questioning the traditional position of the Mesopotamians, that of a strict doctrine of retribution for sin. At this point there is doubt expressed over the justice of the way the supplicant is being treated by the god. However, as Lambert points out, this could be an admission of sin, not a denial of it.¹⁴¹ If Lambert's view is correct the

¹³⁸ Mattingly, "The Pious Sufferer," 319.

¹³⁹ Jean Nougayrol, "Une version du 'Juste Souffrant,'" *RB* 59 (1952): 239-250.

¹⁴⁰ Nougayrol, "Une version," 243, lines 12-13.

¹⁴¹ *BWL*, 11, n. 1. He suggests reading line 14: u! - [ka-ab-bi-i]s!

petitioner here may be ignorant but not innocent, since the second strophe goes on to say:

Mais, moi, j'accepte ton courroux,
(Sa) suite funeste, je la prend a mon compte.

The difference between an innocent sufferer and an ignorant one is subtle but important in the Mesopotamian view of the subject. At the end of the document the petitioner is directed to do charitable deeds, which could be interpreted as a penance (lines 62-65).

In stanza 8 the response of the god to the sufferer is found:

Thy demarche is worthy of a man. Thy heart is innocent.
The years are fulfilled, the days have redeemed thy suffering.
Hadst thou not been called to life, how wouldst thou have come to the
end of this serious illness?
Thou hast known anguish, fear in its full extent.
Until the end hast thou borne thy heavy load.
The way was blocked; it is open to thee.
The road is levelled; grace is granted to thee.
In the future forget not thy god,
Thy creator when thou hast received thy health.¹⁴²

Seeing that the god apparently declared the suffering one innocent as well as giving a warning to pay more careful attention to the god, it appears there was confusion over the doctrine of retribution, or as Mattingly says, "the traditional theodicy is not without its flaws."¹⁴³

an-zi-il-la-ka a-na[ku i]k-ki-ba-am li-im-na-ma am-x [x] x x x x ("I have trespassed against you, I have . . . a wicked abomination").

¹⁴² Gray, "Book of Job," 259. Cf. Nougayrol, "Une version," 247.

¹⁴³ "The Pious Sufferer," 320.

Questions may also arise over the translation of the first line in the previous quote. Gray has translated the Akkadian *li-ib-bu-uk la i-li-im-mi-in* "Thy heart is innocent." But *lemenu* means "to fall into misfortune, to come upon bad times, to turn into evil," and with *libbu* as subject, "to become angry."¹⁴⁴ If this is correct I would suggest translating this phrase "your heart should/must not become angry," making this an admonition against anger rather than a verdict of innocence.

The author has expressed ignorance of his offense, yet counted on the good will of the god to relieve his suffering. In spite of being left in the dark regarding his sins, the author continues to hold to the doctrine of retribution, essentially seeing piety (probably understood as ritual observance) as the best way to counteract or prevent calamities.

b. *Ludlul Bel Nemeqi*

This poem's title comes from its opening line which is usually translated "I Will Praise the Lord of Wisdom," the lord of wisdom being Marduk.¹⁴⁵ It has also been called the "Poem of the Righteous Sufferer" and "The Babylonian Job"¹⁴⁶ although any comparison with the book of Job fails to appreciate the depth of the problem of suffering in Job, where no definite answer is given.¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁴ CAD, vol. 9 (1973), 117.

¹⁴⁵ Lambert, *BWL*, 21-28; *ANET*, 434-437, 596-600.

¹⁴⁶ Mattingly, "The Pious Sufferer," 321.

¹⁴⁷ R. E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life: An Exploration of Biblical Wisdom Literature* (New York: Doubleday, 1990), 156, criticizing the position taken by H. Gese, *Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weisheit* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1958), 63. M. Weinfeld claims "Man and His God" and *Ludlul Bel Nemeqi* have more in common with thanksgiving psalms than with Job, see his "Job and its Mesopotamian Parallels--a Typological

There is also a difference between the Akkadian *nemequ* and the Hebrew חֵכְמָה. The Akkadian word denotes possession of skill for the performance of an occupation, as does the Hebrew. However, *nemequ* is associated frequently with magic rites, incantations, and spells, and rarely used with reference to morals.¹⁴⁸ In Hebrew, חֵכְמָה is seen as skill in an occupation (e. g., Bezalel, Exod 31:1-3), just as the Babylonian *ummanu* refers to manual skills and intellectual talent.¹⁴⁹ The Hebrew term is unique in that duties to God in a moral or ethical sense are emphasized over the observance of ritual, cult magic, incantations or spells, as is the case for *nemequ*. Lambert calls חֵכְמָה a "philosophy of life" and cites only a single passage where *nemequ* is used with this connotation.¹⁵⁰

The poem consists of a long monologue written on four tablets over 400 lines in length, dating from the Kassite period (c. 1500-1100 B. C.).¹⁵¹ In this monologue a man of affluence and authority named Subsi-megre-Sakkan (which means "O-god-Sakkan-provide-me-with-abundance"¹⁵²)

Analysis" in *Text and Context: Old Testament and Semitic Studies for F. C. Fensham*, JSOTSS 48, ed. W. Claassen (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1988), 217.

¹⁴⁸ Thus Lambert, *BWL*, 1; and "Some New Babylonian Wisdom Literature," 32; cf. L. Kalugila, *The Wise King* (Uppsala: CWK, 1980), who discusses the vocabulary of Sumerian and Akkadian expressions for wisdom (38-39) and cites passages from Enuma Elish showing Marduk's tie to incantations, spells, and cult magic (43-45).

¹⁴⁹ Lambert, "Some New Babylonian Wisdom Literature," 30.

¹⁵⁰ "Some New Babylonian Wisdom Literature," 31. The passage occurs in the incantation series *Surpu* II:173: "Siduri...goddess of wisdom" (*distar*(15) *ni-me-qi*), see Erica Reiner, *Surpu: A Collection of Sumerian and Akkadian Incantations* AfO 11 (1958): 18.

¹⁵¹ Lambert, *BWL*, 15; Mattingly, "The Pious Sufferer," 321.

¹⁵² Bottero, "Problem of Evil," 1.167, although he transliterates Sakkan

relates how he suffered numerous afflictions and was eventually restored to health and prosperity by Marduk.¹⁵³

An outline of the poem is as follows: (1) introduction, (2) desertion by the gods, (3) forsaken by friends and acquaintances, (4) failure of all attempts to appease the gods; suffering only increases, (5) the promise of deliverance through three dreams, and (6) restoration to health and prosperity.¹⁵⁴

Frustration over unresponsive deities and the inability of diviners and priests to determine the cause of the problem was the lot of this suffering soul:

I called to my god, but he did not show his face,
I prayed to my goddess, but she did not raise her head.
The diviner with his inspection has not got to the root of the matter,
Nor has the dream priest with his libation elucidated my case.
I sought the favour of the *zaqiqu*-spirit, but he did not enlighten me;
And the incantation priest with his ritual did not appease the divine
wrath against me.¹⁵⁵

The afflicted sufferer complains that his misfortunes have struck even though he has not been lax in cultic responsibilities:

with only one "k."

¹⁵³ Lambert, *BWL*, 21.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature*, 171; and Lambert, *BWL*, 21. A text published by D. J. Wiseman has been identified as the first tablet of the poem, see "A New Text of the Babylonian Poem of the Righteous Sufferer," *AnSt* 30 (1980): 101-107; see also W. L. Moran, "Notes on the Hymn to Marduk in Ludlul Bel Nemeqi," *JAOS* 101 (1983): 255-260.

¹⁵⁵ See *BWL*, 39, tablet II:4-9; cf. also II:108-113.

For myself, I gave attention to supplication and prayer;
To me prayer was discretion, sacrifice my rule.
The day for reverencing the god was a joy to my heart;
The day of the goddess's procession was profit and gain to me.
The king's prayer--that was my joy.
And the accompanying music became a delight for me.
I instructed my land to keep the god's rites,
And provoked my people to value the goddess's name.¹⁵⁶

Subsi-mesre-Sakkan's confusion led him to conclude in II:33-38 that human values and divine values seem inverted, and that the ways of the gods are beyond human ability to determine:

I wish I knew that these things would be pleasing to one's god!
What is good for oneself may be offensive to one's god.
What in one's own heart seems despicable may be proper to one's god.
Who can know the will of the gods in heaven? Who can understand the plans of the underworld gods?
Where have humans learned the way of a god?¹⁵⁷

This apparently innocent sufferer had found no comfort in his religion, and may be covertly blaming Marduk for his suffering, though he approaches this with great delicacy and avoids any open accusations.¹⁵⁸ The gods were unresponsive, the diviners and priests were unable to determine the cause of his calamities and he had no assurance that observing the cult actually led to reward and prosperity from the gods. This complaint is followed by a series of statements on the very uncertain nature

¹⁵⁶ See *BWL*, 39, 41, tablet II:23-30.

¹⁵⁷ *ANET*, 597.

¹⁵⁸ Lambert expresses this view in "Some New Babylonian Wisdom Literature," 32-34.

of human existence (II:39-47) and the speaker confesses ignorance of the meaning of it all:

I am appalled at these things; I do not understand their
significance.¹⁵⁹

The problem is seemingly relieved in a series of three dreams, following which the illness is taken away and the misfortunes are reversed. Unfortunately the tablet is broken at the very point at which the sufferer's infractions were revealed (III:55-60). In Lambert's translation¹⁶⁰ only line 60 is still intact:

He made the wind bear away my offenses.

However, line 58 has been reconstructed to read:

It has become patent to me, my punishment, my crime, (to wit) that I
did not revere her (the goddess's) fame.¹⁶¹

This reconstructed line shows that the speaker did not consider himself an innocent sufferer, only a previously ignorant one. He cites his failure to give proper respect to a goddess as one of the reasons for his calamities. If the surrounding text could be reconstructed it would become clear just what caused the god and goddess to send the misfortunes upon Subi-mesre-Sakkan. Presuming that line 58 would be in synonymous parallelism with line 57 one can posit another similar statement of wrongdoing

¹⁵⁹ *BWL*, 41, II:48. See also the discussion in Lambert, *BWL*, 22.

¹⁶⁰ *BWL*, 51.

¹⁶¹ *CAD*, vol. 4 (1958), 170: *i-pi-a-an-ni in-nin-ti(!) ar-ni la aduru dalilisa*.

cited as further cause for the misfortunes.¹⁶²

c. R.S. 25.460

This relatively short (46 lines) Akkadian text was discovered at Ras Shamra and published in 1968.¹⁶³ It dates from c. 1300 but its archaisms push it back as early as the Old Babylonian or early Kassite periods, in terms of original composition.¹⁶⁴ The author of this text does not grapple with the reasons behind the suffering.¹⁶⁵ In fact, the opening lines (1-8) indicate that no method of inquiry had been able to produce an answer.¹⁶⁶ With support from family and friends, the sufferer was encouraged to depend on the mercy of Marduk, since this situation was known to have occurred before (lines 9-24). In the closing lines the sufferer launched into praises for Marduk (lines 25-46).

The similarities to *Ludlul Bel Nimeqi* and the appearance of an Akkadian text at Ugarit demonstrate contact between Babylon and the

¹⁶² Synonymous parallelism is displayed in III:50-51, the closest complete lines in the surviving texts and throughout the poem. This is in no way a conclusive argument but it certainly leaves open the possibility, even the likelihood, of a parallel statement.

¹⁶³ J. Nougayrol, "(Juste) Souffrant (R.S. 25.460)," *Ug 5* (1968): 265-273.

¹⁶⁴ "Le texte d'Ugarit date de ca.1300, mais sa graphie, ses archaïsmes, son style depouille, sa concision même (en face de *Ludlul*), lui assignent vraisemblablement une date de composition paleobabylonienne ou de plus haute époque 'cassite,'" "(Juste) Souffrant," 267. See also H.-P. Müller, *Das Hiobproblem: Seine Stellung und Entstehung in Alten Orient und im Alten Testament* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1978), 56; and Mattingly, "The Pious Sufferer," 324.

¹⁶⁵ W von Soden, "Bemerkungen zu Einigen Literarischen Texten in Akkadischen Sprache aus Ugarit," *UF 1* (1969): 191.

¹⁶⁶ The text refers to oracles (line 2), haruspicy (3), omens (5), and oneiromancy (6), see Nougayrol, "(Juste) Souffrant," 268.

Levant.¹⁶⁷ Here, as in other literary pieces, the innocent sufferer seeks a resolution to his problems from within the religious system, rather than questioning its validity or seeking answers elsewhere.

d. *Babylonian Theodicy*

This work is structured as an elaborate acrostic of 27 stanzas, eleven lines each.¹⁶⁸ It is one of the most developed and skeptical cuneiform texts concerned with divine justice and human suffering.¹⁶⁹ Lambert says this poem was probably written about 1000 B. C., although von Soden gives a date of about two centuries later.¹⁷⁰

The author of the poem is identified by the acrostic which translates, "I Saggil-kinam-ubbib, the incantation priest, am adorant of the god and the king."¹⁷¹ The work consists of a dialogue between an unnamed skeptic and a more pious friend.

As the acrostic unfolds the skeptic recites all the injustices and difficulties he has experienced, beginning with being orphaned at a young age (lines 9-11), resulting in poor health and destitute conditions (lines 27-33).

¹⁶⁷ Gray, "Book of Job," 262. Nougayrol, "(Juste) Souffrant," 267, speaks of the possibility of a common source behind *Ludlul* and R.S. 25.460: "Dann l'etat actuel de nos connaissances, mieux vaut nous en tenir a l'hypothese d'une source ancienne commune a 25.460 et a *Ludlul*, et renfermant deja tous les elements dont nous avons souligne la presence dans ces deux textes a la fois."

¹⁶⁸ Lambert, *BWL*, 63. For the text see *BWL*, 70-91; *ANET*, 601-604.

¹⁶⁹ Mattingly, "The Pious Sufferer," 325.

¹⁷⁰ Lambert, *BWL*, 63; W. von Soden, "Das Fragen," 51-52. For a quick overview of the entire poem, see Lambert, *BWL*, 64-65.

¹⁷¹ Lambert, *BWL*, 63: *a-na-ku sa-ag-gi-il-ki-[i-na-am-u]b-bi-ib ma-as-ma-su ka-ri-bu sa i-li u sar-ri*.

The pious friend recites what appears to be a proverb of conventional wisdom:

n[a]-til pa-an ilim-ma ra-si la-mas-[sal
n[a]-ak-di pa-li-ih ^distar(15) u-kam-mar tuh-[da].

He who waits on his god has a protecting angel,
The humble man who fears his goddess accumulates wealth.¹⁷²

The sufferer then points out examples which call into question the supposed connection between piety and divine reward (lines 48-53), and claims he has not failed to observe the required rituals, which should, by implication, ward off all the calamities he has endured (lines 54-55). The friend responds with his dogma that can be summed up as "piety pays."¹⁷³ The examples cited by the sufferer--the wild ass who tramples the grain, the lion who attacks livestock and the human profiteer--will all pay the penalty for their crimes in due time (lines 59-64).¹⁷⁴ Holding his ground, the sufferer stubbornly says:

Those who neglect the god go the way of prosperity,
While those who pray to the goddess are impoverished and
dispossessed.
In my youth I sought the will of the god;
With prostration and prayer I followed my goddess.

¹⁷² *BWL*, 70, lines 21-22. Line 21 may be translated "he who waits on his god has good fortune," a parallel statement to line 22. See Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, 155-156; and Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 198-206, for general discussions of the relationship between individuals and protective spirits, including the terms *ilu*, *istaru*, *lamassu*, and *se'du*, even though the latter term does not occur here.

¹⁷³ Lambert, "Some New Babylonian Wisdom Literature," 35-36.

¹⁷⁴ Cf. Saggs, *Encounter*, 119.

But I was bearing a profitless corvee as a yoke.
My god decreed instead of wealth destitution.¹⁷⁵

The element of prosperity coming to the wicked is an item that has not been mentioned in any work we have examined previously,¹⁷⁶ but seems to be one of the most irritating issues to the sufferer in the Babylonian Theodicy.¹⁷⁷ It seems that the prosperity of the wicked, more than the suffering of the (apparently) righteous, made the problem so acute. While no one could be sure that an outwardly good person had not secretly or unknowingly offended a god, one could hardly doubt that an obviously bad person deserved punishment.¹⁷⁸

The friend responded with the pious-sounding observation that the ways of the gods are unknowable:

The plans of the gods are as [inscrutable(?)] as the midst of the heavens,

The utterance of the god or goddess is not comprehended.¹⁷⁹

The divine mind is remote like the inmost of the heavens,
Knowledge of it is arduous, people are uninformed).¹⁸⁰

The frustration of the sufferer must have been aggravated by the fact that he was an incantation priest, i. e., a religious professional. If anyone

¹⁷⁵ Lines 70-75, *BWL*, 76-77.

¹⁷⁶ R. J. Williams, "Theodicy in the Ancient Near East," in *Theodicy in the Old Testament*, ed. J. L. Crenshaw (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1983), 46.

¹⁷⁷ Saggs, *Encounter*, 119.

¹⁷⁸ Saggs, *Encounter*, 119-120. Similar issues confronted the writers of Pss 37, 49 and 73 as well as the book of Job.

¹⁷⁹ Williams, "Theodicy," 46; cf. lines 82-83, *BWL*, 76-77.

¹⁸⁰ Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, 162; cf. lines 256-257, *BWL*, 86-87.

should have had an idea of how to reverse suffering, calamities and difficult circumstances it should have been him, or his associates.

The conclusion reached by the friend is that the evil experienced by humankind is not directly due to the injustice of the gods, but to the sin of each individual. When the gods created humanity they

Gave perverse speech to the human race.
With lies, and not truth, they endowed them for ever.¹⁸¹

In other words, whatever evil is done by individuals is done because the gods made them that way. Both sufferer and friend began by assuming that the gods were responsible for maintaining justice among humans. They ended up by admitting that these very gods made people prone to injustice.¹⁸²

The poem ends with the sufferer thanking his friend for his sympathy and with a plea to the personal god and goddess to give help and to show mercy, as well as a call for Shamash to guide him.¹⁸³ The problem is never solved--at least, not in this text. Whether the deities this man called on ever responded is not known.

The speakers in this poem had to content themselves with the

¹⁸¹ Lines 279-280, *BWL*, 88-89; cf. Saggs, *Encounter*, 120.

¹⁸² Lambert, *BWL*, 65. This quote contains an idea very similar to the statement found in the Sumerian "Man and His God" quoted above: "Never has a sinless child been born to its mother, a sinless workman(?) has not existed from of old." See Kramer, "Man and His God," lines 102-103.

¹⁸³ Lines 295-297, *BWL*, 88-89. Shamash is called a shepherd, showing a positive view of the god, or it may be an ingratiating statement designed to coax the god into helping him.

conclusion that the righteous person simply did not exist. The justice of the gods was not at issue, since the ways of the gods were unknowable, thus it was useless to question them. For this reason I question the appropriateness of the commonly used title of the poem. The issue of theodicy does not arise in the so-called *Babylonian Theodicy*.

e. The Poem of Erra

This little-known poem has received only slight attention from the scholarly world because of its relatively recent recovery and collation of many of its text fragments.¹⁸⁴ However, Erra was apparently very popular in Mesopotamia, judging by its diffusion over a large geographical area during the first millennium.¹⁸⁵

The basic story-line is that humans had offended several gods, including Erra, Marduk, *the Sebetti*¹⁸⁶ and the *Anunnaki*.¹⁸⁷ The offenses

¹⁸⁴ L. Cagni, *Das Erra-Epos: Kleinschrifttext* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1970); idem, *The Poem of Erra* (Malibu, CA: Undena, 1977). Previous texts were either incomplete or incompetently handled, see Daniel Bodi, *The Book of Ezekiel and the Poem of Erra*, OBO 104 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1991), 13, n. 11.

¹⁸⁵ Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, 227; Bodi, *Ezekiel and Erra*, 52. For issues of introduction see Bodi's discussion on pp. 54-62.

¹⁸⁶ The *Sebetti* were seven wicked gods without individual names. They acted as a unit, even to the point of being treated grammatically in the singular. Their cult was widespread in the latter half of the first millennium. In the Erra poem they are exclusively evil, as opposed to Erra and Ishum who reconstruct the country in the last tablet of the story, see Cagni, *Poem of Erra*, 18-19.

¹⁸⁷ *Anunnaki* is a Sumerian loanword meaning "the princely seed," see Bodi, *Ezekiel and Erra*, 65, n. 57. For a list of Sumerian evidence for these gods see A. Falkenstein, "Die Anunna in der sumerische Überlieferung," in *Studies in Honor of Benno Landsberger on his 75th Birthday*, ed. H. Guterbock and T. Jacobsen (Chicago: University of Chicago Press,

included contempt (I.120-121), disrespect (I.122), and cultic offenses such as neglecting the proper care of Marduk's statue (I.127-128). Even animals were holding gods in contempt (I.77) and trampling and destroying the pastureland which sustained the country (I.83-86). The *Anunnaki* were deprived of sleep (I.81-82) because of the noise made by mankind, which may be an echo of a similar motif in the Atrahasis epic (see above). In the underworld there is a taboo of silence. Breaking the silence makes it impossible for a mortal to return to the earth unless another person or a god intervenes.¹⁸⁸

Apparently the gods believed that the increase in the number of humans and the resultant noise posed a direct threat to the gods, that they would be overwhelmed (I.79). Erra mentioned the "former sin" committed by humans (V.6), no doubt referring to the contempt humans showed Erra (cf. I.120-122).¹⁸⁹

Stirring up rebellion and war, society was devastated but an assistant, Ishum, interceded on behalf of humanity and was able to calm Erra down before all of humanity was killed. Ishum then confronted Erra with his indiscriminate killing of both the guilty and innocent:

quradu ^d*Erra kinamma tustamit*
la kinamma tustamit

1965), 127-140. for evidence in Akkadian literature see in the same volume B. Kienast, "Igigu and Anunnaki nach den akkadischen Quellen," 141-158.

¹⁸⁸ Note *Gilgamesh* XII.23, 28; and cf. S. N. Kramer, "Death and the Nether World According to the Sumerian Literary Texts," *Iraq* 22 (1960): 59-68.

¹⁸⁹ Bodi, *Ezekiel and Erra*, 66.

sa ihtukama tustamit
sa la ihtukama tustamit

Hero Erra, you killed the righteous one.
You killed the unrighteous one.
You killed the one who had sinned against you.
You killed the one who did not sin against you.¹⁹⁰

Thus humans were punished because of sin (*hitu*) against Erra. The expression "to sin against (a deity)" is similar to the numerous examples in Akkadian literature where in legal contexts it refers to an offense against the suzerain, breaking a treaty or covenant, or failing to keep an obligation.¹⁹¹ Humans were punished for offending the gods, thus the "din" or "noise" made by humans is also a crime deserving of punishment.¹⁹² After Ishum confronted Erra with killing the innocent, Erra decreed that Akkad's enemies would be defeated (IV.128-150), Ishum was honored (V.1-19), and commissioned to rebuild and restore the city (V.20-38), and blessing was promised to those who honored the poem (V.39-61).

One of the unique features of the Poem of Erra is that innocent deaths and the suffering of the righteous are tied directly to one of the gods. To the best of my knowledge this is the only admission by Mesopotamian writers that the concept of an innocent or righteous sufferer existed in relation to the gods. The social implications of this are far-reaching. The brutalization of life in the first millennium led to the portrayal of gods as bloodthirsty

¹⁹⁰ IV 104-107; see Bodi, *Ezekiel and Erra*, 68; Cagni, *Poem of Erra*, 54.

¹⁹¹ Bodi, *Ezekiel and Erra*, 68.

¹⁹² Cf. A. Kilmer, "Mesopotamian Concept of Overpopulation"; and Both, *Ezekiel and Erra*, 131-155.

killers, with the gods now being made in the image of man in a warlike society.¹⁹³ The evolution of the gods from warrior kings in the third millennium with the image of a protector and ruler to the parental figures of the second millennium which allowed worshippers to express a personal relationship to the divine to the violence and brutality of the gods in the Erra poem is one of a slow deterioration of Mesopotamian culture into the warrior societies of the Assyrians and Babylonians.¹⁹⁴

To summarize this section, each of the texts examined from Mesopotamia has the prevailing attitude that the sufferer can never assume innocence, only ignorance. Part of the reason for this is that evil was built into human nature and therefore suffering was to be expected.¹⁹⁵ It was simply part of the normal world order, thus there was no need to question and complain. The best course of action for the ancient Mesopotamians was to submit and suffer, and hope that the offended god or goddess would eventually change the course of events. Since the ways of the deities were beyond human comprehension, one could never be certain what actions would bring about divine wrath, but it was virtually always certain that the fault lay with the human sufferer, not the deity. Simply stated, the result of this is that all suffering is deserved, and there is no recourse but to admit one's guilt, praise one's god and plead for mercy.¹⁹⁶

¹⁹³ Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, 227: "[I]t is the divine that conforms down to the image rather than the image that rises up to approach the divine."

¹⁹⁴ Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, 231-232.

¹⁹⁵ Bottero, "Problem of Evil," 166.

¹⁹⁶ Pope, *Job*, 60.

Even worse, there could be no confidence that one could determine the specific offense in any given situation. Even if someone kept within the guidelines of the *Surpu* incantation list there was no assurance of avoiding sin, and thereby avoiding the wrath of the gods. Everyone merited punishment. Therefore divine punishment of an apparently good person did not call into question the justice of the gods.¹⁹⁷

A suffering individual did not disturb the community since national religion and personal religion were thought to operate in separate spheres. The individual distress of a person who was enduring illness or misfortune could be accounted for by those around him on the assumption that this was a private matter between the individual and the personal god.¹⁹⁸

As it relates to the book of Proverbs, according to many scholars, the Mesopotamian view of life was shared by the sages who were part of Israel's wisdom movement. It may be the view Job's counselors held.¹⁹⁹ However, as I intend to demonstrate, this is not exactly true for Proverbs. Rather than accepting a foreign *Weltordnung*, which has often been the assumption of past scholarship, the book of Proverbs is grounded in a distinctive Israelite monotheistic world view and shows an awareness of the possibility of, and the actual existence of, an innocent sufferer.

B. Egyptian Literature

In Egypt, as in most ancient societies, religion was a domina-

¹⁹⁷ Saggs, *Encounter*, 117.

¹⁹⁸ Van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, 114.

¹⁹⁹ According to Mattingly, "The Pious Sufferer," 329ff.

ting force.²⁰⁰ The focal point of Egyptian religion was the pharaoh, who was viewed as divine and associated with Horus.²⁰¹ He functioned as the ultimate high priest, who built temples and saw to their maintenance.²⁰²

Because Egyptian beliefs were never consolidated or systematized there is no single "Egyptian religion." Beliefs remained fluid, even during the historical period, and they had no one "sacred book," which makes it difficult for us to say what was believed by whom.²⁰³ It is likely that the existing texts relate to a small group of the social elite showing little direct evidence for the beliefs and attitudes of the rest of the people.²⁰⁴ Baines points out that

Since in theory the gods provided for all of humanity, and humanity responded with gratitude and praise, the cult could be seen as having universal implications. In practice, however, the god's benefits were unequally divided. The privileged received the rewards of divine beneficence and returned gratitude, while the rest suffered misfortune in greater measure and had no official channel for interacting with deities.²⁰⁵

The average person came into contact with the deities only when periodic festivals were observed. The gods were purified, fed, clothed and

²⁰⁰ Hoffmeier, "Egyptians," 283.

²⁰¹ Henri Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948; repr. Phoenix Books, 1978), 15-50.

²⁰² Hoffmeier, "Egyptians," 283.

²⁰³ David P. Silverman, "Divinity and Deities in Ancient Egypt," in *Religion in Ancient Egypt*, ed. Byron E. Shafer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 12; see also in the same volume John Baines, "Society, Morality, and Religious Practice," 123.

²⁰⁴ Baines, "Society," 124.

²⁰⁵ Baines, "Society," 127.

praised on a daily basis but this was done by the privileged and by those attached to the temple cult, not the ordinary individual.²⁰⁶

The king also served as an example of or metaphor for the way others were to conduct their lives. The king was "on earth for ever and ever, judging humanity and propitiating the gods, and setting order in place of disorder. He gives offerings to the gods and mortuary offerings to the spirits (the blessed dead)."²⁰⁷

In addition to the king, *ma'at* was also a very important concept in Egyptian religion. The meaning of the word incorporates ideas such as truth, harmony and justice.²⁰⁸ It is the "right" or correct behavior in any given circumstance.²⁰⁹ Old Kingdom texts speak of "doing *ma'at*" or "speaking *ma'at*," in contrast with the opposites "wrong" and "falsehood," giving the clear conclusion that *ma'at* had the meanings "right" and "truth" from very ancient times.²¹⁰ In a quote from an Old Kingdom text

²⁰⁶ Erik Hornung, *Conceptions of God in Ancient Egypt: The One and the Many*, tr. John Baines (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1982), 135-136; Baines, "Society," 126.

²⁰⁷ See Jan Assmann, *Der König als Sonnenpriester: Ein kosmographischer Begleittext zur kultischen Sonnehymnik* (Gluckstadt: Augustin, 1970), 17-22; and Baines, "Society," 128. In this quote "order" is *ma'at*, a fundamental religious and social concept. "Disorder" is *isft*, the opposite of *ma'at*, which is associated with the world outside creation.

²⁰⁸ J. D. Ray, "Egyptian Wisdom Literature," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*, ed. J. Day, R. P. Gordon, and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 20. See also J. Assmann, *Ma'at: Gerechtigkeit und Unsterblichkeit im alten Ägypten* (Munich: C. H. Beck, 1990) for a recent detailed study.

²⁰⁹ G. L. Archer and W. S. La Sor, "Religions of the Biblical World: Egypt," *ISBE*, vol. 4 (1988), 107.

²¹⁰ Miriam Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and*

(before 2200 B. C.), *ma'at* is shown to be equated with a universal standard:

Justice (*ma'at*) is great, and its appropriateness is lasting; it has not been disturbed since the time of him who made it, (whereas) there is punishment for him who passes over its laws. It is the (right) path before him who knows nothing. Wrongdoing (*isft*) has never brought its undertaking into port.²¹¹

Miriam Lichtheim says:

[M]an did Maat because it was "good" and because "the god desires it." It was the principle of right order by which the gods live, and which man recognized as needful on earth and incumbent upon them.²¹²

This principle of cosmic dimensions regulated the functioning of nature, society, and an individual's life. But it was not a mechanical, impersonal principle. *Ma'at* essentially meant veracity or fair dealing.²¹³ *Ma'at* was personified as the daughter of the sun god and worshipped as a goddess, having both temple and cult dedicated to her honor.²¹⁴

Due to the multiple systems of theology in Egypt it is difficult to provide a basic background to the discussion as I did for the previous section. There were three main systems²¹⁵ which presented different cosmo-

Related Studies, OBO 120 (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 18. The literature on *ma'at* is enormous, see W. Helck, "Maat," *LA*, vol. 3 (1980), 1110-1119; and A. Volten, "Der Begriff der Maat in den agyptischen Weisheitstexten," in *Les Sagesses du Proche-Orient ancien*, no ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), 73-101.

²¹¹ Lines 85ff., *ANET*, 412.

²¹² Lichtheim, *Maat*, 19.

²¹³ Lichtheim, *Maat*, 37.

²¹⁴ Edward F. Wente, "Egyptian Religion," *ABD* 2.410; Hornung, *Conceptions of God*, 75.

²¹⁵ The centers for these theological systems were based in Heliopolis,

gonies and explanations for creation. Each was characterized by a main creator deity who generated associated gods and goddesses.²¹⁶ The enormous time span over which Egyptian literature emerges causes it to show some variety and change over the centuries. But unlike Hebrew wisdom literature, Egyptian wisdom writings were never considered sacred.²¹⁷ Thus we should not expect to see consistency throughout the literature of Egypt, nor see concepts viewed in the same way in the different theological systems.²¹⁸

Egyptian deities were portrayed in a large number of forms, ranging from animal to human, to a combination of both.²¹⁹ The gods often exhibited human emotions and engaged in human activity. They thought, spoke, dined, traveled by boat, had a sense of humor, and some even drank to excess.²²⁰ The gods were created beings, hence not eternal. The Egyptian calendar contained days set aside to mark birthdays of many of their

a very ancient center for Egyptian religion; Memphis, the capital of united Egypt during the Old Kingdom period (Dynasties III-VI, 2686-2181); and Thebes, the capital during the Middle Kingdom (Dynasties XI-XII, 2133-1786) and the New Kingdom (Dynasties XVIII-LX, 1552-1070), see Jack Finegan, *Myth and Mystery: An Introduction to the Pagan Religions of the Biblical World* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1989), 39, 51.

²¹⁶ Silverman, "Divinity and Deities," 30. See also in the same volume Leonard H. Lesko, "Ancient Egyptian Cosmogonies and Cosmology," 88-115, for a more detailed discussion.

²¹⁷ Wente, "Egyptian Religion," 410.

²¹⁸ See the comments of Gladson, "Retributive Paradoxes," 80, in this regard. Despite the different theological systems there was very little fluctuation in the way *ma'at* was viewed, see Lichtheim, *Maat*, 97.

²¹⁹ Silverman, "Divinity and Deities," 19-23; see also Finegan, *Myth and Mystery*, 43-44.

²²⁰ Silverman, "Divinity and Deities," 15-16.

gods.²²¹ The gods were also subject to death and rebirth, though not always in the mortal sense.²²² Some texts mention a limited and fixed lifespan for deities, and the story of "The Blinding of Truth by Falsehood" refers to "the god's tomb."²²³ The resurrection of Osiris is mentioned frequently in the Coffin Texts,²²⁴ and Re, the king of the gods, was said to die symbolically every sunset and to be reborn at dawn the next day.²²⁵

Since the gods participated in the afterlife it was only natural to see this as a precedent for human existence as well.²²⁶ At first, only the king and society's elite were mummified but after the Old Kingdom this privilege was extended to others.²²⁷ It is this preoccupation with life or existence after death that provides the most insight into the Egyptian view of suffering, as we will see below.

²²¹ Peter Kaplony, "Geburtstage (Gotter)," *LA*, vol. 2 (1977), 477-479.

²²² Silverman, "Divinity and Deities," 29; cf. Wente, "Egyptian Religion," 410.

²²³ Siegfried Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, tr. A. Keep (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 24-25; Hornung, *Conceptions of God*, 151-165.

²²⁴ Hornung, *Conceptions of God*, 152-153; e. g., Coffin Text spells 16, 17 and 148 in Adriaan de Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 7 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935-1961), vol. 1 (1935), 47-53; and vol. 2 (1938), 209-226.

²²⁵ Silverman, "Divinity and Deities," 29; Finegan, *Myth and Mystery*, 4647.

²²⁶ Wente, "Egyptian Religion," 411.

²²⁷ See R. B. Finnestad, "The Pharaoh and the 'Democratization' of Post-mortem Life," in *The Religion of the Ancient Egyptians: Cognitive Structures and Popular Expressions*, ed. G. Englund (Uppsala: Acta Universitatis Upsaliensis, 1989), 89-93; and in the same volume, J. P. Sorensen, "Divine Access: The So-called Democratization of Egyptian Funerary Literature as a Socio-cultural Process," 109-123.

As for the practice of the medical arts in ancient Egypt, there is ample evidence of physicians who based their practice on empirico-scientific principles as far back as the Old Kingdom.²²⁸ They show an advanced level of knowledge regarding human anatomy, and in some cases are surprisingly devoid of magic or religious jargon.²²⁹ This is in contrast to Mesopotamian medicine, which seems to have been based more on superstition than science.²³⁰

1. The Absence of Theodicy in Egypt

The gods are rarely blamed or questioned for the upheavals in human society.²³¹ In Egypt the notion of evil overlapped to a great extent with that of disorder.²³² This served to promote a "don't-rock-the-boat" attitude, and kept the ruling group in power.

In a Middle Kingdom text there is an apologia of the creator god, who distances himself from human wrongdoing, saying:

²²⁸ See Brown, *Israel's Divine Healer*, 41-42, and his attending bibliography.

²²⁹ Brown, *Israel's Divine Healer*, 41-42. This is not to say that no magical rites were practiced, see J. F. Borghouts, *Ancient Egyptian Magical Texts* (Leiden: Brill, 1978); and R. K. Ritner, *The Mechanics of Ancient Egyptian Magical Practice* (Chicago: Oriental Institute, 1992).

²³⁰ According to Oppenheim, *Ancient Mesopotamia*, 224, who observed that prescribed medical treatment occurs rarely and is not medical but magical. The names of diseases are not medical but usually point to the deity or demon that caused them.

²³¹ Williams, "Theodicy," 47.

²³² Baines, "Society," 163; and Reinhard Grieshammer, "Gott und das Negative nach Quellen der ägyptischen Spätzeit," in *Aspekte der spät-ägyptischen Religion*, ed. W. Westdorf (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1979) 79-92.

I made every man like his fellow.
I did not ordain that they do wrong (*isft*, "disorder").
It was their desires that damaged what I had said.²³³

The last line speaks of the damage to the created world (brought into existence by the creative word of the god?) caused by the desires of humanity. As Baines succinctly says:

The creator is not responsible for the origin of evil. He cares so much for people's well-being that "he has built himself a shrine around them; when they weep he hears" (l. 135). This image of tears relates to the origin of human beings. A wordplay found in the creator's apologia and in other sources says that people arose from the creator's tears--an indirect statement that they are born to suffer.²³⁴

This is quite similar to the Mesopotamian view in that there was a divine order that regulated society and individual lives (Mesopotamia, *me*; Egypt, *ma'at*) and neither society made blatant accusations of divine injustice, or attributed evil to the gods. Any suggestion of injustice done by a deity was done so only with the greatest caution and circumspection.

2. Suffering is Due to Perversion of *Ma'at*

Where did evil arise in the Egyptian world view? Part of the answer has already been referred to--the presence of *isft*, "disorder." But there is also a more direct source, that of humans themselves. Some of the texts quoted above have hinted at this. In virtually all of the, wisdom or reflective texts human suffering is viewed as a result of the perversion of

²³³ De Buck, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 7 (1961), 464a-b. Cf. R. B. Parkinson, *Voices From Ancient Egypt* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1991), 32-34; and M. Lichtheim, *AEL*, vol. 1 (1973), 131-133.

²³⁴ Baines, "Society," 163-164; see de Buck, *Coffin Texts*, vol. 7 (1961), 465a, and Hornung, *Conceptions of God*, 149-150.

ma'at by humans.²³⁵

In this part of the study four documents will be examined with reference to these issues. Though the study will not be detailed, it is intended to show that the source of evil and suffering almost always lay with humanity's failure to live up to the standards of *ma'at*, thus placing the blame on mankind and removing it from the gods.

a. *Admonitions of Ipuwer*

This work is usually placed in the category of instruction (Egyptian, *sbayt*²³⁶), although Williams discusses it under the category of speculative works.²³⁷ The beginning of this work is lost, and with it, the setting.

In its present form, which is no earlier than the late Thirteenth Dynasty, the text is in two parts. The main body was probably produced between 2180-2130 B. C.²³⁸ The second part is a dialogue between Ipuwer, a sage, and the creator god.²³⁹

Though the situation presented in this text is not considered histori-

²³⁵ Williams, "Theodicy," 47.

²³⁶ Ray, "Egyptian Wisdom Literature," 18, says the root meaning of the word is closer to "enlightenment."

²³⁷ Ronald J. Williams, "Egyptian Literature (Wisdom)," *ABD*, 2.397, as does Nili Shupak, "The 'Sitz im Leben' of the Book of Proverbs in the Light of a Comparison of Biblical and Egyptian Wisdom Literature," *RB* 94 (1987): 99-100, n. 2. She says *sbayt* refers primarily to written rather than oral instruction, 108, n. 19.

²³⁸ Gerhard Fecht, *Der Vorwurf an Gott in den "Mahnworten des Ipu-wer"* (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsverlag, 1972).

²³⁹ Williams, "Egyptian Literature (Wisdom)," 397-398.

ca1²⁴⁰ it is unusual in that the sage criticizes the god for deplorable conditions existing in the land. The king responds to the criticism at the end of the document, and from what remains of the speech it seems that the king places the blame for the adverse conditions on the people themselves.²⁴¹ Even in a text where a god was reproached for allowing people to suffer and conditions to deteriorate, the conventional orthodox view is still present, that these conditions are due to actions of people, and the gods are not blamed.

b. *Dispute of a Man with His Ba*

Dating from the Twelfth Dynasty, this poem is preserved in a single manuscript, of which the first part is missing.²⁴² It is also known as the "Dispute over Suicide."²⁴³ There are many ways of interpreting this difficult work but the basic facts are communicated as a discussion between "a man" and his *ba*, or "soul."²⁴⁴ Although this is frequently the translation seen for *ba* it has no Semitic equivalent, and "soul" fails to properly communicate its salient meaning. It also introduces a dualistic distinction between body and soul proper to some other philosophical systems but contrary to the concept of human beings held by the Egyptians.²⁴⁵ It could be called the personification of the vital force that

²⁴⁰ Lichtheim, *AEL*, vol. 1 (1973), 149-150.

²⁴¹ Lichtheim, *AEL*, vol. 1 (1973), 161-162, n. 29.

²⁴² Lichtheim, *AEL*, vol. 1 (1973), 163.

²⁴³ *ANET*, 405-407.

²⁴⁴ R. Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 170.

²⁴⁵ Louis V. Zabkar, "Ba," *LA*, vol. 1 (1975), 588-589. The *ba* is the "moral essence of a person's motivation and movement, which also enables him or her to be free in the next world," according to Baines, "Society," 145.

animates the *kha* (body).²⁴⁶ There were several stages of development for the idea of the *ba* in post-mortem existence, and Zabkar notes three facts:

First, the *Ba* indicates the fullness of being, not a part of it. Second, the *Ba* is not a spiritual part of man, but the totality of his physical and psychical attributes and functions. The third fact which logically follows from the second is that the idea of man in ancient Egypt was not that of a composite body and soul, of physical and spiritual or material and immaterial elements, but that of a monistic unit comprising all of man's qualities; in each and all of the several modes of existence (*Ba*, *Ka*, *Ach*, etc.) man continues to live and act as a full individual.²⁴⁷

A brief look at the contents of the work shows a suffering man expressing his longing for death. Angered over this, his *ba* threatens to leave him. This causes horror to the man, since abandonment by the *ba* would mean total annihilation instead of the resurrection and eternal bliss which he imagined, and he entreats his *ba* to stay with him and not oppose him in his longing for a natural death, rather than a suicide. The *ba* then tells the man that death is a sad business, and that those who have nice tombs are no better off than those who have none. The *ba* urges the man to

²⁴⁶ H. Seebass, "נַכְּשִׁי," TWAT, vol. 5 (1986), 533. It was often pictured in Egyptian artwork as a migratory stork, or a human-headed bird which flutters or hovers over the mummy or near the tomb and may be benefitted by offerings, water or shade, see G. L. Archer and W. S. La Sor, "Religions: Egypt," 106; Finegan, *Myth and Mystery*, 45; and the picture of a "soul tree" in Cecil M. Robeck, "Soul," *ISBE*, vol. 4 (1988), 587.

²⁴⁷ Zabkar, "Ba," *LA*, vol. 1 (1975), 590. For a more detailed treatment see L. Zabkar, *A Study of the BA Concept in Ancient Egyptian Texts* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1968); and Hans Goedicke, *The Report About the Dispute of a Man with His BA* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1970), 20-37, who stresses the duplexity of the meaning against the uniform character of the term in Zabkar's study.

stop complaining and enjoy life. The man seems unconvinced, since he closes by deploring the miseries he has to endure, and exalts death and resurrection. In a concluding speech the *ba* decides to remain with the man.²⁴⁸

On the subject of the source of evil, the *Dispute* is silent. The poem acknowledges the existence of evil, citing many examples; but nowhere is the question of origin asked with regard to evil. The role of the gods mentioned in the text is judicial,²⁴⁹ and the idea that misery in life will be rewarded in a hereafter appears in line 22.²⁵⁰ The "second poem of the man" (lines 103-130) cites instances of wrongdoing, greed, criminal activity and alienation, for the current state of misery the man is enduring. In lines 122-123 he says:

To whom shall I speak today?
None are righteous (*ma'tyw*),
The land is left to evildoers (*irw isft*).

The word translated "righteous" is based on the root *ma'at*, and means someone who pursues "the good," or "one attached to *ma'at*."²⁵¹ The opposite of *ma'tyw* "righteous one" is *irw isft* "the wrongdoer," and has a

²⁴⁸ Lichtheim, *AEL*, vol. 1 (1973), 163; Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 170; and in greater detail, Goedicke, *Report*, 38-59. Williams, "Egyptian Literature (Wisdom)," 398 sees it as an attack on the traditional costly material provision for the afterlife, but Goedicke (*Report*, 58) disagrees.

²⁴⁹ Goedicke, *Report*, 84-85, 102-109. The passage is in lines 23-31, see *AEL*, vol. 1 (1973), 164-165.

²⁵⁰ According to Goedicke (*Report*, 103).

²⁵¹ Goedicke, *Report*, 169.

strong moral connotation.²⁵²

The conclusion is that in the Dispute the problems of an innocent sufferer are brought on by others who do not observe *ma'at*.

c. Tale of the Eloquent Peasant

This story dates from the Middle Kingdom and was apparently intended as a literary essay in what the Egyptians considered fine writing.²⁵³ The text consists of a series of nine poetic speeches framed by narrative.²⁵⁴ The basic story line is that a humble oasis dweller (not a "peasant"²⁵⁵) named Khun-Anup has his goods taken from him by a tenant farmer. When the complaint is brought before the high steward, Rensi son of Meru, he is so impressed with Khun-Anup's eloquence that he delays the repayment of the lost goods until after nine speeches are made.

Though it is evident in the poetry and literary devices²⁵⁶ that this was an essay showing fine writing, the main emphasis is on the rights of the common individual.²⁵⁷ There is no outcry against the gods over the injustices done to Khun-Anup, only a criticism of those who fail to do *ma'at*, as he tells Rensi:

Do Justice (*ma'at*) for the Lord of Justice (*ma'at*),
who is the wise perfection of his Justice (*ma'at*).
Reed pen, papyrus, and palette of Thoth all dread to write injustice:

²⁵² Goedicke, *Report*, 169. See also de Buck, *Coffin Texts*, 4.63a.

²⁵³ William K. Simpson, ed., *The Literature of Ancient Egypt* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1972), 31.

²⁵⁴ Lichtheim, *AEL*, vol. 1 (1973), 169.

²⁵⁵ Williams, "Egyptian Literature (Wisdom)," 398.

²⁵⁶ See Simpson, *LAE*, 35, n. 11; 37, n. 23; 41, n. 48; etc.

²⁵⁷ Williams, "Egyptian Literature (Wisdom)," 398.

when good is truly good, that good is priceless--
But Justice (*ma'at*) is forever,
and down to the very grave it goes with him who does it.
His burial conceals that man within the ground,
yet his good name shall never perish from the earth.²⁵⁸

The eternality of *ma'at* as the standard of right order is shown here,
and injustice results when people, especially those in power, do not abide by
its standards. Khun-Anup calls in frustration to the high steward, who
has remained silent during the entire ordeal:

Do not answer with the answer of silence!
do not attack one who does not attack you.
You have no pity, you are not troubled,
You are not disturbed!
You do not repay my good speech which comes from the mouth of Re
himself!
Speak justice (*ma'at*), do justice (*ma'at*),
For it is mighty;
It is great, it endures,
Its worth is tried,
It leads to reveredness.²⁵⁹

As the story ends, the high steward Rensi eventually forces the
robber to repay Khun-Anup for his losses. Rather than criticize the gods,
one of the last things said by Khun-Anup prompting Rensi into action is the
threat by the sufferer to plead his case to the god Anubis if Rensi continues
his silence:

²⁵⁸ Lines 304-307; this translation is that of John L. Foster, *Echoes of Egyptian Voices* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1992), 83.

²⁵⁹ *AEL*, vol. 1 (1973), 181. Foster's translation (*Echoes*, 84) differs slightly but meanings are essentially the same.

Here I have been pleading with you, and you have not listened to it.
I shall go and plead about you to Anubis!²⁶⁰

For Khun-Anap the problems he experienced were external and social. For the man in the *Dispute* they were internal and personal. However, both see injustices and suffering resulting from a perversion of *ma'at*. As indicated earlier, this concept of cosmic order is similar to the Sumerian *me* but with a significant difference. In Mesopotamia the gods are "wielders of the *me*"²⁶¹ whereas in Egypt, pharaoh and the gods exist by *ma'at*.²⁶² Thus *ma'at* has more extensive ramifications in its relation to the realm of the divine.²⁶³ It was a standard of behavior that both deities and humans were measured by.²⁶⁴ Speaking and doing *ma'at* led to success; failing to do so led to *isft*, disorder. If *ma'at* is to be understood in the sense of harmony, truth and justice, then this has implications for social relationships. Everyone has rights, and those rights carry with them a responsibility for those around them. Individuals were seen as care-worthy creations of the gods and this formed the basis for morality.²⁶⁵ This

²⁶⁰ *AEL*, vol. 1 (1973), 182, the end of the ninth petition.

²⁶¹ See *ANET*, 579-580; and Hallo and van Dijk, *Exaltation of Inanna*, 15, 49-50.

²⁶² Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods*, 158, 278.

²⁶³ Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature*, 91.

²⁶⁴ It is still a matter of discussion whether the concept of *me* was as central to Mesopotamian society as *ma'at* was to Egypt. See H. H. Schmid, *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit*, BZAW 101 (Berlin: Topelmann, 1966), 115-118 for a survey of the question.

²⁶⁵ John A. Wilson, "Egypt," in *The Intellectual Adventure of Ancient Man*, ed. H. Frankfort et al. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1946; repr. Phoenix Books, 1977), 82, 108-109.

is a far cry from the Sumero-Babylonian view that humanity was created to serve the gods, and that justice was a privilege rather than a right.²⁶⁶

d. *Teaching of Amenemhet*

This purported communication of an assassinated king to his son and successor has only slight bearing on this study, and it is mentioned only due to its unique position on the subject. It has no religious aspect to it, and nothing is said about *ma'at*.²⁶⁷

The main message of the instructions is "trust no one".²⁶⁸
Trust not a brother, know not a friend,
Make no intimates, it is worthless.
When you lie down, guard your heart yourself,
For no man has adherents on the day of woe.²⁶⁹

Amenemhet then gives evidence why this advice should be taken:

I gave to the beggar, I raised the orphan,
I gave success to the poor as to the wealthy;
But he who ate my food raised opposition,
He whom I gave my trust used it in a plot.²⁷⁰

The speaker claims he did what the kings of Egypt were supposed to do, yet within his palace a plot was made which eventually led to his murder. In the concluding two lines of this section of poetry Amenemhet encourages his son to learn the lessons he has to offer:

²⁶⁶ Jacobsen, "Mesopotamia," 207-208.

²⁶⁷ William L. McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 85.

²⁶⁸ Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 165; McKane, *Proverbs*, 84.

²⁶⁹ *AEL*, vol. 1 (1973), 136; *LAE*, 194.

²⁷⁰ *AEL*, vol. 1 (1973), 136; *LAE*, 194.

If one fights in the arena forgetful of the past,
Success will elude him who ignores what he should know.

The uniqueness of this work is seen in that it is the only known specimen of its kind, yet over seventy copies or portions of it have been recovered.²⁷¹ It is a misanthropic work, characterized by cynicism and bitterness. In both poetical sections Amenemhet asserts that the good he did for his subjects and the country was repayed with betrayal and ultimately murder. Amenemhet claims to have suffered undeserved violence. In his advice no blame is ascribed to the gods, only untrustworthy people are warned against.

The political function of this essay was to validate the succession to the throne of Sesostri I, the son of Amenemhet.²⁷² It was probably written by a creative royal scribe in the employ of Sesostri I who showed a great deal of imagination, but few modern scholars take this work at face value. This forces any analysis of the work to be careful not to take it as an historical record, although the attitudes displayed toward royal advisors and other people are informative.

²⁷¹ Lichtheim, *AEL*, vol. 1 (1973), 135, observes that the subject of regicide conflicted too strongly with the dogma of divine kingship for several works of this sort to be produced, yet Simpson (*LAE*, 193) says that the large number of copies or portions recovered indicate its popularity. Note also the comment of McKane (*Proverbs*, 83) in this regard.

²⁷² Simpson (*LAE*, 193) calls it a blatant work of political propaganda designed to validate the new king.

3. Inequity or Injustice was Often Rectified in the Afterlife²⁷³

When rewards and punishments could be projected into a post-mortem existence the problem of injustice and innocent suffering becomes a less vital concern.²⁷⁴ A culture which believes that there is a judgment after death for all individuals plays down the need for retribution and reward in this life since all scores will be settled in the next life and it is never too late for righteousness to be rewarded.

C. Conclusion

Some comparisons of Sumero-Babylonian literature with that of Egypt regarding innocent suffering are in order.

First, we can observe that theodicy, by strict definition, is not an appropriate category for discussion of Egyptian literature due to the Egyptian view of a judgment in post-mortem existence. This is in contrast to Sumero-Babylonian literature, which calls for the rectification of injustice and illness in the present life. To be sure, there are protests over injustices and bad treatment in Egyptian literature but the general tenor of Egyptian society was more serene,²⁷⁵ and the possibility of all things being set right in the afterlife made a difference in their outlook.

Secondly, the gods are not viewed in either literature as holding to as high a moral standard as that of Yahweh of the ancient Israelites. The

²⁷³ For a basic discussion of the afterlife in Egypt see Silverman, "Divinity and Deities," 46-49; in more detail, Hermann Kees, *Totenglauben und Jenseitsvorstellungen der alten Agypter* (Berlin: Akademie-Verlag, 1977).

²⁷⁴ Williams, "Theodicy," 48.

²⁷⁵ Gladson, "Retributive Paradoxes," 85.

gods of Egypt and Mesopotamia are not always portrayed in "holy" terms, and in neither culture are moral standards based on the character of the gods.²⁷⁶ In Egypt, behavioral standards related to keeping *ma'at*; in Mesopotamia the law codes were based on economic factors, and wrongdoing was more often seen as an offense against society. The claim to "righteousness" was usually based on ritual observations, especially in times of suffering when an individual was not able to get the god to reveal the reason for the divine anger expressed against the person.

Thirdly, in Egypt the gods are rarely questioned or blamed for injustices; in Mesopotamia, suggestions of a god or goddess being responsible for someone's suffering are made in the most cautious and circumspect terms. When it is claimed in the *Admonitions of Ipuwer* that the gods might be at fault the king responds with the conventional teaching that people have failed to keep *ma'at*, leading to the disruption of society. In Mesopotamia when a sufferer pleads for a god or goddess to relieve sickness or suffering there is always an assumption on the part of the petitioner that a sin of some kind has caused the deity to allow this treatment.

This leads to the fourth observation, that the source of evil in Egypt and Mesopotamia differed. For the Egyptians, evil was generally associated with *isft*, "disorder," the opposite of *ma'at*. Those who did not do or speak according to the standards of *ma'at* allowed disorder into their lives. For the Mesopotamians evil was often seen as a result of demonic activity,

²⁷⁶ Contrast with this the numerous claims of Yahweh's holiness, Lev 11:44-45; 19:2; 21:8; Josh 24:19; 1 Sam 2:2; etc., and the title "Holy One of Israel" ascribed to Yahweh in Ps 71:22; 78:4; Is 1:4; 5:19, 24; 10:20; etc.

hence a result of living forces or beings. Even a "friendly" personal god may allow suffering to occur in an individual's life if offended, so the rituals in Mesopotamian worship often functioned as appeasement so that suffering was avoided or halted.

How does the previous study relate to von Soden's four elements required for theodicy?

1. A Clear Sense of Right and Wrong

a. Egypt

To do right was to conform to *ma'at*. No one could ever exhaust the knowledge of *ma'at* completely nor conform to *ma'at* totally, hence a certain amount of disorder in an individual's life and in society was expected. For the Egyptians *ma'at* was seen as "doing good," and becoming cognizant of *ma'at* was based on instruction and observation or perception and insight.²⁷⁷ Although the Egyptians did not have a written law code (or if they did it has not been discovered yet) the funerary inscriptions show their claims to have done certain things or abstained from other activities in the attempt to gain a favorable verdict in the judgment.²⁷⁸

Morenz says these inscriptions show us clearly that

...the Egyptians possessed general maxims of conduct, such as the need to avoid inflicting pain upon one's fellow beings, but did not attempt to describe exhaustively all the possible wicked actions whereby this could be done. They may be said to have had an ethic of an attitude of mind, which obliges men themselves to apply to the concrete circumstances the general moral maxim that one should

²⁷⁷ Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, 123.

²⁷⁸ Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, 134.

show consideration for one's fellows. Thus Egyptian ethics are oriented toward commission and omission, but also toward facts and toward mental attitudes.²⁷⁹

So the norms of conduct in Egyptian society were (apparently) not codified, unlike the law codes in Mesopotamia or the Torah in Israel. One may get a glimpse into Egyptian ethics and morals by examining the Negative Confessions (Book of the Dead, chapter 125), where a list of actions or attitudes was denied in order to achieve a favorable judgment in the afterlife.²⁸⁰

As far as we know at present, Egyptian moral thought was not formulated as a code of ethics and written down as such. Morals were conveyed in five types of literary sources: (1) instructions in wisdom; (2) autobiographies; (3) declarations of innocence in the Book of the Dead, chapter 125; (4) priestly prohibitions and declarations inscribed on temple doors; and (5) imaginative tales that conveyed moral lessons.²⁸¹ Each individual knew that his or her personal conduct would have to be accounted for and weighed against *ma'at* in the judgment.

b. Mesopotamia

A sense of right and wrong is present to some extent in Mesopotamia, although an absolute moral standard is lacking. Law

²⁷⁹ Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, 134.

²⁸⁰ There are also moral self-laudations in private autobiographies most often phrased as positive statements of good character and right action, see Lichtheim, *Maat*, 105. A thorough discussion of the Negative Confessions (103-144), and the moral vocabulary found therein (145-150) as well as the aspects of *ma'at* (151) and a ranking of virtues and vices (152-153) are also contained in Lichtheim's discussion.

²⁸¹ Lichtheim, *Maat*, 152.

codes²⁸² were in effect at various times but these did not explain why a person may suffer a run of "bad luck," played out as poor health, financial setbacks, or the like. The gods frequently left the person in ignorance of the offense, giving them recourse only to seek the answer through haruspicy, oneiromancy or other forms of divination,²⁸³ or to recite the *Surpu* incantations, hoping to hit upon the one that had offended the deity.

In the event that the gods did not reveal the nature of the offense the claim to "righteousness" then became a claim that an individual had done all that could be done and the gods had not communicated any failings.²⁸⁴ This left a sufferer in ignorance, but there was no assumption of innocence.

2. Significant Individual Worth

a. Egypt

Both societies held this view to some degree, though Egypt seemed to apply it more practically than Mesopotamia. The Egyptians considered themselves divine creations, and in the Middle Kingdom it was said that the first human (*rmt*, later *rmt*) was created from the tear (*rmit*) of the creator-god.²⁸⁵ Though this idea was associated with an ex-

²⁸² E. g., Sumerian: Laws of Ur-Nammu, Laws of Lipit-Ishtar; Old Babylonian: Laws of Eshnunna, Code of Hammurapi. For manuscript data, publication, and translation information for these and other ancient law collections see Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature*, 69-74.

²⁸³ For a brief look at their divination methods see Malcolm J. A. Horsnell, "Religions: Assyria and Babylonia," *ISBE*, vol. 4 (1988), 90; and in more detail, W. Farber, "Witchcraft, Magic, and Divination in Ancient Mesopotamia," in *Civilizations of the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. M. Sasson, 4 vols. (New York: Scribner, 1995), 3.1895-1909.

²⁸⁴ Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature*, 180.

²⁸⁵ Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, 183; Hornung, *Conceptions of God*, 150; cf. Lesko, "Cosmogonies," 101-102.

planation of the suffering of mankind it also gives an explanation of their origin.²⁸⁶ Another text implies that people are small livestock, i. e. merely cattle, the property of the gods.²⁸⁷ This view is the negative end of the scale from the title of the pharaoh as shepherd, the shepherd's crook being one of the earliest insignia of the pharaoh and the origin of one of the words meaning "to rule."²⁸⁸ This is often a positive image due to its association with provision and protection.

An "Egyptocentric" view was prominent in the thinking of the inhabitants of that nation which promoted them as the most important people on earth.²⁸⁹ This was a result of their national religion, which had their people being ruled by a divine king. They held the conviction that their nation was the center of the earth²⁹⁰ and that they were superior to all other peoples.²⁹¹ Their self-worth seemingly was rooted in their religion and their belief that they held a position of privilege and status among their gods.

b. Mesopotamia

People were created to serve the gods, according to Sumero-Babylonian belief, and as it was pointed out earlier, self-worth came as a result of the role or function one played in society. The gods

²⁸⁶ Baines, "Society," 163; cf. also Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, 183, and see 184 where the god Khnum's activity as creator is discussed.

²⁸⁷ Wilson, "Egypt," 79.

²⁸⁸ Wilson, "Egypt," 79.

²⁸⁹ Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, 42-49. See also Wilson, "Egypt," 33.

²⁹⁰ Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, 42-47. This idea was not limited to the Egyptians. See the brief discussion of this motif in the OT in L. C. Allen, *Ezekiel 1-19*, WBC vol. 28 (Dallas: Word, 1994), 72-73.

²⁹¹ Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, 47-49.

needed people. Saggs observes:

In the last resort, man was lord of all: the proper functioning of the universe itself depended upon man's maintaining agriculture, supporting the temples, and providing the gods with their sustenance.²⁹²

Saggs may be correct in pointing out the importance of human beings in their roles which supported the temple and its adjoining property, but I can detect no sense of "lordliness" on the part of the average person, especially when it has been observed so many times that people were created to do the work the gods did not want to be bothered with. It is difficult to see how human beings could hold a lofty view of themselves knowing their role of servitude before the gods. In contrast to Saggs' claim of lordliness, Bottero observes the great anxiety in Mesopotamian society evidenced by their obsession with demonic oppression.²⁹³

Ancient Mesopotamian society was structured around temples to various gods, hence one can assume that those employed in the temple held higher social status than those who did not, and that there was also very likely an ascending order of status held among temple employees, depending on what one did.

The average person in Mesopotamia was not of sufficient significance to the great gods to merit individual attention, thus the heightened importance and emphasis on the personal deities.²⁹⁴ The suffering of an individual was seen as a matter between the individual and the personal

²⁹² Saggs, *Encounter*, 170.

²⁹³ Bottero, "Problem of Evil," 1.163-167, especially 1.165.

²⁹⁴ Saggs, *Encounter*, 122-123.

god and did not affect the community as a whole. The two balancing perspectives of religious individualism and religious nationalism combined with the inscrutability of the gods left a suffering individual in an ambiguous position.²⁹⁵ The gods were not morally obligated to help and this resulted in the cajoling and attempted manipulation of the gods seen in the literature. Since humanity existed to serve the gods and do their work, it was only logical to keep people alive and healthy, or so the ancient Mesopotamians reasoned. Justice as favor was originally the concept until the law codes, especially the Code of Hammurapi, took shape. Before this, justice could never be claimed; it could only be obtained through personal connections, favoritism or manipulation.²⁹⁶

3. Conflict Between Deities

Given the size of the pantheons in both Egypt and Mesopotamia it is amazing that this issue is rarely seen in the literature of either society. With so many gods it seems there might have been conflict or competition for the loyalty of worshippers but there is no record of such. Von Soden considers that this fact is due to a virtual monotheism on the practical level of worship, which he called "monotheotetism."²⁹⁷ While it is true that the mythology of Mesopotamia has instances of conflict between divinities²⁹⁸ it is very rare to find an individual human portrayed as a victim of the conflict between the gods. One of the exceptions to this would be Atrahasis in the

²⁹⁵ Van der Toorn, *Sin and Sanction*, 114.

²⁹⁶ Cf. Jacobsen, "Mesopotamia," 207-208.

²⁹⁷ Von Soden, "Das Fragen," 46.

²⁹⁸ E. g., *Enuma Elish*.

epic of the same name, as he was caught in the interplay between Enlil and Enki.²⁹⁹

4. Judgment in the Afterlife

a. Egypt

This, of course, is the main element of religion which negates the need for theodicy in Egyptian literature. Many of the specifics have already been covered above and need not be repeated here. Lest modern readers believe that the Egyptians were assured and comfortable with their official teachings, Miriam Lichtheim makes the following observation:

But whatever apprehension of the judgment the Egyptian had, it was as nothing compared to his fear and hatred of death. By right doing and by ritual means as well, the judgment would be overcome. But death could not be evaded. With all his faith in the magical manipulation of the universe, the Egyptian, when not indulging in hopes and phantasies, was a pragmatist. Death was a massive reality. The hereafter? Except in imaginative tales, no one had ever come back to tell of it. These two things remained largely unresolved: the full-bodied fear of death, and the nagging doubt about the reality of a life in the beyond. To overcome these two required not self-assertion but rather a self-restraining sagacity and piety:

The end of the man of god is to be buried on the mountain with his burial equipment (*Papyrus Insinger* 18, 12).³⁰⁰

b. Mesopotamia

Without a doubt the ancient Mesopotamians believed in an existence after death. However, the evidence is very thin that a judg-

²⁹⁹ See the discussion in Jacobsen, *Treasures of Darkness*, 116-121.

³⁰⁰ Lichtheim, *Maat*, 144.

went would take place.³⁰¹ There are incantation texts which speak of the afterlife in reference to a sick person who is in the land of the dead.³⁰² The "Counsels of Wisdom" speak of the *Anunnaki* defining the status of the dead:

He who fears the *Anunnaki* extends [his days].³⁰³

These underworld gods are not viewed as carrying out moral judgment on the deceased. The fate of the dead seems to have depended more on social status, how they died and the manner in which the funeral rituals were carried out.³⁰⁴ Thus in Mesopotamia reward and punishment are viewed as something carried out in this life.

Mankind's ultimate destiny was death, as Gilgamesh shows.³⁰⁵

³⁰¹ See Helmer Ringgren, *Religions of the Ancient Near East*, tr. J. Sturdy (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1973), 46-48, 121-123; and J. Bottero, "La mythologie de la mort in Mesopotamie ancienne," in *Death Mesopotamia. XXVIe-Recontre assyriologique internationale*, ed. B. Alster, (Copenhagen: Akademisk Forlag, 1980), 25-52, esp. 29-32, for a discussion of the afterlife in Mesopotamia.

³⁰² Sumeran *kur-nu-gi⁴-a*, Akkadian *erset la tari*; lit. "land of no return." The OT knows the earth as the "land of the living" (אֶרֶץ חַיִּים), Isa 38:11; 53:8; Jer 11:19; Ps 27:13; Job 28:13; etc., as opposed to the netherworld. Job 10:21 observes that this place is a land of gloom and deep darkness from which no one returns. For a detailed study see Nicholas J. Tromp, *Primitive Conceptions of Death and the Nether World in the Old Testament* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969).

³⁰³ *BWL*, 105, line 147. For more on the *Anunnaki* see the discussion of Erra above.

³⁰⁴ H. W. F. Saggs, "Some Ancient Semitic Concepts of the Afterlife," *Faith and Thought* 90 (1958): 168.

³⁰⁵ See the comments of Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 155-156.\

Beyond death was the netherworld ruled by Nergal and his consort Ereshkigal, and inhabited by the disembodied spirits (*etemmu*) of the dead. Each *etemmu* experienced a shadowy, dismal existence in this dark and dreary place where clay and dust were eaten for food. The twelfth tablet of the Gilgamesh epic lists various fates for people but none are pleasant. The concept of a happy and blissful afterlife did not exist in Mesopotamia.³⁰⁶

The analysis of theodicy and the applicable literature of the cultures of the ANE have shown that only Israel possessed a true concept of an innocent sufferer. However, it seems many scholars limit this to OT books other than Proverbs. Why is this so? This will be discussed in the next chapter.

³⁰⁶ Horsnell, "Religions: Assyria and Babylonia," 94.

CHAPTER TWO

THE LACK OF DISCUSSION RELATED TO INNOCENT SUFFERING IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

Introduction

The purpose of this chapter is to explore some of the past assumptions of scholarship to establish why the book of Proverbs has been excluded from discussions of innocent suffering or sufferers. Then I will suggest a thesis which will allow a detailed discussion of the main topic in the remainder of this study. My purpose is not to recount the history of wisdom scholarship or the scholarly trends concerning the book of Proverbs in general but to examine certain trends and positions which seem to exclude Proverbs from the discussion of this topic.¹

I. Past Assumptions

There are two main points that will be touched on in this part of the study. The first is the categorization of Proverbs as conventional wisdom, with the implication that a mechanical or impersonal order and a rigid expression of retribution are norms. The second is the perception that Job and Qoheleth, as exceptional, wisdom, react against the dogmatization seen in the sayings and admonitions of Proverbs.

¹ For a brief discussion of wisdom scholarship see R. E. Clements, *One Hundred Years of Old Testament Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1976), 99-117; and more recently R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of Modern Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1995).

A. Proverbs is Conventional Wisdom

One of the assumptions of past studies of Proverbs is that the book reflects the conservative outlook of conventional wisdom.² R. B. Y. Scott describes it as "conservative, practical, didactic, optimistic, and worldly wise."³ Other scholars have suggested two additional beliefs regarding conventional wisdom as expressed in Proverbs, the first of which is the assumption that the divine order of the world is similar in function to the Egyptian idea of *ma'at*,⁴ and second, that there is a strict doctrine of retribution at work in the book which controls reward and punishment. Both of these issues will be discussed in some detail, since they form an important part of the interpretational matrix for the book of Proverbs, and are a part of the reason why scholars, both past and present, fail to discuss Proverbs in any detailed treatment of the topic of innocent suffering.

1. Reflection of a "Divine" Order

According to some scholars, the primary foundation of wisdom thinking is the concept of order:

The fundamental premise of wisdom is belief in order. Implicit is a world view of reality as subject to laws established by a Creator, to governing principles discernible by use of reason. Wisdom seeks to understand these rules, to discover the appropriate deed for the moment.⁵

² R. Gordis, "The Social Background of Wisdom Literature," *HUCA* 18 (1944): 81-82.

³ R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, AB vol. 18 (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1965), xvix.

⁴ For a discussion of *ma'at* in Egyptian literature see chapter 1.

⁵ J. L. Crenshaw, "Wisdom in the OT," *IDBSup*, 954. See also idem, "Prolegomenon," in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, ed. J. Crenshaw

According to Lennart Bostrom⁶ this concept of order is virtually axiomatic due to its familiarity and prominence in scholarly works dealing with wisdom literature.⁷ These studies often draw heavily on the wisdom traditions of the ANE and emphasize the permeation of creation by a cosmic order that integrated the various parts of reality into a harmonious whole.⁸ The goal of the sages was to discover order, and once the order of the cosmos was determined "wisdom could be achieved, lessons made

(New York: KTAV, 1976), 27; R. E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1990), 115; and cf. J. Blenkinsopp, *Wisdom and Law in the Old Testament: The Ordering of Life in Israel and Early Judaism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1983), 41-73, for a discussion of how moral order pervades all Israelite traditions.

⁶ Lennart Bostrom, *The God of the Sages* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1990), 91; also Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 115.

⁷ E. g., W. Zimmerli, "The Place and Limit of Wisdom in the Framework of Old Testament Theology," *SJT* 17 (1964): 146-158; H. Gese, *Lehre und Wirklichkeit in der alten Weisheit: Studien zu den Spruchen Salomos und zu dem Buche Hiob* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1958); H. H. Schmid, *Wesen und Geschichte der Weisheit: Eine Untersuchung zur altorientalischen Weisheitsliteratur*, BZAW 101 (Berlin: Topelmann, 1966); idem, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung: Hintergrund und Geschichte des alttestamentlichen Gerechtigkeitsbegriffes* (Tubingen: J. C. B. Mohr [Paul Siebeck], 1968); idem, "Schopfung, Gerechtigkeit und Heil: 'Schopfungstheologie' als Gesamthorizont biblischer Theologie," *ZTK* 70 (1973): 1-19; G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, tr. J. D. Martin (London: SCM, 1972); and H.-J. Hermisson, "Observations on the Creation Theology in Wisdom," in *Israelite Wisdom: Theological and Literary Essays in Honor of Samuel Terrien*, ed. J. G. Gammie et al. (New York: Scholars Press, 1978), 43-57.

⁸ L. G. Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation: The Theology of Wisdom Literature* (Nashville: Abingdon, 1994), 37. For a discussion of scholarship's trends in these areas see J. A. Gladson, "Retributive Paradoxes in Proverbs 10-29" (Ph. D. diss., Vanderbilt University, 1978), 8-18, 22-52.

apparent, and laws for conduct established."⁹

This view is often held as a parallel to the Egyptian concept of *ma'at*,¹⁰ with an Egyptian mentality virtually transposed onto the wisdom literature of the Hebrew Bible.¹¹ *Ma'at* essentially means truth and justice expressed as a single concept. However, a large number of scholars have seen order or world order as its meaning. The idea of *ma'at* as order was then applied to both Israelite and Egyptian wisdom.¹² This order underlies the thought-pattern of the sentence literature. According to Gese:

Vielmehr wird hier in der Weisheit auf Grund der Erkenntnis *einer der Welt innewohnenden Ordnung* gesagt, dass der Fleissige durch sein Tun reich, der Faule arm wird; and ebenso wird Gerechte Erfolg, der Ungerechte Misserfolg davontragen. Wir können fast von einer naturgesetzlichen Weise sprechen, in der sich die Folge aus der Tat ergibt.¹³

H. H. Schmid proposed a common "altorientalische Weltordnungsdenken"¹⁴ observable in Egypt, Mesopotamia, Canaan and Israel. In the OT this view of world order was designated by the root **קָדַשׁ** which "scheint in ihrem kanaanaischen Hintergrund diesem Vorstellungsbereich einer

⁹ Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 115.

¹⁰ See R. Anthes, "Die Maat des Echnaton von Amarna," *JAOS Supplement* 14 (1952): 1-36; S. Morenz, *Egyptian Religion*, tr. A. Keep (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1973), 113, and H. H. Brunner, "Der freie Wille Gottes in der ägyptischen Weisheit," in *Les Sagesse du Proche-Orient ancien*, no ed. (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1963), 103.

¹¹ See Schmid, *Wesen and Geschichte*, 47-50, 156-166.

¹² Michael V. Fox, "World Order and Ma'at: A Crooked Parallel," *JANES* 23 (1995): 38.

¹³ Gese, *Lehre und Wirklichkeit*, 34-35 (emphasis in original).

¹⁴ Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung*, 14-23, 65.

umfassenden Weltordnung anzugehören."¹⁵

However, this view has been criticized by Jorn Halbe, who has argued that almost any world view will have elements of a concept of order, and that the act-consequence is of such a general nature that parallels can be found in most cultures, which does not necessitate a claim of borrowing, even if these cultures neighbor one another.¹⁶ Also, Schmid's analysis of **קִדְּ** can be disputed.¹⁷ In Schmid's view the ancient oriental concept of order had broad application and included the areas of law, wisdom, nature/fertility, war/victory, cult/sacrifice and kingship, but he was unable to demonstrate convincingly that **קִדְּ** held this meaning in Biblical texts except in the three areas of law, wisdom and especially kingship.¹⁸ His idea that **קִדְּ** constitutes a term for world order assumes a Canaanite background for the root, but this is difficult to detect in the OT material.¹⁹

Those who attempt to view Israelite wisdom through the concept of order based on a comparison with Egyptian literature and the function of *ma'at* see *ma'at* as an impersonal principle, according to which everything in the world is ordered. Those who have noted the impersonal formulations of the Biblical sentence literature seize upon this impersonal nature

¹⁵ Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung*, 66.

¹⁶ Jorn Halbe, "'Altorientalisches Weltordnungsdenken' und alttestamentliche Theologie: Zur Kritik eines Ideologems am Beispiel des israelitischen Rechts," *ZTK* 76 (1979): 385-395.

¹⁷ See the criticisms made by Bostrom, *God of the Sages*, 94; and Dietrich Romheld, *Wege der Weisheit: Die Lehren Amenemopes and Proverbien 22,17-24,22*, BZAW 184 (Berlin: Walter de Gruyter, 1989), 121-122.

¹⁸ Schmid, *Gerechtigkeit als Weltordnung*, 171.

¹⁹ Bostrom, *God of the Sages*, 94.

of order to explain the occurrence of consequences. These scholars also point out the "secular" character of these sayings, noting the lack of reference to God.

In reacting to this we cannot doubt the Egyptian influence reflected in Proverbs in both literary forms and motifs,²⁰ since the similarity is too striking to be considered coincidence.²¹ However, there has been a shift in thinking among Egyptologists on the nature of *ma'at*, who observe that the concept of *ma'at* was not static.²² Brunner pointed out that from Dynasty XVIII onward there was a shift in Egyptian wisdom literature away from the conventional view of *ma'at* toward an emphasis on human piety and the free will of the god. The emphasis in the text of *Amenemope* is interesting since it is not *ma'at* which plays the significant role but human piety and the god's free will to react toward the pious which are dominant.²³ This makes the assumption of an impersonal concept of order borrowed from Egypt an untenable position. In light of research based on recent archaeological findings the date of *Amenemope* has been pushed back to a time well before the monarchy was established in

²⁰ See Schmid, *Wesen und Geschichte*, 47-50, 156-166; and Christa B. Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1-9*, WMANT 22 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966).

²¹ Roland E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature*, FOTL vol. 13 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 51.

²² E. g., Brunner, "Der freie Wille Gottes," 103-120; and J. Assmann, "Weisheit, Loyalismus und Frömmigkeit," in *Studien zu altägyptischen Lebenslehren*, OBO 28 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 12-15.

²³ Bostrom, *God of the Sages*, 96. Examples of personal piety and divine free will to react toward the pious are also well attested in the Old and Middle Kingdoms, but not as prominent as in the New Kingdom, see Fox, "World Order," 43.

Israel.²⁴ This shows that the later Israelite material would have been written after the shift regarding *ma'at* in Egyptian literature had already been accomplished. During this same time period *ma'at* acquired personal characteristics, including her depiction as a goddess and receiving her own temple and cult.²⁵ These more current views show the flawed assumptions of past scholarship, since the older view virtually holds to a kind of deism, in which justice and world order are built into the cosmos as one of its functioning principles, rendering God's involvement redundant. More recent studies show *ma'at* to be distinguished from a mechanistic world order. It is a standard to live by, not a mechanism for retribution.²⁶

One of the results of seeing *ma'at* as an impersonal concept and applying it to the concept of order was to divide proverbs into secular and religious categories, as well as differentiate between revealed truth (e. g., prophetic material which originated from Yahweh) and observational truth based on experience. An example of this is Norman K. Gottwald's description of wisdom as

a non-revelatory mode of thought that focuses on individual

²⁴ R. J. Williams, "A People Come Out of Egypt," *Congress Volume, Edinburgh, 1974*, VTSup 28 (Leiden: Brill, 1975), 231-252; idem, "The Sages of Ancient Egypt in the Light of Recent Scholarship," *JAOS* 101 (1981): 10; and J. Ruffle, "The Teaching of Amenemope and its Connection with the Book of Proverbs," *TynBul* 28 (1977): 33-34.

²⁵ See Kayatz, *Studien*, 93-98; W. Helck, "Maat," *LA*, vol. 3 (1980), 1114-1115; E. Wente, "Egyptian Religion," *ABD*, 2.410; and chapter 1 above.

²⁶ See Miriam Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, OBO 120 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992), 37; Fox, "World Order," 43.

consciousness of truth and right conduct, displaying a humanistic orientation and a didactic drive to pass on its understandings to others.²⁷

However, this separation of thought into secular and religious is a modern phenomenon²⁸ and there is no reason to believe that anything like "secular" thinking existed in the Biblical world, since distinctions like secular versus religious and revelation versus experience were foreign to the Biblical mind, at least as we understand these terms today.²⁹

Here it must be observed that Israel's doctrine of creation stood behind its wisdom literature. This was put succinctly by Walther Zimmerli: "Wisdom theology is creation theology."³⁰ According to David A. Hubbard, order "stems from a view of creation that is assumed but only rarely expressed."³¹ An examination of the book shows references to creation or the Creator only in 3:19-20; 8:22-31; 14:31; 16:4, 11; 17:5; 20:12; 22:2; 29:13.³² However, the comparatively small number of sayings which make reference to creation show that while creation-of-the-world passages

²⁷ N. K. Gottwald, *The Hebrew Bible: A Socio-Literary Introduction* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1985), 567.

²⁸ Von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 61.

²⁹ Bostrom, *God of the Sages*, 36-37; see also R. E. Clements, "Israel in its Historical and Cultural Setting," in *The World of Ancient Israel*, ed. R. E. Clements (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 9. Adriaan de Buck, "Het religieus Karakter der oudste egyptische Wijsheid," *Nieuw theologisch tijdschrift* 21 (1932): 322-349, refuted the common idea that Egyptian wisdom literature was basically nonreligious, thus removing a foreign model as a basis for claiming a secular and religious distinction for Proverbs.

³⁰ W Zimmerli, "Place and Limit of Wisdom," 316.

³¹ D. A. Hubbard, "Proverbs, Book of," *ISBE*, vol. 3 (1986), 1019.

³² For an analysis of the creation theology in Proverbs see Perdue, *Wisdom and Creation*, 77-122; and Bostrom, *God of the Sages*, 48-67.

gain some prominence it is virtually impossible to ascribe any special importance to the creation of humans in chapters 10-31.³³ This would show that other theological influences were at work in the formulation of the wisdom materials. The question for the sages was not so much "Where did we come from?" but rather "How do we live?" Roland E. Murphy³⁴ raises the idea that Israelite sages never asked what wisdom was based on. For them it was a given that the "fear of Yahweh is the beginning of wisdom." He points out that to ask the question is to attempt to reconstruct their mentality. They never asked the question nor consciously attempted an answer. There is comparatively little interest in human origins per se but a great deal of emphasis on relationships, and the world as showcase for divine activity.³⁵

Given the fact of a Creator standing behind world order so that it functions according to certain laws and principles, the discovery of God's guidelines for living a successful life could hardly be called "secular," irreligious or pragmatic. Proverbs itself tells the reader in its statement of purpose (1:1-6) that it intends to teach these guidelines, and the theme (1:7) says the "research" is based on the **יִרְאַת יְהוָה** (cf. also 9:10). So the basis of order in the world, in society and between individuals is based on the fear of Yahweh, the Creator.

³³ According to Bostrom, *God of the Sages*, 80.

³⁴ *Tree of Life*, 116.

³⁵ *Tree of Life*, 119. See also Murphy's discussion of creation theology and its influence on wisdom materials in "Wisdom in the OT," *ABD*, 6.924-925.

Using the term "order" to designate the world view of the sages is problematic, due to its connotations.³⁶ This concept is by no means employed in a consistent way,³⁷ since scholars use it to refer vaguely to a world view that is orderly rather than chaotic, or to a view of the world in which everything works strictly according to a metaphysical principle of order to which God is also subject.³⁸ If the recent studies of Fox, Bostrom, Halbe and Steiert are correct, the idea of *ma'at* must not be forced on Israelite materials. This is especially true in light of Fox's assessment that *ma'at* did not and could not exist in Israel.³⁹

As this study will show in the following chapters, Proverbs is aware of situations in which order is not always validated by experience. Rather than simply appealing to order, the sages placed their faith in divine justice that went beyond the observable and predictable.⁴⁰

Past scholarship has placed too much emphasis on Egyptian concepts in evaluating Israelite materials. While there is no doubt influence, the criticisms regarding the dialectical relationship of Egyptian influence

³⁶ Bostrom, *God of the Sages*, 137.

³⁷ See the comments of Fox, "World Order," 40-41; and Bostrom, *God of the Sages*, 91.

³⁸ The latter view is defended by H. D. Preuss, "Das Gottesbild der alteren Weisheit Israels," in *Studies in the Religion of Ancient Israel*, VTSup 23 (Leiden: Brill, 1972), 120-128. As Fox ("World Order," 38, n. 8) points out, "[t]he relation between Israelite Wisdom and its foreign predecessors is dialectical, not imitative." For a detailed critique of Preuss' view see F.-J. Steiert, *Die Weisheit Israels--ein Fremdkorper in AT?* (Freiburg: Herder, 1990), 28-209.

³⁹ "World Order," 42.

⁴⁰ Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Wealth and Poverty: System and Contradictions," *HS* 33 (1992): 25-36. Note also Fox, "World Order," 40, n. 23.

as opposed to incorporation or imitation are well taken.

2. Doctrine of Retribution

A discussion of retribution arises very naturally out of the preceding examination of order. If there is a created order then it should stand to reason that some actions will produce a good result, while others will result in evil. Belief in retribution often brings the justice of God and the righteous sufferer into tension, since it is thought that a just God would not allow a righteous or innocent person to endure hardship or suffering. This issue was discussed at some length in the first chapter in regard to its portrayal in Mesopotamia and Egypt, and now its treatment in Proverbs will be addressed, though an exhaustive discussion will not be possible.

The doctrine of retribution is a frequently recurring theme in the book of Proverbs which seems to indicate that quality of life runs closely parallel to conduct.⁴¹ In the past it has been referred to as the "act-consequence relationship,"⁴² although Bostrom prefers the term "character-consequence relationship" since the texts reflect more references to life-style than to individual actions.⁴³

Interlocked with the concept of retribution as seen in Proverbs are the

⁴¹ Bostrom, *God of the Sages*, 90.

⁴² K. Koch, "Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?" ZTK 52 (1955): 1-42; H. Gese, *Lehre und Wirklichkeit*, 33-45; and G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 124-128.

⁴³ Bostrom, *God of the Sages*, 90-91; and see U. Skladny, *Die ältesten Spruchsammlungen in Israel* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1962), 8, 72, who finds the term *Haltung-Schicksal-Zusammenhang* more appropriate since specific actions are rarely in view.

ideas of order and creation theology.⁴⁴ Wisdom theology is founded upon a presupposed world order, which is inherent in creation, since Yahweh created the world in wisdom (Prov 8).⁴⁵

According to Klaus Koch, retribution, to a great extent, functions apart from any established norm or legal code. Citing Prov 25:19; 26:27, 28; 28:1, 10, 16b, 17, 18, 25b; 29:6, 23, 25, he says:

Sie betonen alle, dass auf eine gemeinschaftstreue Tat Heil, auf eine sittlich böse Tat aber Verderben für den Träter folgt,--dass jedoch Jahwe dieses Verderben hervorrufen, sagen sie nicht...Die Verse erwecken zunächst den Eindruck, dass eine böse Tat--der Notwendigkeit eines Naturgesetzes vergleichbar--*unheilvolles Ergehen zwangsläufig zur Folge* hat.⁴⁶

This view held sway for quite some time among scholars, some claiming this strong association of act and consequence constituted an early, primitive-magical view of reality which has left enduring traces in Biblical material.⁴⁷ In this view every act has built-in consequences for the one who performs it. Act and consequence are inseparable and comprehended as one totality.⁴⁸

⁴⁴ As discussed above, see W. Zimmerli, "The Place and Limit of Wisdom," 146-158; and H.-J. Hermisson, "Observations on the Creation Theology in Wisdom," 43-57.

⁴⁵ Hermisson, "Observations on the Creation Theology in Wisdom," 44-47.

⁴⁶ K. Koch, "Vergeltungsdogma," 3 (emphasis in original).

⁴⁷ H. G. Reventlow, "Sein Blut komme über sein Haupt," *VT* 10 (1960): 311-327; J. G. Gammie, "The Theology of Retribution in the Book of Deuteronomy," *CBQ* 32 (1970): 1-12.

⁴⁸ This view has been designated as *synthetische Lebensauffassung*, a term introduced by K. Fahlgren in "Die Gegensätze von *sedaqa* im Alten Testament," in *Um das Prinzip der Vergeltung in Religion and Recht des alten Testaments*, ed. K. Koch (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesell-

However, Koch's view can be questioned on the basis of his limited range of material, since he examines only Prov 25-29 on the assumption that these chapters appear to be the oldest section of the book.⁴⁹

Koch's view of inseparable consequences has been criticized as going too far.⁵⁰ His claim is that retribution in the OT excludes the idea that God from time to time steps into human history and acts as judge. Asserting that there is no gap between act and consequence into which a wedge of divine retribution can be inserted is essentially deism. This mechanistic view of the world probably goes beyond credibility as an attempt to reconstruct a subconscious world view.⁵¹

Many can agree with Koch to a small extent, since there is an undeniable correspondence between act and consequence for many everyday activities.⁵² This is apparent in Prov 6:27-28:

Can a man carry fire in his lap
Without his clothes being burned?

schaft, 1972), 87-129.

⁴⁹ Koch, "Vergeltungsdogma," 2. But W. L. McKane takes virtually all of ch. 28 and a large part of 29 as late because it derives from Yahwistic piety, see his *Proverbs: A New Approach*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970) 620, 632. The point here is not to solve the problem of dating but to show that the establishment of Prov 25-29 as the oldest section of the book has not gone unchallenged.

⁵⁰ See John Barton, "Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the Old Testament," *JTS* 30 (1979): 1-14.

⁵¹ Barton, "Natural Law," 11-12. See also the criticism by Bostrom in *God of the Sages*, 109-113.

⁵² This kind of result is classified as "predictable order" according to Fox's assessment ("World Order," 40).

Can a man walk on coals
Without his feet being scorched?

But we also must admit that part of the ancient Israelite mentality was the belief in the direct intervention of Yahweh. Roland E. Murphy points out there has been too much effort made to separate wisdom teaching from the preaching of the prophets:

...wisdom is interpreted as secular and human, an exercise on the plane of creation in which one deals with an *Urhebergott*, and not the saving God of Israel. It is hard to see how the average Israelite, to whatever extent he or she recognized the Lord as God (Deut. 6:4), would have made the academic distinction that is implied by this view. Wisdom and salvation are not incompatible in human experience; prosperity and adversity are personal as well as communal. The teaching of Deuteronomy and Proverbs suggests that the Yahweh of both books is the same Yahweh who is at work on every level of experience.⁵³

Bruce K. Waltke also argues for the compatibility of wisdom to law and prophecy.⁵⁴ John F. Priest has argued for a common religious tradition in early Israel from which prophets, priests and the wise selected specific emphases without necessarily rejecting the emphases chosen by other groups.⁵⁵ According to this view prophet and sage together

⁵³ R. E. Murphy, "Religious Dimensions of Israelite Wisdom," in *Ancient Israelite Religion*, ed. P. D. Miller, P. D. Hanson, and S. D. McBride (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1987), 450.

⁵⁴ Bruce K. Waltke, "The Book of Proverbs and Old Testament Theology," *BibSac* 136 (1979): 302-317.

⁵⁵ J. F. Priest, "Where is Wisdom to be Placed?" in *Studies in Ancient Israelite Wisdom*, ed. J. L. Crenshaw (New York: KTAV, 1976), 281.

expressed the totality of Israel's faith which neither could do alone.⁵⁶

Others acknowledge the difference in the views of Deuteronomy and Proverbs but still regard the views as compatible. Duane A. Garrett⁵⁷ admits Deuteronomy tends to stress the concept of punishment or reward being direct acts of God, whereas Proverbs tends to make each action contain within itself a link to punishment or reward.

A consideration of the forms of proverbial literature is decisive in solving this problem. Recognizing that the intent of an individual proverb is limited to one aspect or element of a situation may help explain why proverbs seem limited to act-consequence interpretations.⁵⁸

In the book of Proverbs there are two ways of understanding retribution: forensic and dynamistic.⁵⁹

a. Forensic Retribution

This is the type of retribution in which God plays an active role and is seen as one who brings about reward or punishment. While it is impossible to do a comprehensive study of this topic in Proverbs⁶⁰ two examples will be cited: Prov 3:32-35 and 5:21-23.

⁵⁶ Waltke, "Book of Proverbs," 304.

⁵⁷ Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC vol. 14 (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 54.

⁵⁸ See the discussion by Raymond C. Van Leeuwen, "Proverbs," in *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible*, ed. L. Ryken and T. Longman III (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1993), 260-262; and my "Doctrine of the 'Two Ways' in the Book of Proverbs," *JETS* 38 (1995): 501-517.

⁵⁹ See David A. Hubbard, *Proverbs* (Dallas: Word, 1989), 149-150, for a brief explanation of these two terms.

⁶⁰ See Bostrom, *God of the Sages*, 90-113, for a more detailed analysis.

(1) Proverbs 3:32-35

כִּי תוֹעֵבַת יְהוָה נָלוֹז וְאֶת-יִשְׁרָיִם סוֹדוּ:	v.32
מֵאַרְצַת יְהוָה בְּבֵית רָשָׁע וּנְהָ צְדִיקִים יִבְרָךְ:	v.33
אִם-לֹלְצִים הוּא-יִלְיָץ וְלַעֲנִיִּים יִתִּי-חַן:	v.34
כְּבוֹד חֲכָמִים יִנָּחֵלוּ וְכִסְיֵי לִים מֵרִים קָלוּן:	v.35

These verses form the conclusion to a small poem which runs from 3:27 to 3:35, vv. 27-30 being comprised of a series of six prohibitions exhibiting emphatic negation⁶¹ regarding behavior in the community and personal relationships. Then v. 32 contains a motive clause beginning with כִּי, followed by several reasons for the prohibitions in the previous verses.

There are statements of judgment threatened for the perverse (נָלוֹז), the wicked (רָשָׁע), scoffers (לֹלְצִים) and fools (כִּסְיֵי לִים). The perverse will acquire the status of abomination to Yahweh,⁶² while the wicked have the curse of Yahweh upon them in 3:32-33 and 3:34-35.

In 3:32-33 the perverse and the wicked are in parallel construction and the abomination of Yahweh is a poetic parallel to the curse of Yahweh. This set of terms would specifically be tied to forensic retribution due to their close association with the covenant and cult,⁶³ abomination being

⁶¹ W G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques*, JSOTSS 26, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 279.

⁶² For a discussion of the use of תוֹעֵבָה in Proverbs see R. E. Clements, "The Concept of Abomination in the Book of Proverbs," in *Texts, Temples and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran*, ed. M. V. Fox et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 211-225, esp. 220.

⁶³ Note Prov 15:8; and cf. Gen 43:32 where תוֹעֵבָה means something like "foreign, contrary to acceptable usage"; and Deut 14:3 where it takes on a cultic meaning. It is found in parallel with the root שָׁקַץ, which refers to

used to refer to anything which dishonors God or violates the commandments. A curse is seen as the most severe way of separating an evildoer from the community.⁶⁴ If this is the case, the curse of Yahweh may be intended to make the wicked or perverse an outcast from society. In the book of Proverbs, which places such great importance on getting along with others and living successfully in society, this would be seen as the ultimate failure. Not only are such persons repugnant to God but the community has shunned them as well.

A similar poetic structure is found in 3:34-35, with scoffers and fools portrayed as parallel members,⁶⁵ and being made objects of mocking and shame as parallel concepts.⁶⁶ The concept of shame is a social control which punished an offender by exclusion from society or loss of status. It relies predominantly on external pressure from an individual or group.⁶⁷

In this small poem it is obvious that God is directly involved in judgment, and there is a close connection between life-style and fate. But it is also apparent that the community is involved in part of the punishment, as the shaming (v. 35b) of the fools would lead to ostracism as part of

cultic uncleanness in Deut 17:1. The root **אָרַר** is used frequently in Deut 2:15-26; 27:15-26 and 28:15-19, 20-36 in the list of covenant curses. A specific link between **תּוֹעֵבָה** and **אָרַר** occurs in 27:15.

⁶⁴ J. Scharbert, "אָרַר," TWAT, vol. 1 (1973), 441-442.

⁶⁵ Also in 1:22; 19:29.

⁶⁶ The idea of shame, and its opposite, honor, will be discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

⁶⁷ Lyn M. Bechtel, "The Perception of Shame within the Divine-Human Relationship," in *Uncovering Ancient Stones: Essays in Memory of H. Neil Richardson*, ed. L. M. Hopfe (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 80.

Yahweh's curse. In 3:32 the same root (לִיץ) is used to describe the scoffers and the action Yahweh will take against them, giving a case of strict retribution.

(2) Proverbs 5:21-23

The proverbs which make reference to God (or Yahweh) in regard to retribution sometimes speak specifically of God acting to punish or reward,⁶⁸ but others simply state or imply a retributive result, often in impersonal terms or in passive constructions.⁶⁹ The small poetic unit of Prov 5:21-23,⁷⁰ which is part of a longer unit which runs from 5:15 to 5:23, gives an example of Yahweh actively involved in the assessment of human conduct (5:21); then the next two verses state the results of sin in a way that reflects a character-consequence relationship:

כִּי נִלְכַּח עֵינַי יְהוָה דְּרֹכַי-אִישׁ וְכָל-מַעֲגָלָתוֹ מִפְּלִס:	v.21
עוֹנוֹתָיו יִלְכְּדֻנוּ אֶת-הַרְשָׁע וּבְחִבְלֵי חַטָּאתוֹ יִתְמָד:	v.22
הוּא יָמוּת בְּאֵין מוֹסֵר וּבְרֹב אֲנִלָּתוֹ יִשָּׁג:	v.23

The two different ways of expressing the character-consequence relationship are used side by side, showing that these views were not mutually exclusive.⁷¹ It is obviously Yahweh's activity as a judge which is

⁶⁸ E. g., 2:5; 3:5-10; 12:2; 15:25; 16:7; 19:3, 17; 22:12; etc.

⁶⁹ E. g., 2:21-22; 16:5; 28:25; 29:25. See Bostrom, *God of the Sages*, 101-102, 112.

⁷⁰ Note the chiasmic structure of verses 21 and 23:

A	B	B'	A'
21 full view	paths of a man	all his ways	he examines
23 he will die	lack of discipline	great folly	gone astray

⁷¹ See Bostrom, *God of the Sages*, 99.

the point of 5:21,⁷² with Yahweh examining a person's ways, which are not hidden but in full view (cf. NIV). The connection between 5:21 and 5:22-23 is not that of a reinterpretative expansion with a Yahwistic note⁷³ but a combination of statements concerning Yahweh as the all-seeing observer and guarantor of justice in the world.⁷⁴ The Egyptian concept of "weighing the heart" after death at judgment may be in the background here and reflected by the root פלס.⁷⁵ According to the Book of the Dead the god Anubis weighed the heart on scales with *ma'at* to see if the person was worthy of post-mortem existence. If not they were devoured by a hideous creature crouching nearby.⁷⁶

The sage's teaching is expressed in familiar images of travel and hunting. The image of travel by foot is displayed in 5:21 by the use of דָּרַךְ and מַעְגָּל, both very prominent in Proverbs as metaphors for conduct or character, and in v. 23 by the root שָׁגָה meaning "to stray (from the path), to veer, to go astray." The hunting or trapping term is the root לָכַד (5:22a), which is frequently used figuratively of divine judgment.⁷⁷ In 5:23a discipline (מוֹסֵר), another common word in Proverbs, is portrayed as life-

⁷² This is also true of 15:3, 11; 16:2; 21:2.

⁷³ Suggested by McKane, *Proverbs*, 313. He believes this expansion was possible due to this passage being located near the end of a chapter, apparently leaving room for a later scribe to add the note.

⁷⁴ Cf. Bostrom, *God of the Sages*, 146.

⁷⁵ This root means to "make level" (cf. 4:26) but in the pi'el, "weigh out." See BDB, 814, but note HAL, vol. 3 (1983), 833: *beobachten*.

⁷⁶ See the description of David P. Silverman, "Divinity and Deities in Ancient Egypt," in *Religion in Ancient Egypt*, ed. B. E. Shafer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 48-49, and the photograph on p. 51.

⁷⁷ Is 8:15; 24:18; Jer 6:11; 8:9; 48:7, 44.

sustaining, since a lack of it contributes to a person's death. The person in this proverb has apparently ignored all sound teaching, whether it comes from the sages (1:2, 3, 8, etc.), parents (4:1, 13; 5:7-12; 15:5) or from Yahweh (3:11-12). As a result, he has earned the title "fool" by his actions ("folly," 5:23b), which go against the fear of Yahweh (1:7; 3:11-12; 15:32-33).

The placing of Yahweh in the role of judge due to his all-seeing ability and sovereignty over events to bring about punishment shows that forensic and dynamistic retribution could be thought of as working together to accomplish the same ends. Yahweh had at his disposal more than one way to punish. Forcing these ideas to operate separately goes against the rare but undeniable conclusion that Yahweh was not limited in options in bringing about judgment.

b. Dynamistic Retribution

In sentences which show dynamistic retribution there is no direct theological reference, and a kind of mechanical correspondence is sometimes perceived to operate. About ninety per cent of the proverbs which refer to some type of retribution are of this kind.⁷⁸ In the past some have referred to these sayings as "secular wisdom" and claim this type of wisdom predates those which are theological.⁷⁹

Although a great deal of disagreement still exists over the dates, the collecting and arranging of the book of Proverbs as we now have it, there no longer exists a requirement for scholars to analyze the book according to a

⁷⁸ Bostrom, *God of the Sages*, 114.

⁷⁹ See for example, Scott, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, xxv-xl; von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel*, 53-73.

priori evolutionary standards.⁸⁰ The idea that the short, pithy statements must antedate the longer texts has no validity.⁸¹ There is no reason to argue for a dichotomy or development of secular to religious, or a superiority of one over the other.⁸² Thus there is no need to draw artificial lines between various collections and designate them as secular and religious.⁸³

Due to the large number of sayings in the category of dynamistic retribution the discussion will be limited to 11:31 and 24:15-16.

(1) Proverbs 11:31

הֵן צַדִּיק בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׁלָם אִף כִּי־רָשָׁע וְחַוְטָא:

This saying is beset with textual and translation difficulties according to the editors of *BHS*, and arriving at any conclusions regarding its interpretation will naturally depend on how these problems are solved.⁸⁴

⁸⁰ Note the view of O. Eissfeldt, *Der Maschal in Alten Testament*, BZAW 24 (Geissen: Topelmann, 1913), who argued that the folk proverb was the evolutionary predecessor of the literary proverb which added a line to form a couplet. W. O. E. Oesterley built a comprehensive theory based on Eissfeldt's view, claiming three stages of proverbial literature: the single line saying, the distich and the miniature essay. See *The Book of Proverbs* (London: Methuen, 1929), xii-xvii.

⁸¹ See Garrett, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 42; and cf. K. A. Kitchen, "The Basic Literary Forms and Formulations of Ancient Instructional Writings in Egypt and Western Asia," in *Studien zu altägyptischen Lebenslehren*, OBO 28 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1979), 251-252; and B. Gemser, "The Instructions of 'Onchsheshonqy and Biblical Wisdom Literature," *Congress Volume, Oxford 1959*, VTSup 7 (Leiden: Brill, 1960), 102-128.

⁸² Murphy, "Religious Dimensions," 449.

⁸³ This is discussed in greater detail by Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 121-126.

⁸⁴ For brief discussions of the textual and translation problems see

The issue of retribution is the primary concern of this proverb,⁸⁵ and a correct understanding of יָשַׁלֵּם is essential to the interpretation. It is best to see this verb as "reward" since its positive and negative aspects are in view, i. e., the righteous and wicked each getting their just deserts.⁸⁶ There are many strong statements regarding retribution in the proverbs preceding 11:31, and I suggest a small poem here with the emphasis on rewards for the צַדִּיק and the רָשָׁע in the inclusio with plurals used in v. 23:

- A 11:23 תָּאֲנֹת צַדִּיקִים אֶךְ-טוֹב תִּקְנֹת רָשָׁעִים עֲבָרָה:
- B 11:24 יֵשׁ מִפִּזֵּר וְנוֹסֵף עוֹד וְחוֹשֵׁף מִיָּשָׁר אֶךְ-לְמַחְסוֹר:
- B 11:25 נֶפֶשׁ-בִּרְכָּה תִדְשֵׁן וּמְרוֹה גַם-הוּא יוֹרָא:
- B 11:26 מִנֵּעַ בָּר יִקְבְּחוּ לְאוֹם וּבִרְכָּה לְרֹאשׁ מִשְׁבִּיר:
- C 11:27 שֹׁחַר טוֹב יִבְקֹשׁ רָצוֹן וְדֹרֵשׁ רָעָה תִּבְוֹאֲנוּ:
- B' 11:28 בּוֹטֵחַ בְּעֲשָׂרוֹ הוּא יִפֹּל וְכַעֲלָה צַדִּיקִים יִפְרָחוּ:
- B' 11:29 עוֹכֵר בֵּיתוֹ יִנְחַל-רוּחַ וְעֹבֵד אֱוִיל לַחֲכָם-לֵב:
- B' 11:30 פְּרִי-צַדִּיק עֵץ חַיִּים וְלֶקֶחַ נִפְשׁוֹת חָמָס:⁸⁷
- A' 11:31 הֵן צַדִּיק בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׁלָם אֶף כִּי-רָשָׁע וְחוֹטֵא:

McKane, *Proverbs*, 437-438; and Otto Ploger, *Die Sprüche Salomos*, BKAT 17 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), 133-134. For a detailed and technical treatment see J. Barr, "בֹּאֲרִץ-MOΛΙΣ: Prov. XI.31, 1 Pet. IV.18," *JSS* 20 (1975): 149-164.

⁸⁵ Cf. also in the near context 11:8, 17, 18, 19, 21.

⁸⁶ McKane, *Proverbs*, 437.

⁸⁷ Here I follow the emendation of *BHS* apparatus which suggests reading נִפְשׁוֹת for נִפְשׁוֹת and חָמָס for חָכָם, cf. RSV and Whybray, *Proverbs*, 188. The occurrence of חָכָם in 11:30 may be dittography from 11:29.

In the first set of B elements the main topic is wealth, and attitudes toward generosity. There is a catchword, **בִּרְכָּה**, used in v. 25a and 26b. It is left open and unspecified as to how retribution will be expressed in vv. 24-25, but it comes through the actions of the community in v. 26. The C element, which forms the middle saying and the main thesis of the poem, is a general expression of the surrounding truths which enlarge on it. The second set of B elements is expressed in horticultural metaphors (**וּכְעָלָה**, v. 28b; **עֵץ חַיִּים**, v. 30a) and also has the root **צדק** as a catchword. These sayings deal with social relationships and the rewards for proper behavior or punishments for going against acceptable social behavior. The emphasis on relationships within the home (v. 29) and community (v. 30) show the serious consequences of going against social norms. In v. 29a bringing trouble upon one's household is paralleled with the taking of lives by the violent in v. 30b. The difficulty arises in the fact that there is no divine reference in the proverb.⁸⁸

A caution against the danger of treating individual proverbs in

⁸⁸ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 128-130. He suggests that seeing 11:31 in the literary context as part of a small poem running from 11:28-12:4 places this proverb under the influence of the Yahweh-saying in 12:2. This has the advantage of placing the retributive statements in 11:31 and 12:2 in parallel. I have added the Hebrew text to Garrett's structure for the sake of reference:

Aa 11:28: **בֹּטֶחַ בְּעֶשְׂרוֹ הוּא יִפֹּל וּכְעָלָה צְדִיקִים יִפְרָחוּ:**
 Ab 11:29: **עוֹכֵר בֵּיתוֹ יִנְחַל-רוּחַ וְעַבְדֹּ אֱוִיל לַחֲכָם-לֵב:**
 Ba. 11:30: **פְּרִי-צְדִיק עֵץ חַיִּים וְלֶקֶחַ נִפְשׁוֹת חָמָס:**
 Bb 11:31: **הֵן צְדִיק בְּאֶרֶץ יִשְׁלָם אֶף כִּי-רָשָׁע וְחוּטָא:**
 Ba' 12:1: **אֲהֵב מוֹסֵר אֲהֵב דָּעִת וְשֹׂנֵא תוֹכַחַת בָּעֵר:**
 Bb' 12:2: **טוֹב יִפִּיק רָצוֹן מִיְהוָה וְאִישׁ מִזְמוֹת יִרְשִׁיעַ:**
 Aa' 12:3: **לֹא-יִכּוֹן אָדָם בְּרָשָׁע וְשֹׂרֵשׁ צְדִיקִים בַּל-יִמּוּט:**
 Ab' 12:4: **אֲשֶׁת-חַיִּל עֲטָרַת בַּעֲלָהּ וְכִרְקַב בַּעֲצָמוֹתָיו מְבִישָׁה:**

isolation holds true here. As we have seen in discussing other proverbs, the sages were not bound by modern dictums which require a separation of retribution methods. Various ways of punishment could be stated side by side or in unspecified ways, leaving the options open as to how retribution would be worked out. A saying such as 11:31 implies a background which contains a belief in some kind of comprehensive power or principle. The Yahwism expressed elsewhere in the book is the only plausible alternative, according to Bostrom.⁸⁹ Even though the covenant is never explicitly mentioned in Proverbs⁹⁰ we can assume it to lie behind the text.⁹¹ Canonically, the book of Proverbs functions within the covenantal perspective, although this study will not address this matter. The lack of reference to the covenant is due mainly to the preoccupation of wisdom materials with issues of daily life in a created world.⁹² Thus the essence of wisdom is the "fear of Yahweh," (cf. 1:7; 9:10) a total commitment within a framework of covenant relationships.⁹³ The recognition of Israel's creation theology and covenant standing behind the wisdom literature allows modern interpreters to avoid giving *ma'at* and the Egyptian influence

⁸⁹ *God of the Sages*, 122.

⁹⁰ The occurrence of בְּרִית in 2:17 is in reference to the marriage vow.

⁹¹ See e. g., D. A. Hubbard, "The Wisdom Movement and Israel's Covenant Faith," *TynBul* 17 (1966): 3-33; and Richard L. Schultz, "Unity or Diversity in Wisdom Theology? A Canonical and Covenantal Perspective," *TynBul* 48 (1997): 271-306.

⁹² See the discussion of W. J. Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation: A Theology of Old Testament Covenants* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 1984), 205, and my earlier discussion of order and creation theology.

⁹³ Dumbrell, *Covenant and Creation*, 205-206. Cf. also Prov 1:7; 9:10; Job 28:28; Ps 111:10.

more credit than it deserves. The same principle holds true for Schmid's suggestion regarding the Canaanite influence expressed by the root צדק

(2) Proverbs 24:15-16

אַל-תִּאָרֵב רָשָׁע לְנוֹה צְדִיק אֶל-תִּשְׁדָּד רִבְצוֹ:
כִּי שָׁבַע יִפּוֹל צְדִיק וְקָם וְרָשָׁעִים יִכְשְׁלוּ בְרָעָה:

These verses are found in the Sayings of the Wise, a section which shows some vague similarities to the *Teaching of Amenemope*, though there are no parallels between the two works at this point.⁹⁴

This saying indicates that the righteous also experience setbacks, a rare occurrence in Proverbs. Here the difference between the righteous and the wicked is not so much their fortune in life but their abilities to recover from adverse circumstances.⁹⁵ Both the righteous and the wicked are seen to have difficulties which are expressed by the root נפל. Here נפל appears to be a morally neutral term, relating to the hardships of life experienced by all. The motive clause in 24:16 is a straightforward statement of the retribution principle expressed in numerical hyperbole,⁹⁶ in which the righteous person succeeds but the wicked fail, using the root כשל, "to stumble," also a parallel to נפל in Ps 27:2; Jer 46:6. The

⁹⁴ See Whybray, *Proverbs*, 323-325, and P. Overland, "Structure in The Wisdom of Amenemope and Proverbs," in *Go to the Land I Will Show You: Studies in Honor of Dwight W. Young*, ed. J. Coleson and V. Matthews (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 276-279, for brief assessments of the scholarly issues behind this discussion.

⁹⁵ Bostrom, *God of the Sages*, 126.

⁹⁶ Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 320.

significance for the present study is the explicit admission that the righteous experience trouble. The formulation of the fate of the wicked is in the passive, similar to 2:22; 4:19; and 5:22; allowing a number of possible ways that the wicked might be brought down.⁹⁷

The theme of retribution, regardless of whether it is expressed forensically or dynamistically, is one of the most distinctive features of Proverbs. One of the ways this theme is portrayed is by the metaphor of travel and by the word "path."⁹⁸ The so-called doctrine of the "Two Ways" is a didactic element of the book of Proverbs which allowed teachers to draw clear distinctions between good and bad choices.⁹⁹ The "Two Ways" gave teachers a format in which to express the universally applicable doctrine of retribution. The choice of "one or the other" served clearly to mark the difference between the wise/righteous and the fool/wicked, and the consequences of their behavior.¹⁰⁰

B. Job and Qoheleth React Against the Dogmatism of Proverbs

If Proverbs is assumed to be the normal expression of wisdom then the questioning of the norms and dogmas by the authors of Job and Qoheleth can be seen as a critique.

⁹⁷ See Bostrom, *God of the Sages*; 127.

⁹⁸ This concept may be expressed by several Hebrew words, including דֶּרֶךְ (the most common), אֶרֶץ, נֶתִיב/נֶתִיבָה, and מַעְגָּל, see my "Doctrine of the 'Two Ways,'" 511.

⁹⁹ Cf. my "Doctrine of the 'Two Ways,'" 515.

¹⁰⁰ Bricker, "Doctrine of the 'Two Ways,'" 516. See also Donald K. Berry, *An Introduction to Wisdom and Poetry of the Old Testament*, (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 122.

Scholars may not always use the designation "exceptional" in describing Job and Qoheleth but quite a number of them use similar terms when comparing the relationship between Proverbs, Job and Qoheleth.¹⁰¹

It is common to see statements such as:

In Proverbs the theology of retribution offers a pat answer to almost all questions of human fortunes. The wicked suffer; the righteous prosper. Yet two wisdom books challenge the doctrine of fair retribution in major fashion--Job and, in somewhat lesser degree, Ecclesiastes, claimed their personal experiences contradicted the common philosophy of retribution.¹⁰²

If one sees Proverbs as dogmatic expressions of retribution without the possibility of exceptional circumstances these quotes will accurately reflect the material in Proverbs. However, it will be my contention that this is not always the case and there are many proverbs which admit exceptions to this "rule."

This way of seeing the wisdom literature has been a handy oversimplification, but my belief is that a closer examination of the material in Proverbs will show that it is not entirely accurate. There are no examples of sayings from Proverbs as it now stands being, quoted in Job or Qoheleth.

¹⁰¹ There are far too many sources to cite here. Two that are still influential are R. Gordis, "Social Background," 77-118; and A. de Pury, "Sagesse et Revelation dans l'Ancien Testament," *RTP* 27 (1977): 1-50, cited by B. Witherington, *Jesus the Sage* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1994), 8, n. 13.

¹⁰² Berry, *Wisdom and Poetry*, 21. Cf. also "[t]he moral optimism and theological simplicity of Proverbs probably represented the norm for wisdom during much of Israel's history" (142), and "[t]he wisdom of Proverbs focuses on the hope of God's reward and punishment. In Job and Ecclesiastes wisdom includes acceptance that good and evil sometimes come without identifiable cause" (21).

This is not to deny similar ideas being referred to.¹⁰³ An example of a scholar who sees similarity of ideas in both Proverbs and Qoheleth is Robert Gordis, who says, "maxims similar in both form and spirit to those in the Book of Proverbs are common in Koheleth."¹⁰⁴ But there are no instances of verbatim citations. The evaluation of wisdom materials typically seen in scholarly works which places Job and Qoheleth in opposition to, in protest against, or forming a counter-balance to the axioms of Proverbs fails to consider the lack of references.¹⁰⁵ It is most often simply assumed that Job and Qoheleth are voices in protest or counterpoint to Proverbs. A quote from Clines demonstrates this clearly:

The Book of Proverbs is, next to Deuteronomy, the most stalwart defender in the Hebrew Bible of the doctrine of retribution. In it the underlying principle is that wisdom--which means the knowledge of how to live rightly--leads to life and folly leads to death (e.g., Prov 1:32; 3:1-2, 13-18; 8:36). Everywhere it is asserted--or else taken for granted--that righteousness is rewarded and sin is punished (e.g., 11:5-6). And the world of humans is divided into two groups: the righteous (or, wise) and the wicked (or, foolish); which group a

¹⁰³ See Derek Kidner, *The Wisdom of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes* (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1985), 117-118, where a list of statements from Job are compared with sayings from Proverbs showing the similarity of thought.

¹⁰⁴ Robert Gordis, *Koheleth--the Man and His World* (New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1951), 99. There are no exact quotes but see Prov 24:21 and cf. Qoh 8:2-4.

¹⁰⁵ The list of scholars here is extensive. For two of the more prominent works, see David J. A. Clines, *Job 1-20*, WBC vol. 17 (Dallas: Word, 1989), lx-lxii; R. B. Y. Scott, *The Way of Wisdom in the Old Testament* (New York: Macmillan, 1971), 136-189; and the discussion by Richard L. Schultz, "Unity or Diversity in Wisdom Theology? A Canonical and Covenantal Perspective," *TynBul* 48 (1997): 271-306.

particular individual belongs to seems to be determined by upbringing and education and there is little hope or fear that a person may move from one group to another. Thus there is a determinism about the outlook of Proverbs, and a rather rigid notion of cause and effect, which is reasonable enough in material designed for the education of the young but is lacking in intellectual sophistication and, to be frank, in realism.¹⁰⁶

This quote shows evidence of the tendency among current scholars to limit Proverbs to a belief in rigid retribution dogmas, determinism that borders on deism and an unsophisticated, simplistic view of life. One can hold this view only if individual proverbs are hardened into dogma.¹⁰⁷ This is particularly true in regard to retribution. One must also ignore the ones which mention innocent sufferers/suffering. The views of retribution have been discussed above, as have the related issues of cause and effect, with the conclusion that retribution is not always portrayed as a rigid, unbending law, nor is cause and effect seen to be operating mechanically. Clines states: "In the framework of the thought of Proverbs, the man Job is an impossibility. If he is truly righteous, he finds life, and wealth, and health. If he is in pain, he is one of the wicked and the foolish."¹⁰⁸

There is no doubt that Job's three friends rely on maxims or generalizations regarding retribution that are similar to some of the sayings in Proverbs. But the use of these statements by Eliphaz, Bildad and Zophar differs greatly in purpose from that of the sages in Proverbs. While

¹⁰⁶ Clines, *Job*, lxi.

¹⁰⁷ Note the comment of J. Crenshaw, "Wisdom in the OT," *IDBSup*, 954, regarding the hardening of retribution into dogma.

¹⁰⁸ Clines, *Job*, lxii.

Proverbs employs these statements to educate the young and encourage faithfulness to the relationships within the family, the community and with God, the three friends use them as a yardstick for morals and a diagnostic tool for determining reward.¹⁰⁹

Clines correctly observes that the material in Proverbs is designed to educate the young, but that does not necessarily make the material unrealistic and unsophisticated, as the assessment by Clines would have it. His evaluation is far too generalized to bring out the instances in Proverbs where the righteous or the innocent are shown to suffer setbacks, be denied justice in the courts or suffer abuse from an ungrateful child, as the following chapters will show.

Another issue requiring brief mention is the validity of placing the book of Proverbs in the position of the ultimate model for wisdom in both form and content. Proverbs implies no single origin for wisdom and encompasses many of its themes. Using Proverbs as a model for wisdom will make Job and Qoheleth appear out of line with the norm. However this line of reasoning could be guilty of circularity: "All wisdom is like Proverbs; and what is wisdom? Material that looks like Proverbs."¹¹⁰

The present study is intended to show that the book of Proverbs is aware of the possibility of an innocent sufferer as well as the fact that the doctrine of retribution is not as firm as it is sometimes presented.

¹⁰⁹ See Kidner, *Wisdom*, 117.

¹¹⁰ Berry, *Wisdom and Poetry*, 13.

II. A Current Proposal

A. Many Proverbs Refer to and/or Assume Innocent Suffering

One of the main contentions of this study is that the issue of innocent suffering and the existence of the righteous person who had not gotten just or fair treatment has been overlooked in the past. It is not that scholars are unaware of the problem. There are many statements in various commentaries that treat isolated sayings when the topic comes up but there is no comprehensive study.¹¹¹

Proverbs recognizes innocent suffering/sufferers under three general categories: (1) parental suffering, (2) emotional suffering, and (3) suffering due to the words/deeds of others.

1. Parental Suffering

This is a result of a child who, because of actions or attitudes, is labeled a fool, using all three Hebrew words that are commonly associated with this label: **נָבִיל** and **אֵיל**, **כָּסִיל**.

There is also the matter of parents and public shame or disgrace brought on by a child who is characterized as shameful (**בֶּן מְבִיֵּשׁ**), a disgrace (**מַחְפִּיר**) or causes public humiliation (**כָּלֵם**). All these terms; reflect a social status or peer pressure exerted in the community that has only recently been brought to light and applied to OT studies.

There are also two proverbs which speak of cursing a parent, an act which is in direct violation of the Torah. There are two other examples of verbal abuse--mocking (**לְעֵג**) and scorning (**בִּזְיָ**)—to be addressed as well.

Finally I will examine the only proverb which mentions the physical

¹¹¹ See chapter one, n. 1 above for two similar studies.

abuse of parents, the one who robs (גַּזֵּל).

While the number of proverbs which mention parental abuse and suffering is not large, they address important issues within the ancient social structure of Israel. Due to the centrality of family relationships as portrayed in the Hebrew Bible the topic is important and deserves recognition even though the statistical incidence is low by any measure.

2. Emotional Suffering

There are proverbs which describe or refer to a person forced to deal with difficulties described as heartaches, anxiety, depression, frustration, bitterness, etc. In every case there is no fault, shortcoming or sin ascribed to these people. They are simply forced to deal with the events of daily life which can not be guaranteed to turn out positive in every instance. The main terms under discussion in this part of the study will be לֵב, רֹחַ and נֶפֶשׁ. For לֵב and רֹחַ there will be a great deal of overlap, since these two terms are quite often used to refer to the inner part of humans, whereas נֶפֶשׁ; will be used holistically to refer to a "person."

3. Suffering Due to the Words/Deeds of Others

In any society there will be those who seek to harm the innocent or take advantage of others. No doctrine of retribution can explain this away. In our modern Christian era this is often accounted for by the doctrine of the sin nature. The ancient Mesopotamians believed something similar, though it had a different expression.¹¹² They believed that the gods

¹¹² "Man and His God," lines 102-103: "Never has a sinless child been born to its mother, ... a sinless workman(?) has not existed from of old."

had created humans with the tendency to sin, something the Hebrews never held to,¹¹³ although the later rabbinic doctrine of the two *yesers* comes close.¹¹⁴

In the present study there are certain categories of suffering which arise due to the mistreatment of the righteous or innocent. The first category is concerned with legal injustice. The second category is that of damaging words; the third, harmful actions. In each of these classifications an innocent victim will suffer due to the careless or malicious actions or words of another.

These proverbs are found in a broad range of literary forms and in almost every collection. Attention will be drawn to these forms and locations when individual sayings or poems are addressed.

B. Job and Qoheleth are Not Necessarily in Opposition to Proverbs

In light of the fact that there are proverbs which address innocent sufferers the assertion that Job and Qoheleth are in opposition to, or in protest against, the wisdom of Proverbs can be called into question.

The previous discussion in chapter one on theodicy showed Job reacting more against a Mesopotamian world view than against the book of Proverbs itself. Job rejects the solutions offered by his three counselors, who take a Mesopotamian world view, according to Mattingly.¹¹⁵ Though it

¹¹³ See the discussion of the origin of sin in Israel and Mesopotamia in Robin C. Cover, "Sin, Sinners (OT)," *ABD*, 6.33-34.

¹¹⁴ See B. Otzen, "יָצַר, *yasar*," *TDOT*, vol. 6 (1990), 265. See also the rabbinic comment on Deut 26:16 in *Ta'an*. 23b, cited in H. Strack and P. Billerbeck, *Kommentar zum Neuen Testament*, 6 vols. (Munich: Beck'sche, 1954) 3.751.

¹¹⁵ Gerald L. Mattingly, "The Pious Sufferer: Mesopotamia's Tradi-

is true that there are several other parallels in cuneiform literature, none of these can match the book of Job, which is more profound and far-reaching in content than the Mesopotamian works.

Crenshaw claims Job comes to the same conclusions as the cuneiform documents in regards to innocent suffering.¹¹⁶ He says three solutions to the problem of innocent suffering are manifest: (1) man is congenitally evil; (2) the gods are unjust; and (3) our knowledge is partial.¹¹⁷ But this is not completely accurate.

To answer these three assertions briefly, we can observe first that while Eliphaz and Bildad agree with the teaching of congenital evil¹¹⁸ this doctrine is never interpreted in the Hebrew Bible to mean that mankind was created evil. Even the texts which speak of inherent human evil stop short of claiming God personally endowed humans with sinful tendencies.¹¹⁹ More importantly, Yahweh never tells Job that part of his problem is the fact that he was born in sin. It is the three friends who espouses this teaching, apparently in line with current Mesopotamian doctrine.

Secondly, the claim is made that the deities are unjust. This is something the three friends never claim, only Job. It is virtually the only

tional Theodicy and Job's Counselors," in *The Bible in the Light of Cuneiform Literature*, ed. W. W. Hallo, B. W. Jones, and G. L. Mattingly (Lewis-ton, NY: Mellen, 1990), 329-330.

¹¹⁶ J. Crenshaw, "Popular Questioning of the Justice of God in Ancient Israel," *ZAW* 82 (1970): 388. Cf. also Mattingly, "Pious Sufferer," 330.

¹¹⁷ Crenshaw, "Popular Questioning," 387.

¹¹⁸ 4:17-21; 15:14-16; 25:4-6.

¹¹⁹ Cover, "Sin," 34.

defense Job has other than a claim to innocence (9:22-24; 24:1-12). The three friends constantly defend God's actions in sending the suffering upon Job, and it is doubtful that Mesopotamian literature ever accuses a deity of unjust treatment. If so, it is only "sniper fire" in comparison to the heavy artillery of Job's accusations.¹²⁰ If Scholnick's studies are taken into consideration, God's justice is one of the main points of the book, and occupies the main focus of the second divine speech (cf. 40:8).¹²¹

Third on Crenshaw's list is the claim that all the documents had in common the claim to partial knowledge. This is the only one of the three elements he lists that I have no criticism of. The lack of certainty was characteristic of the Mesopotamian literature, as pointed out in the previous chapter. It is also important in Job, where the root **יָדַע** is emphasized in Job's confession (42:1-6).

This brings us to the conclusion that Job's frustration and agitated reaction is not so much with the book of Proverbs, except where it dovetails with Mesopotamian thought and world views. Job's contention is with his three friends, who insist on a dogmatic scheme of retribution, something the book of Proverbs does not uniformly do.

¹²⁰ This was discussed in some detail in the first chapter, where the conclusion was reached that any suggestion of divine fault was made cautiously and in circumspect terms. Crenshaw cites the *Dialogue of Pessimism* (discussed in chapter one under the title *Dispute of a Man with his Ba*), claiming that the injustice of God lies behind the despair, but he gives no concrete examples to prove his point, see "Popular Questioning," 388. It is far from certain how to interpret this text (see *BWL*, 140-141) so Crenshaw's position is questionable.

¹²¹ See chapter one, the discussion of Job and theodicy.

Without doubt there are similarities between Job and its Mesopotamian parallels but the resemblances are less significant when examined closely. Proverbs does not limit itself to the dogmas that made it possible for Job's counselors to claim their teachings as normative.

In regards to Qoheleth, the view of life in Proverbs is not so superficial as to allow Qoheleth to claim that the teachings in Proverbs were in need of balance. Building on the previous discussion of Proverbs and Qoheleth we can note that the author of Qoheleth recognized inconsistencies in retribution, or at best, delays. In a very insightful discussion Michael V. Fox shows that the sages who penned Israel's wisdom literature did not have the short-sighted or superficial view of retribution that is often attributed to them.¹²² It is true that proverbs or sayings are often cast in dogmatic terms, that the natural course of events will punish or reward a person's deeds. God has created a natural order in which good deeds typically have good effects, bad deeds bad effects. However, natural order is not necessarily tied to retribution, and this leaves an opening for injustice to occur. As J. G. Williams points out, wisdom literature, despite its dogmatic cast, does not assume strict and exclusive causal links between a deed and its recompense.¹²³

Qoheleth will not subsume all the anomalies he observes under

¹²² Michael V. Fox, *Qoheleth and His Contradictions*, JSOTSS 71 (Sheffield: Almond, 1989), 132ff.

¹²³ James G. Williams, *Those Who Ponder Proverbs* (Sheffield: Almond, 1981), 18. Williams says Proverbs usually deals with typical cases, not a strict and hard determinism that holds "all X leads to Y" and "Y is always the result of X" (18-19).

maxims which assume dogmatic categories. Qoheleth sees God as just but often delaying justice.¹²⁴ Qoheleth differs profoundly from other sages in his response to certain assumptions regarding divine justice, while agreeing with the principle of divine justice and the fact of injustice.¹²⁵ The discussion in the book of Qoheleth includes the use of wisdom sayings but is often considered a reflection set in a didactic form.¹²⁶ Thus the reader can expect thematic development and an exploration of issues in a way that individual proverbs, or even sets of proverbs, would have difficulty expressing.

C. Correctly Understanding the Proverb Genre Negates Dogmatizing

This has been briefly mentioned above in the discussion of retribution. Recognizing that a proverb cannot address all aspects of an issue will require modern readers not to read individual proverbs dogmatically.

Parallelism, poetical structure and limited application of a proverb dictate against misunderstanding these sayings, or ascribing more meaning to them than they actually carry.¹²⁷

Because proverbs or sayings are set in a poetic format some limits on

¹²⁴ Fox, *Qohelet*, 139.

¹²⁵ Fox, *Qohelet*, 139. He cites four specific areas where this is displayed: (1) death, (2) time and memory, (3) the inability of human actions to right wrongs, and (4) Qoheleth's focus on injustice rather than justice (140-150).

¹²⁶ R. E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature*, FOTL vol. 13 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981), 130, discusses the problem of the form of Qoheleth, saying it contains several forms including instruction and reflection.

¹²⁷ I have set out my position on this issue in some detail in my article "Doctrine of the 'Two Ways,'" 501-517.

expression must be imposed, i. e., they, are not essays. In antithetic parallelism there will be normally two elements contrasted. This means the discussion will necessarily be short. There may be no shades of gray or exceptions listed, giving the impression that all people may be categorized as righteous or wicked, wise or foolish, etc.

However, it would be a mistake, in my opinion, to force each proverb to be interpreted in isolation. A recent trend among some scholars is to see small poetical units scattered throughout the larger, more commonly recognized collections.¹²⁸ I agree with many of their suggested units but I will often construct different schemes. Seeing these poetic units within the collections helps us posit a larger theological foundation underlying the editing process of the book, as well as classifying the book of Proverbs as literature, not just a hodge-podge of miscellaneous maxims and observations.

As a result the proverbs should be recognized as having only limited application. They may be general principles¹²⁹ or situation-specific proverbs).¹³⁰ They may address situations which no longer exist¹³¹ or there may be proverbs which state opposite positions.¹³² Thus the danger of

¹²⁸ Two examples are Arndt Meinhold, *Die Spruche*, 2 Teilen (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1991); and Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*.

¹²⁹ E. g., 15:1; 13:21.

¹³⁰ 14:25; 22:11.

¹³¹ The monarchy and slavery are two of many examples here for the Western reader, see 16:10, 12-15; 21:1; 24:21-22; 25:6-7; etc. and :12:9; 19:10.

¹³² The most well known examples are 26:4-5 on answering a fool, but note also 17:27-28 (regarding speech), 17:8, 23 (on bribes), 15:6; 18:11 (on wealth) and 25:8-9 (on going to court).

dogmatizing should be apparent.

D. Conclusion

The discussion above has served as a point of departure for the main part of this study. The purpose of the final three chapters will be to incorporate the advances made in the first two chapters into the analysis in the last three.

The first assumption that must be discarded as a result of the previous analysis is that the book of Proverbs is categorized as conventional wisdom and limited to expressions of that viewpoint. This is not always the case, as the discussion above has shown. Proverbs contains many statements which include maxims which follow conventional wisdom but also many which do not. The following three chapters will give specifics on how the fact of innocent suffering or the righteous sufferer plays an important role in the theology of the book.

Secondly, we will take the book on its own terms without forcing foreign influence onto it without adequate reason. This means discussions of *ma'at* and of Mesopotamian or Canaanite backgrounds will play much smaller roles than might be expected. In terms of retribution, there will be no effort to separate the sayings which use divine references from those which do not, since this is now shown to be an artificial point of division.

There will also be no reason to portray Job and Qoheleth as antagonists or balances to the superficial dogmatism of Proverbs, since the study will show more agreement between these books than has been acknowledged in the past.

And finally, I will attempt to set the proverbs on the subject of innocent suffering or righteous suffering in a correct literary structure and genre, which will give a theological foundation to many of the sayings and avoid treating individual proverbs in isolation.

CHAPTER THREE

PARENTAL SUFFERING IN PROVERBS

Introduction

The role of Yahweh as divine parent and the covenant relationship form the foundation for this part of the study. Since the parental image is of utmost importance for this study it will be necessary briefly to establish family terminology and roles as portrayed in the OT.

The image of Yahweh as divine parent leads to the question of the use and setting of the instruction genre, another prominent feature of wisdom materials. Quite often in the prophetic corpus Israel is addressed as Yahweh's child, straying from the instruction given to the nation. This image can be seen very prominently in Isa 1:2-3, as well as Hos 11, and Jer 3:4, 19-20. In the *Torah* Deut 32 contains this image. A related issue has to do with education in ancient Israel, raised by the instructional address **בְּנֵי**, which is ubiquitous in the first nine chapters of Proverbs. Is this address a metaphor for teachers, hence indicative of a formal school setting, or should it be taken literally and the educational setting be seen in the home?

The second part of this chapter will examine individual proverbs that specifically deal with parental suffering.

I. Parents in the OT

It will be important for this part of the study to discuss the social

backgrounds and cultural settings for the family. This will enable us better to understand the individual proverbs which make reference to parental suffering.

A. Social Structure and Duties

Granting that there was some fluidity in the way the terms were used over time it is still necessary to give a basic discussion of kin group terminology.

1. Structure of Kin Groups

The nomenclature of ancient Israel shows how social structure was perceived. A reading of Josh 7:16-18 shows this clearly:

Early the next morning Joshua had Israel come forward by tribes, and Judah was taken. The clans of Judah came forward, and he took the Zerahites. He had the clan of the Zorahites come forward by families, and Zimri was taken. Joshua had his family come forward man by man, and Achan son of Carmi, the son of Zimri, the son of Zorah, of the tribe of Judah was taken (NIV).

This passage tells of the search for the guilty party responsible for the defeat of the Israelite army in the attack on Ai. The nation is presented tribe by tribe (שֵׁבִיט) and one clan (מִשְׁפָּחָה) is designated. Then out of this clan a family (בֵּית־אָב) is chosen. Out of the chosen "father's house" an individual is selected, then his identification is made using these terms in the reverse order).¹ The offender is first identified by name and parent ("Achan son of Carmi"), then by family ("son of Zimri"), followed by his clan ("son of Zorah") and tribe ("of the tribe of Judah").

¹ Christopher J. H. Wright, "Family," *ABD*, 2.761.

a. Tribe **מִטָּה, שֵׁבֶט**

The tribe was the broadest unit of social and territorial organization in ancient Israel. Each tribe bore the name of a son of Jacob/Israel, with the tribe of Joseph being divided into Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen 48-49; cf. Josh 13-14). While the tribe formed the basis for the military levy (Num 1; 26) it was the least important for determining kinship. At the head of every tribe was the **נָשִׂיא**.² However, the tribes were not equal in population, size or amount of territory they possessed.³ Essentially, according to G. E. Mendenhall, the tribe was an "administrative unit,"⁴ but cautions modern readers not to assume that "tribe" in English always communicates the meaning of **שֵׁבֶט**.⁵

b. Clan **מִשְׁפָּחָה**

Land was allotted in ancient Israel **לְמִשְׁפָּחָתָם**, "according to their clans" (Josh 13:15, 24, 29, 31; Num 33:54).⁶ The primary significance of the term **מִשְׁפָּחָה** is that (1) it functions as the term of kinship between the family (**בֵּית אָב**, see below) and the tribe (**מִטָּה, שֵׁבֶט**),

² Num 7:2; 31:13; 32:2; Exod 22:27[28]. See H.-W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 215; cf. H. J. Zobel, "שֵׁבֶט, *sebaet*," *TWAT*, vol. 7 (1993), 971, citing de Vaux: "De Vaux (26) schlägt für den Stammesführer den Titel *nasi'* vor." For detailed information on the various terms of tribal and clan leadership see H. Reviv, *The Elders of Ancient Israel*, tr. L. Plitmann (Jerusalem: Magnes, 1989).

³ Barry L. Bandstra, "Tribe," *ISBE*, vol. 4 (1988), 905.

⁴ G. E. Mendenhall, "Social Organization in Early Israel," in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God*, ed. F. M. Cross, W. E. Lemke, and P. D. Miller, Jr. (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1976), 146.

⁵ Mendenhall, "Social Organization," 146-147.

⁶ C. J. H. Wright, *God's People in God's Land* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 48.

and (2) serves as a territorial designation.

In a social context the **מִשְׁפָּחָה** was the most important unit of organization.⁷ It also served as a territorial designation since it has been shown to function as a technical term in hereditary land tenure.⁸

Francis I. Andersen has shown that this territorial association in a person's kin group was the virtual equivalent to a geographical address.⁹

The **מִשְׁפָּחָה** was the broadest unit of recognized kinship, thus it is not surprising that the economic and social practices within this group were based on blood relationship, since the individual Israelite found his or her identity as a member of the covenant community through the obligations placed on them within the **מִשְׁפָּחָה** and the **בֵּית אָב**.¹⁰ One of the most far-reaching roles within the clan was the protection offered by the **גֹּאֵל**, who avenged the murder of a kinsman (Num 35), raised up a male heir for a deceased relative (Deut 25:5-10), redeemed land for a kinsman who had been forced to sell land due to harsh circumstances (Lev 25:23-28), and maintained or redeemed a kinsman or dependents of a kinsman in debt (Lev 25:35-55).¹¹

⁷ C. H. J. de Geus, *The Tribes of Israel* (Assen: van Gorcum, 1976), 137.

⁸ William Johnstone, "Old Testament Technical Expressions in Property Holding: Contributions from Ugarit " *Ug* 6 (1969): 313.

⁹ F. I. Andersen, "Israelite Kinship Terminology and Social Structure," *Bible Translator* 20 (1969): 36.

¹⁰ Wright, "Family," 763.

¹¹ See Donald A. Leggett, *The Levirate and Goel Institutions in the Old Testament* (Cherry Hill: Mack, 1974), 83-137; and Jeremiah Unterman, "The Social-Legal Origin for the Image of God as Redeemer **גֹּאֵל** of Israel," in *Pomegranates and Golden Bells: Studies in Biblical, Jewish and Near*

The clan also provided a military unit known as the **אֶלֶף**, essentially the "kin group-at-arms," the complement of troops provided by a kin group for the tribal levy.¹² The word **אֶלֶף** is traditionally translated "one thousand" but other studies suggest that it is not a fixed number.¹³

In summary, the **מִשְׁפָּחָה** existed for the well being and protection of its family members. It attempted to provide stable conditions whereby mutual help was given to those in need.

c. Family **בֵּית־אָב**

Each individual was a member of a **בֵּית** or **בֵּית־אָב** an extended family made up of all the descendants of a single living ancestor, sometimes called the **רֹאשׁ־בֵּית־אָב**. The **רֹאשׁ** participated in leadership activities at the family level of social organization, and a select group of these individuals exercised leadership over the clan. These collective bodies were known as "elders."¹⁴ The **בֵּית־אָב** included this

Eastern Ritual, Law and Literature in Honor of Jacob Milgrom, ed. D. P. Wright et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1995), 399-405, for a discussion of these roles.

¹² Wright, *God's People*, 72.

¹³ Bandstra, "Tribe," 905; see also G. E. Mendenhall, "The Census Lists of Numbers 1 and 26," *JBL* 77 (1958): 52-66; and Norman K. Gottwald, *The Tribes of Yahweh* (Maryknoll: Orbis, 1979), 270-276.

¹⁴ Reviv, *Elders*, 11. There is a great deal of overlap between **רֹאשׁ** and the office of **זֶקֶן**, see 15-20. Summarizing Reviv's findings, "heads" were the leaders ("elders") at the sub-tribal and settlement levels, or parallel to "chiefs" at the tribal level. However, "elders" are second in rank to the "head" in the sense of "chief" when these terms are both mentioned in a particular context. The use of the various titles of tribal heads such as "heads of the fathers," "heads of the father's houses" and "heads of the people of Israel," implies that the individual tribal chiefs came from the elders (21).

man's wife or wives, his sons and their wives, his grandsons and their wives, plus any unmarried sons or daughters in these groups along with the nonrelated dependents.¹⁵

This social unit was the basic unit of land tenure since (ideally) each one had its own **נַחֲלָה** which was kept in the **בֵּית־אָב**, and the **מִשְׁפָּחָה** if possible.¹⁶ Thus ownership of land was protected by the principle of inalienability; the rule that the land should remain in the family to which it had been apportioned, and could not be sold permanently outside the family.¹⁷

The **בֵּית־אָב** was one of the main spheres where justice was a concern, both internally, where disputes and problems of marriage and divorce were settled as well as parental discipline enforced, and externally,

¹⁵ Married daughters were not included since they became members of their husband's **בֵּית־אָב**, see Wright, "Family," 762. Exceptions did occur. Note the case of Jacob, who went to become part of Laban's **בֵּית־אָב** Gen 28:2. There is also the unusual statement in Gen 2:24 where it is the man who leaves his father and mother when he takes a wife, which may be a reference to *erebu* marriage in which the man leaves his family and lives with, his wife's family, see C. H. Gordon, "Ereebu Marriage," in *Studies on, the Civilization and Culture of Nuzu and the Hurrians. In Honor of Ernest R. Lachemann*, ed. M. Morrison and D. Owens (Winona Lake: Eisehbrauns, 1981), 155-161. It could also be understood psychologically, see M. M. Bravmann, *Studies in Semitic Philology* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), 593-595.

¹⁶ Extenuating circumstances might force the sale of land but there was no real estate market. The case of Abraham (Gen 23) is unusual and an act of generosity by Ephron the Hittite.

¹⁷ Wright, "Family," 763-764. Incidents at Shechem (Gen 35), Bethlehem (Ruth 4) and Jezreel (1 Kgs 21) show that the whole town had an interest in the various transactions involving property. Note Abraham's recognition as **אֱלֹהֵי** in the example cited in the note above (Gen 23:4).

since the **בֵּית־אָב** functioned in solidarity in relation to outside groups, e. g., all members of the **בֵּית־אָב**; were shamed by the misconduct of any member. This is of great importance in the book of Proverbs since parents are placed in a position of high authority. Some of the proverbs associated with parental discipline will be an integral part of the discussion below.

Another important function of the family was that of preserving the continuity of the faith, the law, and traditions. Here the primary responsibility lay with the parents, especially the father, to pass along to the children the law of Yahweh as well as the explanations for the various observances and rituals (Deut 6:1-9, 20-25; etc.). In this way the "faith of the fathers" was preserved from one generation to the next (Ps 78).

It is this didactic function of the parents which gains emphasis in the book of Proverbs, especially in chapters 1-9, with the recurring instructional address **בְּנִי**.¹⁸ One of the emphases in Proverbs is for the children to observe or pay attention to the instruction of the parents. Those who reject their parents' teaching are sometimes branded fools who bring sorrow and pain to parents. These proverbs will be discussed below.

2. Roles of Individuals

The discussion here will not attempt to go beyond details necessary to give sufficient background for the main study

a. Father

In ancient Israel family life was centered around the father. He possessed a great deal of authority over the lives of his sons

¹⁸ See 1:8, 10, 15; 2:1; 3:1, 11, 21; 4:10, 20; 5:1; 6:1, 3; etc. The plural **בְּנִים** occurs in 4:1; 5:7; 7:24; etc.

and daughters. He could sell a daughter into slavery (Exod 2:1:7), have a son stoned to death if he attempted to lead people away from the worship of Yahweh (Deut 13:6-10) or insisted on acting rebelliously as a drunkard or glutton (Deut 21:18-21). The father could also take away the birthright of the firstborn (Gen 35:22; 49:4; 1 Chr 5:1) although favoritism was prohibited (Deut 21:15-17). However, this does not mean the father's power and authority was unlimited and absolute, and he was not a despot.¹⁹ The power of life and death over family members shows that the security and stability of the family as a whole was valued more highly than one of its members, especially if that member's behavior seriously threatened the substance of the family. For example, rebellious and irresponsible behavior on the part of a son showed that he was incapable of being entrusted with his inheritance.²⁰

Fathers also had the responsibility to love, care for and protect their children (Deut 1:31; Ps 103:13; cf. Job 1:5; Jer 47:3; Hos 11:1-3). Other responsibilities included ,training and education (Deut 4:9; 6:7; Prov 1:8; 22:6) as well as discipline (Prov 13:24; 19:18; 23:13-14).

b. Mother

The mother's primary role revolved around child-birth and nurturing the children. Motherhood was considered honorable and desirable. Those women who were unable to bear children were often portrayed in pain over it (1 Sam 1:4-11; cf. Ps 113:9; Isa 54:1).

¹⁹ Victor H. Matthews and Don C. Benjamin, *Social World of Ancient Israel, 1250-587 B. C. E.* (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1993), 9.

²⁰ Wright, "Family," 767.

Biblical society was clearly male-centered and families were patriarchal.²¹ However, the Bible itself grants women much more access to the administrative, judicial and economic systems than many of today's generalizations about women and the Bible acknowledge.²²

The mother's authority in the household was generally significant in the areas of decision-making and she was often the one who took the initiative in directing the affairs of the family. For example, Sarah demanded that Hagar be expelled from camp despite Abraham's misgivings (Gen 21:10); Rebekah arranged for the blessing to be conferred on Jacob rather than Esau (Gen 27:5-17); Abigail interceded on behalf of her household (1 Sam 25:14-35) and Bathsheba intervened on behalf of Solomon (1 Kgs 1:11-31).²³

In Proverbs the father is primarily the parent responsible for instructing children, but mothers are included on occasion (cf. 1:8; 6:20; 30:17; 31:1 where mother occurs alone).

In her status as a mother she was to be obeyed and regarded with honor, just as a father would be (Exod 20:12//Deut 5:16; Lev 19:3). These

²¹ A patriarchy has two distinguishing features. Wives go to live in their husband's households and the heir of the household must be a natural or adopted son of the father, see Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World*, 23.

²² Matthews and Benjamin, *Social World*, 22.

²³ See C. J. Vos, "Mother," *ISBE.*, vol. 3 (1986), 427. For a discussion of the equal role of women in authority over the household see Claudia V. Camp, *Wisdom and the Feminine in the Book of Proverbs* (Sheffield: Almond, 1985), 79-90. Another projection of the normal role of the mother in the home is the positive image of wisdom as hostess in Prov 9, cf. Prov 31.

passages, part of the Ten Commandments and the Holiness Code respectively, use different terminology and word order to set forth the guidelines on treatment of parents. A comparison of the texts shows this clearly:

Exod 20:12//Deut 5:16 כִּבֵּד אֶת־אָבִיךָ וְאֶת־אִמְךָ

Lev 19:2 אִישׁ אָמוֹ וְאִבּוֹ תִירָאוּ

The order of the wording in Lev 19:2 is unusual in that the direct object is placed between the subject and the verb. Several ancient versions (including LXX, Syriac, and Vulgate) invert the order of the text so that "father" appears before "mother," possibly to conform to other similar texts where father is listed first.²⁴ The word order may also be significant in that mother is placed first to show that she is not considered a secondary authority in the home or due a lesser amount of respect than the father. The use of the root ירא "to fear" is also unusual, since it is found most often with God as the object. In this commandment, "fear" refers to a child's acknowledgment of parental authority,²⁵ since a society without police, probation officers, or a professional court system depended more on discipline within the family than on authority outside the family structure.

The issue of treatment of parents is the subject of many proverbs, some of which will be discussed below.

²⁴ See John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC vol. 4 (Dallas: Word, 1992), 304. This reversal of terms is also true of Lev 21:2 and Ezek 16:45.

²⁵ Hartley, *Leviticus*, 312-313.

c. Children

In ancient Israel children were regarded as a mark of divine favor and blessing, greatly to be desired (Gen 15:2; 30:1; 1 Sam 1:11, 20; Ps 127:3-5). The birth of a male child was met with a more positive response because it marked an additional future worker to support the **בֵּית־אָבִי** and another defender of the **מִשְׁפָּחָה**. It also helped insure that the family name would be kept alive.

As indicated above, parents had God-given authority over their children, as signified by references to the rod, **שֵׁבֶט** (Prov 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14; 29:15), the same word translated "scepter" in Gen 49:10; Num 24:17; Ps 45:6; etc., a symbol of authority, and identical to one of the words for "tribe."

Children were expected to honor and respect their parents, who in turn were required to provide for and protect them. Education and training were also part of the parental duties. Many of the proverbs which refer to these issues will be part of the study below.

The OT speaks of the grief parents experienced over the loss of a child showing that the love between parents and children went beyond that of their status as the father's legal property, since the OT places a great deal more emphasis on the father's responsibility and feelings for his children than on his rights over them. There are many examples of this: Jacob mourning over the perceived death of Joseph (Gen 37:34); David's earnest prayer for the child of Bathsheba (2 Sam 12:15-17, 22-24); his grief over the deaths of Amnon and Absalom (2 Sam 13:30-38; 18:33); and Job's grief over the loss of his children (Job 1:20-21). But it went beyond grief. There are

also narratives which show the lack of parental guidance or rebellious behavior by children as is seen in the stories of David's children, Eli's sons and Samuel's sons. There is also the unusual story of the two women who come to Solomon arguing over the possession of a baby, the real mother eventually choosing to give up her rights to the child for the sake of its life. The most common picture of the parent-child relationship in the OT contains little or no emphasis on legal status. The few texts which treat children this way gain prominence in the scholarly literature but they are far outweighed by other texts which show human love, care or other family feelings and conflicts. The issue of legal status is rarely raised.

There are also passages which express God's sorrow or consternation over Israel's behavior. It is expressed in familial language, either that of father-son²⁶ or husband-wife.²⁷ This shows that the covenant relationship, though partly modeled on the treaties used in international politics, also drew on models with more personal overtones.

B. The Family as a Setting for Wisdom

Under this heading two basic issues will be addressed. First, the origin of family or clan wisdom will be discussed, with its implications of parents as teachers and how this applies to the book of Proverbs. In other words, is the expression "my son(s)" literal or figurative? Then, second, the purpose of family or clan wisdom will be examined, where it will be shown

²⁶ Deut 32:18-20; Hos 11; Is 1:2-3 (cf. 64:7[8]); Jer 3:4,, 19-20 (cf. 31:18-20); Ps 103:7-18. The parental figure is lacking in Ps 78:40-41 but emotive terms are present.

²⁷ Hos 1-3; Jer 2:31-32; 3:1, 4 (Jer 3 uses the images of child and wife); 31:32; etc.

that there were proverbs directed at parents as well as children. The point here will be to show that the wisdom of Proverbs had young people as one of its primary audiences, but more mature adults were not excluded.

1. The Origin of Family Wisdom

Discussions on the sources of proverbs commonly designate three basic points of origin: (1) clan or family, (2) court and (3) school.²⁸ The oldest of these is seen as family, clan or folk wisdom.

Since our knowledge of formal education in ancient Israel is very sparse we can only draw implications for the existence of educational institutions from the large numbers of government officials needed to run the machinery of the monarchy, basing this inference on analogies from surrounding countries where academies were known to have existed.²⁹ This was the predominant view for several years, and it was claimed by its adherents that analogies could be drawn from the more civilized cultures of Egypt and Mesopotamia. The empires of David and Solomon were late-

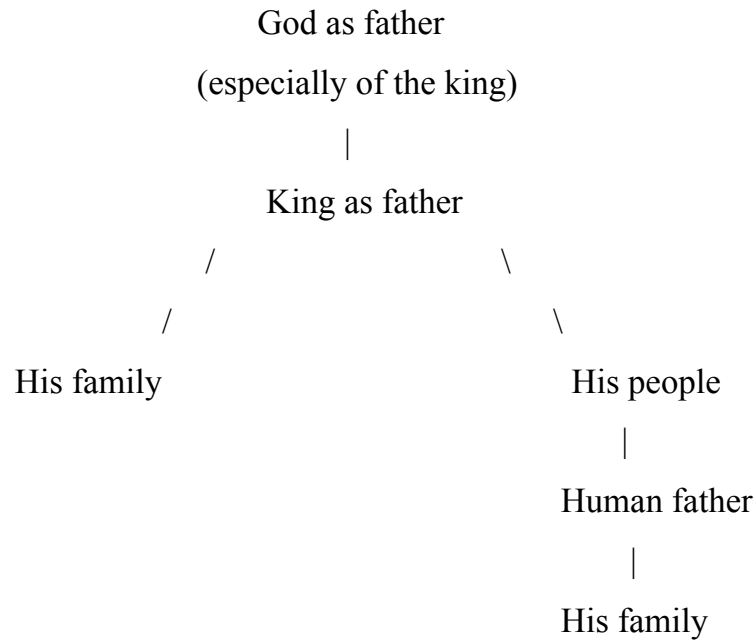
²⁸ See e. g., D. A. Hubbard, "Proverb," *ISBE*, vol. 3 (1986), 1614-1015; James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction* (Atlanta: John Knox, 1981), 56-57; and R. E. Clements, *Wisdom in Theology* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1992), 22-24.

²⁹ This view was championed by G. von Rad, "Der Anfang der Geschichtsschreibung im alten Israel," *Archiv für Kulturgeschichte* 32 (1944): 1-42; translated as "The Beginnings of Historical Writing in Ancient Israel," in *The Problem of the Hexateuch and Other Essays* (London: Oliver & Boyd, 1966), 166-204. For Sumerian scholastic institutions see S. N. Kramer, *History Begins at Sumer*, rev., 3rd ed. (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 1981), 3-9; J. J. A. van Dijk, *La sagesse sumero accadienne* (Leiden: Brill, 1953), 21-27; for Assyrian and Babylonian education see B. Meissner, *Babylonien und Assyrien II* (Heidelberg: Carl Winters Universitätsbuchhandlung, 1925), 324-330.

corners on this scene but good imitators. As a rising political power, Israel developed a complex administration manned by civil servants or court scribes who maintained close contact with their international opposite numbers. A scribal class from the Canaanite cities had been absorbed into the service of the government in the early Israelite monarchy, thus Proverbs was essentially "school wisdom," being a product of the cultural revolution or a "Solomonic Enlightenment" which marked a sharp break from the ancient patriarchal code of living.³⁰

There are many references to kings in chapters 10-29. The instructional addresses and the references to the royal court in Proverbs could be present in order to show that the king was expected to be an exemplary father, first to the whole family but also to all people. The hierarchy of fatherhood would be as follows:

³⁰ Von Rad, "Historical Writing," 204. For a critique of von Rad's position see R. N. Whybray, "Wisdom Literature in the Reigns of David and Solomon," in *Studies in the Period of David and Solomon and Other Essays*, ed. T. Ishida (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1982), 13-26.



But this does not necessarily show that these sayings originated in the royal court.

The assumption that Egyptian wisdom literature was the work of scribes attached to the royal court is not altogether accurate. The scribal profession was not confined to government service. It was widespread throughout the country and essential to the efficient conduct of economic and business affairs. Early Egyptian instructions claimed to have been written by court officials (or even by the king), but many were not. From the New Kingdom there are examples of works written by scribes of lower standing. One of these is Amenemope, whose author was of middle or lower rank on the social and professional scale.³¹ A similar observation can be made regarding Mesopotamia. At times there were schools and

³¹ Hellmut Brunner, *Altägyptische Weisheit: Lehren für das Leben* (Zurich: Artemis Verlag, 1988), 62-75, 236-237.

guilds of scribes based in the large temples, which essentially functioned as cultural centers.³² But three recent essays on sages in the ancient world make no mention of the writing of wisdom books, although their roles as statesmen and royal advisors are emphasized.³³

Stuart Weeks has also called into question the notion of proverbs being composed by and for the royal court.³⁴ His conclusions are based on the suspect nature of the superscriptions in Proverbs, the small number of proverbs associated with the royal court and the varieties of opinions expressed regarding the king.³⁵ Here he follows the studies of Golka, stating that the proverbs which make reference to the king and court do not necessarily originate there. In 1983 Golka took the position that the lack of references to schools in the OT was sufficient proof for their non-existence, thus the whole hypothesis of the existence of schools was a figment of scholarly imagination.³⁶ Golka's studies are based on a comparison of proverbs from Africa with the Biblical material, claiming that the "royal proverbs" from Africa could not be proven to originate from the royal court. Whether critical or sympathetic to the king or the court they were the views of the common individual who observes but is not associated with the

³² W. G. Lambert, *BWL*, 8, 13-14.

³³ R. J. Williams, "The Functions of the Sage in the Egyptian Royal Court," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. G. Gammie and L. G. Perdue (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 95-98; see also in the same volume R. F. G. Sweet, "The Sage in Mesopotamian Palaces and Royal Courts," 99-107; and Loren R. Mack-Fisher, "The Scribe (and Sage) in the Royal Court at Ugarit," 109-115.

³⁴ Stuart Weeks, *Early Israelite Wisdom* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1994).

³⁵ Weeks, *Wisdom*, 41-48.

³⁶ F. W. Golka, "Die israelitische Weisheitsschule oder 'des Kaisers neue Kleider,'" *VT* 33 (1983): 257-271.

court.³⁷ Some have criticized Golka's views, saying that many of his so-called parallels are dubious.³⁸ It can be questioned whether an African proverb, however close, is evidence of the origin of an Israelite folk saying. Also, the communities from which the parallels were taken are not pre-literate, thus there is not a good social parallel. A further complication is the fact that if the parallel is too close there may be Biblical influence, which is entirely possible in modern African traditions.

Another perspective on the scarcity of direct references to schools in ancient Israel may be that schools were so common no Biblical writer felt the need to mention what was obvious to all.³⁹ The recovery of written exercises may be due to the accidents of archaeology and the highly perishable nature of papyrus and leather, thus the materials these exercises were written on have never been found.⁴⁰ However, one can also point to the relatively few explicit references to schools in Egypt, since the devotion to learning by the scribes of Egypt is well known. Thus the silence of the OT is

³⁷ F. W. Golka, "Die Königs- und Hofsprüche und der Ursprung der israelitischen Weisheit," *VT* 36 (1986): 13-36.

³⁸ M. V. Fox, "The Social Location of the Book of Proverbs," in *Texts, Temples and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran*, ed. M. V. Fox et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 234-235.

³⁹ Andre Lemaire, "The Sage in School and Temple," in *The Sage in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. G. Gammie and L. G. Perdue (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 171. For an evaluation of Lemaire's arguments see G. I. Davies, "Were There Schools in Ancient Israel?" in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*, ed. J. Day, R. P. Gordon and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 199-211.

⁴⁰ Unless the Gezer calendar and the small ostraca are actually "exercises."

not necessarily to be viewed so negatively.⁴¹ Both in Egypt and in Israel, the best evidence for scribal education is its literary fruit and the existence of a complex government bureaucracy.⁴² In a comparison of Proverbs and Egyptian wisdom materials Nili Shupak has shown that the vocabulary of the sages in the OT has semantic equivalents in terms normally associated with schools in Egypt. This leads her to assert that Israel's earliest schools were inspired by Egyptian models, and that the book of Proverbs provided some of the learning material in these schools.⁴³

Thus the debate goes on, and the problem is too complex to solve here. It is clear that solving the problem of schools in ancient Israel has much to do with how "school" is defined. While most of the evidence for formal classroom instruction in the scribal art is the existing literature and the testimonies of the Hebrew Bible to the government bureaucracies of the monarchy, this does not exclude the possibility of simple classes in literacy being carried out within the individual families. Thus far no theory of education or training has been able to account for the existing materials and we are left with the conclusion, unsatisfying as it may be, that there were various ways in which education took place in ancient Israel.⁴⁴

⁴¹ M. V. Fox, "Social Location," 229, points out that there is no direct evidence for schools in postexilic Judah before the time of Ben Sira, but no one would claim that he invented them.

⁴² E. W. Heaton, *Solomon's New Men* (New York: Pica, 1975), 108. Cf. also Weeks, *Wisdom*, 132.

⁴³ Nili Shupak, "The 'Sitz im Leben' of the Book of Proverbs in the Light of a Comparison of Biblical and Egyptian Wisdom Literature," *RB* 94 (1987): 104, 117; affirmed by Fox, "Social Location," 229, n. 7.

⁴⁴ See the assessment of J. L. Crenshaw, "Education in Ancient Israel," *JBL* 104 (1985): 601-615.

In contrast to the paucity of evidence for court wisdom, folk (clan or popular) wisdom can be found quoted in both narrative and prophetic literature, as well as in the wisdom corpus. This list would be very lengthy if one was made.⁴⁵

Though none of the sayings outside of Proverbs has bearing on a specific family or clan matter it seems a point of assumption that these sayings can be classified as folk or family wisdom.⁴⁶ Yet when the discussion turns to sayings that are specifically family oriented, the examples are rare outside the book of Proverbs.⁴⁷ Equating oral proverbs with tribal or clan law was a position developed by J.-P. Audet,⁴⁸ H. W. Wolff,⁴⁹ and E. Gerstenberger,⁵⁰ who saw essentially that the origin of Israelite wisdom literature was not in generalized popular proverbs but in a pre-literary and pre-urban oral instruction developed in a tribal society, with the authority of

⁴⁵ See Carol R. Fontaine, *Traditional Sayings in the Old Testament* (Sheffield: Almond, 1982).

⁴⁶ Note the statement of C. R. Fontaine in her essay "The Sage in Family and Tribe," in *The Sage in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. G. Gammie and L. G. Perdue (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 155: "...used by persons in tribal leadership..."

⁴⁷ See the discussions of Hubbard, "Proverb," 1014; Clements, *Wisdom and Theology*, 123-150; Fontaine, "Sage," 158-163.

⁴⁸ "Origines comparees de la double tradition de la loi et de la sagesse dans le proche-orient ancien," in *Proceedings of the International Congress of Orientalists, Moscow, 1960*, vol. 1, 352-357.

⁴⁹ *Amos' geistige Heimat*, WMANT 18 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1964).

⁵⁰ *Wesen and Herkunft des "apodiktischen Rechts"*, WMANT 20 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1965). His ideas had already been expressed in his earlier article "The Woe-Oracles of the Prophets," JBL 81 (1962): 249-263.

patriarchal fathers or tribal leaders, based on the accumulated experience of the past and having something of the force of law. The position was held that wisdom and law had a common origin as regulators of the mores of society.⁵¹

Family wisdom was designed to train the young in clan mores and practices, work ethics, respect for authority and acceptable behavior.⁵² Parents, especially in the early years of a child's life, were the primary teachers and fulfilled that role for as long as needed, whether this was until the children could be trained in a more formal setting, such as a school (by whatever definition is accepted); or until they were old enough to assume family responsibilities of their own. However, the honoring of parents was a lifelong obligation. The fifth commandment, "honor your father and your mother," is never outgrown.

a. Parents as Teachers

Though this has been discussed earlier it bears mention once again to emphasize the importance of this role in ancient Israel. Both parents are mentioned frequently in this role, especially in Proverbs.

Outside of the book of Proverbs one of the most important texts for teaching children is Deut 6, much of which was taken literally in the ancient practice of Hebrew religion, especially the commands in vv. 8-9. The questions of children that may arise in the future are addressed in vv.

⁵¹ For discussion and a short list of those in disagreement see R. N. Whybray, *The Book of Proverbs: A Survey of Modern Study* (Leiden: Brill, 1995), 26-29.

⁵² Hubbard, "Proverb," 1014.

20-21 and it is significant that this instruction stands as the centerpiece of the literary structure of Deut 6:4-7:11.⁵³ The placement of the command to "teach your children" shows the importance of this idea to the structure of this section of Deuteronomy. Events recorded in the book of Exodus are specifically referred to in Deut 6:20ff. and encouragements to teach children are also found in that book, see Exod 10:2; 12:26-27; 13:8, 14.

Another text which places primary importance on the instruction of children is Ps 78, which is often tied to wisdom literature because of the use of מִשְׁלַּל and חִידוֹת in v. 2, cf. Prov 1:6. Even though the psalm has often been classified as an historical psalm, a "didactic accent" can be detected throughout.⁵⁴ The lengthy introduction of Ps 78 forms a setting for the psalm in which vv. 4-6 emphasize the importance of teaching children the lessons learned from past mistakes so future generations will not repeat them. It is interesting to note that we see references to God's anger and grief over Israel's rebellion and testing (vv. 40-41, 58-59, 62) showing that humans are not the only ones who suffer pain innocently, or due to the actions of others.⁵⁵

⁵³ Duane L. Christensen, *Deuteronomy 1-11*, WBC vol. 6a (Waco: Word, 1991), 138. Deut 4:9 also has an injunction to teach children but it is not the focus of the literary structure of Deut 4, see Christensen's outline and discussion, 71-73.

⁵⁴ H.-J. Kraus, *Psalms 60-150: A Commentary*, tr. H. C. Oswald (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1989), 122. Kraus observes that the content of the psalm designates it as an historical psalm, yet it has an introduction (vv. 1-2) which announces a wisdom poem, and in v. 4 the reference to Yahweh's great salvific deeds is similar to a hymnic introit.

⁵⁵ Cf. Num 14:22 and Is 63:7-10. For a detailed analysis of this phenomenon see T. E. Fretheim, *The Suffering of God: An Old Testament*

The book of Joel begins similarly, with a call to "tell it to your children" (1:2-3) regarding the lessons learned, although this text cannot be seen as a definitive statement regarding educational practices in Israel.

The use of "elders" and "all who live in the land" may be a hendiadys for saying "everyone" rather than a specific setting for education by the elders.

So both parents were charged with the upbringing, care and training of children, although in many texts the father seems to be the one given the larger share of the responsibility.

b. "My Son(s)"--Literal or Figurative?

An important question related to the issue of family wisdom and the interpretation of Proverbs is that of the use of the instructional address "my son(s)." ANE sources provide us with texts in which the teacher was referred to as "father" while the student was addressed as "(my) son."⁵⁶

This particular address is lacking in Egyptian instructions except in P. inv. Sorbonne 1260, line 7, a late demotic work dating to about the third century B.C.⁵⁷ John Day has criticized the citation of the *Instruction of Amenemhet* as a parallel since it does not introduce words of advice.⁵⁸

Perspective (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984).

⁵⁶ Lemaire, "Sage in School and Temple," 174; see P. J. Nel, "The Concept 'Father' in the Wisdom Literature of the Ancient Near East," *JNSL* 5 (1977): 59. A brief list of examples can be found on 60-61.

⁵⁷ John Day, "Foreign Semitic Influence on the Wisdom of Israel," in *Wisdom in Ancient Israel*, ed. J. Day, R. P. Gordon and H. G. M. Williamson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 65.

⁵⁸ Day, "Foreign Semitic Influence," 65, n. 36; cf. Weeks, *Wisdom*, 15. For the text of Amenemhet see *ANET*, 419.

However, in my estimation, the location of the expression near the end of the document seems to imply its application to the entire work, hence Day's criticism is somewhat weakened. The late date of this document may make this work of dubious value as a comparison to Israelite literature if the early dates for Proverbs are accepted.

Murphy takes this address (specifically Prov 1:8) as denoting the reader of the book of Proverbs, thus placing the instruction tied to parents as a metaphor for wisdom teachers.⁵⁹ This would have the effect of making the book of Proverbs a book of instruction used in a formal educational setting. Some do not see the necessity of requiring a school setting due to the address, regardless of whether it is singular or plural, and place the instructional *Sitz im Leben* in the home rather than a school.⁶⁰

The plural address does not exclude parental training since there may be more than one child in a family and the remembrance expressed in 4:3, for example, seems to have a family setting in view. Murphy's position would be easier to accept if it were not for the occurrence of "mother." The teacher-pupil relationship was often modeled on the father-son relationship but the lack of reference to formal training in ancient Israel in addition to the use of "mother" seems to make it more difficult to hold to an

⁵⁹ R. E. Murphy, *The Tree of Life* (New York: Doubleday & Co., 1990), 16. It might be better to include "listener" in this sentence since the audience may not always have possessed sufficient literacy skills to read the material.

⁶⁰ See R. N. Whybray, *Proverbs*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 37, 76; Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes. Song of Songs*, NAC vol. 14 (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 87; William L. McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 303.

academy setting for the proverbs. This would include both the royal school and the community school. Again, these questions of the existence of schools are difficult to answer due to the lack of evidence. To what extent there were community schools is virtually impossible to say. If Lemaire's evidence is accepted as valid, then the most we can draw from this is rudimentary training in literacy, since his evidence seems to consist primarily of crude alphabet exercises. It is difficult to postulate a highly trained, literate society from the hard evidence. As Whybray observes, it is a far cry from writing the alphabet to reading and writing advanced literary wisdom texts such as the book of Proverbs.⁶¹

Because of this lack of evidence, the best we can say is that the book of Proverbs seems to hold to a family setting for education and training. Thus I would take the occurrences of family terminology such as "mother," "father" and "son(s)" literally, at least in their original formulation. There may have been a time and place when these terms, especially "father" and "(my) son," were used metaphorically for the teacher-pupil relationship in an instructional setting but we are at a loss to know the specifics of the location(s) or the date(s) for these uses.

2. The Purpose of Family Wisdom

As mentioned above, family wisdom functioned primarily to reinforce roles which various members of a family, clan or community were encouraged to play. As might be expected, there were guidelines given to parents and children both.

⁶¹ Whybray, *Survey*, 25.

a. Proverbs Directed Toward Children

There are a great many of these clue to the necessity of teaching children how to carry out tasks involved in everyday living and relating to other people at an individual level and community level. In fact, virtually all of Solomon A⁶² could be said to be directed toward children due to the ubiquitous "my son(s)." However, this might be too generalized, and the word "children" may leave an impression that is not completely accurate. The presence of so many warnings about sexual conduct, highway robbery (1:10-19), the firstfruit offering (3:9), relationships with the community (3:28ff.), etc., probably removes this material from the normal sphere of "children" and makes the target audience teenagers at the youngest, and covering a broader range of age than is usually associated with a "child." While this material seems to find its setting in parental instruction, the possibilities must be left open that training in a formalized sense made use of this material as well. The date and editorial process in relation to it is too vast and complex a topic to address here.

In Solomon B there are several sayings addressed to sons or dealing with issues which assume this context. Many will be part of the exegetical section below because they deal specifically with parental suffering. There are four proverbs which are addressed to offspring, two of which are concerned with discipline (13:1; 19:27), one which encourages good behavior in order to avoid forfeiting the inheritance (11:29) and another proverb which tells a child (נַעַר) he can be identified by his actions (20:11).

⁶² I am using the terms Solomon A to refer to chapters 1-9, Solomon B for 10:1-22:16, and Solomon C for chapters 25-29.

In the Sayings of the Wise (22:17-24:22) there are three longer instructions all addressed to "my son:" 23:15-28; 24:13-22; 24:21-22. Even though most scholars see parallels between *Amenemope* and this section of Proverbs there are no direct links with the passages which refer to parents or children.⁶³ This is not surprising when the setting of *Amenemope* reflects the education of an official rather than education taking place specifically in the home.⁶⁴

In Solomon C there are two proverbs which will be specifically discussed below due to their reference to parental suffering or abuse of parents by a child. There are also two others which refer to the parent-child relationship without reference to suffering. One is 27:11, which encourages wisdom on the part of the son so the father can be joyful regarding the answer he gives to any possible detractor. This proverb is unusual due to its first person perspective. Then there is a saying in 29:3 which is similar in message to 27:11 in its first line and the second line warns against squandering wealth on prostitutes, a warning similar to those found in Solomon A.

In the last two collections, the Sayings of Agur (30:1-33) and the Sayings of King Lemuel (31:1-9, or 1-31 if the acrostic on the noble wife is included), there are no proverbs addressed to children.

b. Proverbs Directed Toward Parents

As might be expected under this category there is

⁶³ McKane, *Proverbs*, 377, 385; Whybray, *Proverbs*, 323; Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 193.

⁶⁴ See McKane, *Proverbs*, 105-108.

a strong emphasis on the importance of discipline. Four of the eight proverbs in Solomon B addressed to parents make reference to discipline. The word **מוֹסֵר** is found in 13:24 and 22:15; **יָסַר** in 19:18; and training, **חֲנֹךְ**, in 22:6. In every case the priority seems to be actions which are ultimately best for the child. Rather than portraying the child as property, Proverbs places primary importance on the responsibility of parents to ensure the child's eventual assumption of appropriate roles within the **בֵּית-אָב** and the community.

Of the remaining four proverbs, two contain an element of providing care and security for children (13:22; 14:26), while 15:27 is essentially the flip side of the coin, telling of the problems a greedy person might bring upon his house. Then 17:6 comments on the reciprocal value which members of the family should place on each other.

The only other place where parents are addressed in Proverbs is found in the Sayings of the Wise. In 23:13-14 parents are encouraged to discipline a child (**נָעַר**), harking back to similar ideas found in 13:24; 19:18; 22:15. The admonitions in 23:13-14 contain some striking parallels to Ahiqar 81-82:

אֶל-תִּמְנַע מִנַּעַר מוֹסֵר כִּי-תִכְנֹן בְּשֹׁבֶט לֹא יָמוּת:
אֲתָה בְּשֹׁבֶט תִּכְנֹן וּנְפָשׁוּ מִשְׁאֹל תִּצְּלִי:

Ahiqar 81-82:

אל תהחשך ברך מן הטר הן
לו לא תכהל תהנצלננהי
מן באשתא
הן אמחאנך ברי
לא תמות
והן אשבקועל לבבך
[לא תחיה]

Dependence one way or the other is not possible to determine. It is apparent that these two sayings are parallel, due to the injunctions of "spare not" and "if I beat you, you will not die," though the Biblical text is addressed to the father rather than the son. There is also a similar use of the root נצל.

Parental discipline is a common theme in ANE wisdom texts, and the lack of evidence to show obvious signs of dependence one way or the other leaves us with the conclusion that there was a common tradition lying behind both.⁶⁵

To summarize, it is evident that the book of Proverbs, while placing a great deal of importance on the instruction, training and discipline of children, does not lack admonitions to parents on the importance of the care and protection of their children. Any study which fails to incorporate these ideas and relegates children to the status of property falls short of a balanced treatment of the subject.

We must also mention the oft-claimed statement that Proverbs is a book directed at young people. In noticing the number of proverbs aimed at

⁶⁵ See James M. Lindenberger, *The Aramaic Proverbs of Ahiqar* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983), 49-52, esp. 50. Cf. also Murphy, *Tree of Life*, 159.

parents we must also acknowledge the broader range of age groups included in the audience. The book itself does not set limits on the readership (or listeners) to exclude those who may no longer be considered "young." Proverbs addressing an older, more mature audience may not be great in number but they are in evidence.

II. Analysis of Individual Proverbs

In this part of the study attention will be focused on the various individual proverbs which refer to parental suffering. There are two broad categories: (1) the damage caused by fools and (2) the pain due to mocking, scorning, shame, cursing, etc.

A. Parents of Fools

Every proverb which refers to the fool causing pain to parents has been form-critically classified as a "saying." There are no admonitions, comparisons, numerical sayings or other forms. In terms of their appearance in the various collections all of these sayings are located in Solomon B: 10:1; 15:5, 20; 17:21, 25; 19:13.

In this category there are three Hebrew words behind the translation "fool:" כָּסִיל, נָבֵל and אֵיל. The first of the three occurs in five of the sayings, with נָבֵל used as a synonym in 17:21, thus these terms are seen to have some degree of overlap. Briefly, the כָּסִיל, based on the derivation of its root form, seems to mean "one who is dull, obstinate."⁶⁶ The word occurs

⁶⁶ Derek Kidner, *The Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1964), 40. See also J. Schupphaus,

only in the wisdom literature--49 times in Proverbs, 18 times in Qoheleth and 3 times in Psalms.⁶⁷ This makes כָּסִיל a very important term in the wisdom corpus, occurring frequently in contrast to the wise person. The word does not refer to mental deficiency but to a chosen outlook.⁶⁸

The second term, נָבֵל occurs only three times in Proverbs (17:7, 21; 30:22; the verb occurs in 30:32). The main characteristics of this type of person are an evil character, immoral, closed-minded, insensible and impious.⁶⁹

The final term, אָיִל is found more frequently than נָבֵל in Proverbs (19 times) but not as often as כָּסִיל, unless one includes the occurrences of אִנְלָת "foolishness" (22 times). It is of uncertain etymology, but frequently stands in contrast to יָשָׁר, חָכָם or סָכָל.⁷⁰ There is a tendency in Solomon B and Solomon C to connect this word with unfruitful speech, although its occurrence in connection with parental suffering (15:5) is not one of them.⁷¹

Poetically, three of the six proverbs which address parental suffering

"כסל" *ksl*," *TWAT*, vol. 4 (1984), 278: "Die Belege von *ksl* legen trotz semasiologischer Unterschiede die Annahme *einer* Wurzel mit der Grundbedeutung 'dick, fett, schwerfällig' nahe, von der auch die at.lichen abgeleitet werden können."

⁶⁷ See Schupphaus, "כסל" *ksl*," 280 for a more detailed breakdown.

⁶⁸ Kidner, *Proverbs*, 40.

⁶⁹ See J. Marbock, "נָבֵל *nabal*," *TWAT*, vol. 5 (1986), 173-185. Both נָבֵל and its feminine form are more common in prophetic literature. *HAL*, vol. 3 (1983), 626-627 defines it as "trad. toricht (intellektuell u. moralisch)" and "(sozial) wertlos, gottlos."

⁷⁰ H. Cazelles, "אָיִל 'evil'," *TWAT*, vol. 1 (1973), 148.

⁷¹ אָיִל in Prov 10:8, 14, 21; 12:16; 14:3, 9; 17:28; 20:3; 24:7; 29:9; אִנְלָת in 12:23; 13:16; 15:2, 14; 24:9; see Cazelles, "אָיִל 'evil'," 149.

(10:1; 15:5; 15:20) are antithetical, two others are synonymous (17:21, 25) and the last is synthetic (19:13). A more detailed discussion of their individual structure will be found when each is addressed.

1. 10:1(כָּסִיל)

This proverb occupies the first place in Solomon B, a key place in the collection. It is probably no coincidence that it contains a heading similar to that of 1:1, though it is lacking in both the Greek and Syriac versions, but without serious consequences.⁷²

The comment on the wise son serves to show that the basic audience is similar to that of Solomon A even though the literary format is different. This assumes, of course, that references to parents in Solomon A are not metaphorical references to wisdom teachers.⁷³ However, there is no definitive way to exclude either the possibility of parental instruction or that of the wisdom teachers, as indicated by Arndt Meinhold:

Wahrscheinlich steht dieser Spruch nicht zufällig am Anfang der Hauptsammlung B. Die Eltern, von denen in 1-9 mehrmals die Rede ist, haben den ersten und grundsätzlichen Teil der Erziehung ihres Sohnes geliebt (vgl. 1,8; 4,3f.; 6,20f.). Danach trat der Weisheitslehrer an die Stelle der Eltern. Der Text gibt nicht genau zu erkennen, welcher Zeitpunkt hier in Auge gefasst ist.⁷⁴

⁷² According to O. Ploger, *Sprüche Salomos*, BKAT 17 (Neukirchenvluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), 121.

⁷³ For this view see Whybray, *Proverbs*, 149, who says the instructions of chapters 1-9 originated in a primarily educational setting, seeming to imply a formal setting rather than the home.

⁷⁴ Arndt Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*, 2 Teile (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1991), 1.165.

The antithetical parallelism of this saying is matched exactly. For every element in the first line, the second has a corresponding term of contrast. This functions to place at the outset of the collection the main message to children, the value of wisdom and the damage caused by foolishness. This is simply a further outworking of the basic polarity of the book as a whole as reflected in the theme in 1:7.

Some scholars place this saying at the head of a smaller collection which runs through 10:5.⁷⁵ If this is the case then the contrasts of "wise son/foolish son" (10:1) and "wise son/disgraceful son" (10:5) form an *inclusio* for a unit which contains elements of agricultural life, showing the social setting of the unit.⁷⁶ The structure of the poem would be:

- A 10:1 בן חכם ישמח-אב ובן כסיל תוגת אמו:
 B 10:2 לא-יועילו אוצרות רשע וצדקה תציל ממנו:
 C 10:3 לא-ירעיב יהוה נפש צדיק והנת רשעים יהדף:
 B 10:4 ראש עשה כף-רמיה וגד חרוצים תעשיר:
 A' 10:5 אגר בקיץ בן משכיל נרדם בקציר בן מבז:

All of these sayings can be classified as antithetic parallelism, even though 10:5 lacks the characteristic ׀.

In the A elements of this poem there is a parallel between בן חכם (10:1a) and בן משכיל (10:5a). There is also parallelism between

⁷⁵ Garrett, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 117; Meinhold, *Die Spruche*, 1.165.

⁷⁶ Whybray, *Proverbs*, 157.

(10:1b) and **בֶּן מִבִּישׁ** (10:5b).

The B elements parallel the idea of **אוֹצְרוֹת רֶשַׁר** (10:2a) with **רָאשׁ** (10:4a), as well as **צִדְקָה** (10:2b) and **יָד חֲרוּצִים** (10:4b). There is also chiasmus present in the structure of 10:4, contrasting diligent hands with lazy hands.

Since it stands in the middle of the poem, the C element (10:3) is the centerpiece. It makes a chiastic contrast between the righteous (linking it to 10:2) and the wicked (**רָשָׁעִים**), one of the dominant polarities in the book of Proverbs. There is also the association of "going hungry" and "craving" in 10:3, which are possible results of laziness and sleeping in harvest in the following sayings. It is also an important element of the poem because it contains a reference to the divine name. This places the entire series of sayings in a Yahwistic context and provides a theological setting for each of the sayings individually and as part of a poem.

Many of the elements found in 1:8-19, the first extended instruction in Solomon A, are also found here in the first smaller collection in Solomon B. Briefly, to list two, there is the value of work (10:4-5; implied in 1:8-19), and the comment on the questionable value of ill-gotten gain (10:2; 1:19).

Another important part of this small poem is the occurrence of the shameful son (**בֶּן מִבִּישׁ**) in 10:5. Although it is found as a comparison to the foolish son and may be best understood as part of that comparison, I will discuss the aspects of shame in the section below which specifically addresses that issue.

2. 15:5 (אָוִיל)

The decision to include this proverb in the present discussion on parental suffering rested on two factors. First was its location in context where it seemed to be parallel to 15:20, which definitely has reference to this subject, and second, the meaning of the root נָאץ, which is at the heart of the action in this saying:

אָוִיל יִנָּאץ מוֹסֵר אָבִיו וְשֹׁמֵר תּוֹכַחַת יְעָרָם:

Regarding the first conclusion, Garrett⁷⁷ contends that 15:1-16:8 comprise two parallel collections, each of which begins with a word on patience versus the provocation of wrath (15:1, 18) and ends with טוֹב-sayings on apparent versus real prosperity (15:16-17; 16:8). These two collections contain a great deal of correspondence in content but not so much in structure.⁷⁸ McKane,⁷⁹ Whybray,⁸⁰ Meinhold,⁸¹ and Hubbard⁸² all tie these two sayings together in their respective discussions as having similar points, but do not argue for the larger parallel collections.

The second reason for including this proverb is the meaning and uses of the root נָאץ. When the semantic range of the root meaning behind

⁷⁷ *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 149-150.

⁷⁸ See Garrett's chart in *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 150, and 151, where he comments on 15:5 and 15:20-22: "These two texts both draw together two concepts, namely, the wise/foolish son who pleases/disgraces his parents and the importance of heeding wise counsel."

⁷⁹ *Proverbs*, 479.

⁸⁰ *Proverbs*, 226.

⁸¹ *Die Spruche*, 1.250.

⁸² D. A. Hubbard, *Proverbs* (Dallas: Word, 1989), 256-257.

this word is examined it makes a strong statement. It refers to the action or attitude whereby the former recipient of favorable disposition and/or service is consciously viewed and/or treated with disdain.⁸³ As parallel terms it has **מָאָס** "to reject" (Jer 33:24); **מָרָה** "to rebel" (Ps 107:11); **אָבָה** "to be disinclined toward obedience" (Prov 1:30); **שָׂנֵא** "to hate" (Prov 5:12); etc. Due to the strong negative implications of this word it is apparent that this is a very serious matter since to reject or spurn a father's discipline is to reject the father himself.

Discipline (**מוֹסֵר**) and correction (**תּוֹכַחַת**) are paralleled in this saying as is also true of 3:11; 5:12; 6:23; 10:17; 12:1; 13:18. The point of the proverb is very similar to many of those in Solomon A where parental instruction is strongly emphasized. The fool is identified as one who rejects parental discipline, in keeping with other proverbs along this same line. Ultimately the child who behaved this way was in danger of the punishment prescribed in Deut 21:18-21.

3. 15:20 (**כָּסִיל**)

This saying is not far removed in its intent from 10:1 (see above) or 17:21 (see below):

בֶּן חָכָם יִשְׂמַח אָב וְכָסִיל אָדָם בּוֹזֵה אִמּוֹ:

Here the opposite of the fool in 15:5, the wise son (**בֶּן חָכָם**) brings joy to the

⁸³ L. J. Coppes, “נָאַץ” (*na'as*), *TWOT*, 2.543. BDB (611) has it as contempt, spurn."

father rather than despising the discipline offered. The prudent one (יַעֲרֹם) in 15:5 receives or accepts correction (תּוֹכַחַת), which can be contrasted to the "fool of a man"⁸⁴ (כָּסִיל אָדָם) who despises (בּוֹזֵה) his mother. It is seen here as a word similar in meaning to נָאץ, and an antonym of יָרָא "to respect" (13:13); חָנַן "to be kind" (14:21); among others.⁸⁵ The term is often applied to Yahweh or his word:

13:13 He who scorns (בּוֹזֵה) instruction will pay for it,
 But he who respects (יָרָא) a command will be rewarded.

14:2 He whose walk is upright fears (יָרָא) the LORD,
 But he whose ways are devious despises (בּוֹזֵה) him.

This root can also be found in a statement made by Yahweh regarding the way people treat him and the actions of Yahweh in return:

1 Sam 2:30 Those who honor (כָּבֵד) me I will honor (כָּבֵד),
 But those who despise (בּוֹזֵה) me will be disdained (קָלַל).

Lying behind the proverb in 15:20 is the commandment to honor parents (Exod 20:12//Deut 5:16; cf. Lev 19:2) and the correlating proverbs which either encourage proper treatment of parents or condemn parental

⁸⁴ For the genitive use of the noun, see Bruce K. Waltke and Michael O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 153.

⁸⁵ M. Gorg, "בָּזָה; bazah," *TWAT*, vol. 1 (1973), 582, who says the root means something more than a mental intention. It seems clear there is a social aspect to this term when the uses of it, especially in Proverbs, are examined.

abuse. The citations above regarding the use of **בִּיזָה** in relation to Yahweh show the contrast in terminology where both **כָּבֵד** and **יָרָא** are used. This is also true of the respect due to parents, as was seen in Exod 20:12//Deut 5:1 Lev 19:2, where these same roots are used. Thus we see that the OT portrays the authority of Yahweh and parents to be deserving of the highest respect, quite often using the same terms.

A child who refuses to give proper honor or respect to parents causes the parents to suffer emotionally, and proverbs which refer to this will be the focus of a following chapter.

4. 17:21(**כָּסִיל**, **נִבֵּל**); 17:25 (**כָּסִיל**)

There is no agreement over the structure, if any, of chapter seventeen. The most intricate and complex analysis is that of Garrett, who sees the chapter as a series of loosely connected collections. Whybray tends to downplay the structural aspect of the chapter, seeing on 16:33-17:3 and 17:21-25 as definable sections.⁸⁷ Ploger, similar to Whybray, refers to the lack of order in chapter 17 as compared to the previous chapter and has no mention of sections within the chapter.⁸⁸ Meinhold, on the other hand, divides the chapter into four sections: vv. 1-6, vv. 7-15, vv. 16-20

⁸⁶ *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 158-160, where he groups vv. 2-8 as a series of random proverbs (17:1 is related to 16:19, 32), then the remainder of the chapter is composed of "four conjoined collections" (159) based on thematic parallels or catchwords (160): vv. 9-13, vv. 14-19, vv. 20-22, vv. 23-26. He adds vv. 27-28 to 18:14 (163)..

⁸⁷ *Proverbs*, 252-253, 260-261. He is certainly aware of verbal connections but apparently does not see this as an indication of editorial work in quite the same way as Garrett.

⁸⁸ *Sprüche Salomos*, 200: "Im Vergleich zu Kap. 16 ist in Kap. 17 inhaltlich eine Ordnungslosigkeit der Aussagen besonders auffallend..."

vv. 21-28, with many catchwords and associations. The main theme of the chapter is found in vv. 21-25, having to do with unsuccessful education.⁸⁹

My approach will be to focus specifically on vv. 21 and 25:

יֵלֵד כָּסִיל לְתוֹגָה לוֹ לֹא-יִשְׁמַח אָבִי נָבֵל:	v. 21
כָּעֵס לְאָבִיו בֵּין כָּסִיל וּמָמָר לְיֹלְדָתוֹ:	v. 25

A notable feature of 17:21 is the almost exact parallel usage of its words. This is true of the words translated in English as "fool," כָּסִיל and נָבֵל in the two cola of 17:21. Then יֵלֵד in the first colon is paralleled with the same as the construct אָבִי in the second colon; and תוֹגָה in line one equates with the negative לֹא-יִשְׁמַח in line two. The poetic structure is in the classic ABB'A' pattern:

A	יֵלֵד כָּסִיל
	B לְתוֹגָה לוֹ
	B' לֹא-יִשְׁמַח
A'	אָבִי נָבֵל

The emotive terms תוֹגָה and לֹא-יִשְׁמַח form the B elements of the proverb. Surrounding the core elements are terms identifying parents of fools in the

⁸⁹ *Die Spruche*, 2.281: "Der Aufbau des Kapitale erschliesst sich am besten vom seinem Ende her, denn in den inhaltlich gleichen Versen 21 and 25 tritt das Problem einer misslungenen Erziehung mit ihren schmerzlichen Folgen für die Eltern deutlich hervor." For further discussion of his view of the word associations and poetic structure see 293.

A elements, יֵלֵד כָּסִיל and אָבִי נָבֵל. This proverb essentially says the same thing in both lines, once stated by a positive assertion, then a contrasting statement is made by means of a negation in the second line.

Similarly, 17:25 emphasizes the damage the fool's actions bring upon his parents. The addition of the mother in 17:25 serves to highlight the seriousness of the actions. This proverb is structured as a chiasmic tricolon in the ABA' pattern:

A	כַּעַס לְאֲבִיו
	B בֶּן כָּסִיל
A'	וּמִמֶּר יוֹלַדְתּוֹ

The outer elements are parallel in these types of structures, which consist of two parallel thoughts separated by an isolated one.⁹⁰ The pronominal suffixes in the outer elements both make reference back to the inner element which is sandwiched between.

Practically speaking, these two proverbs admit the possibility that no amount of parental guidance can guarantee that a child will choose to go the correct way in life. There are no condemnations of the parents here, just the bare observations on the misery a wayward child can bring to parents.

⁹⁰ For other examples of this type of parallelism see Is 30:31; Am 1:3; Nah 3:17; Ps 86:12; etc. For discussion of this see Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to its Techniques*, JSOTSS 26, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 181-182, 204.

5. 19:13 (כָּסִיל)

In terms of the current study only the first colon of this saying is applicable. The second colon is provided for the sake of reference and completion:

הָיָה לְאָבִיו בֶּן כָּסִיל וְדָלָף טַהֲרָד מִדִּינָי אֲשֶׁה:

Here it is stated that a בֶּן כָּסִיל is his father's ruin, הָיָה. Each line of the proverb has similarities elsewhere. For the first colon see 10:1b; 17:21a, 25a; for the second, see 21:9b, 19b; 25:24.⁹¹

The word הָיָה "ruin" is rendered *Ungluck*, "tragedy" or "destruction" by both Meinhold⁹² and Ploger.⁹³ This seems like a stronger term than the English word, and the stronger force of *Ungluck* is more appropriate when the Hebrew word is examined.

The root הוה occurs sixteen times in the OT, ten of which are plural as is the case in 19:13. It is generally associated with those who are unfaithful and rebellious against God, cf. Mic 7:3, where the הָיָה נִפְשׁ, the "inner desire," leads to evil and perverted action; Prov 10:3, where it parallels רָשָׁעִים, "wicked ones" and 11:6 where it is associated with the בֹּגְדִים, "treacherous ones." It can refer to the inner root of evil, or as is more often the case when the plural is in view, the fruits of evil desire, cf.

⁹¹ Whybray, *Proverbs*, 280. For a longer discussion of the second colon see Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 170.

⁹² *Die Spruche*, 2.315.

⁹³ *Sprüche Salomos*, 217.

Prov 17:4; Ps 5:10[9]; 55:12 [11]; etc.⁹⁴

"Ruin" or "destruction" are good renderings of the word here but there seems to be an element of self-seeking or self-satisfaction (*selbstzufrieden*) on the part of the son which causes this, possibly a further result of ignoring parental instruction.⁹⁵ The son's pursuit of selfish ends rather than participating in harvest (cf. 10:5) or other duties would cause a great deal more than just disappointment or consternation on the part of the father. It could go beyond a mere failure to live up to expectations. It might destroy the family's reputation as dependable supporters of the community. Or worse, if several young people placed their own interests above that of the family and community, the lack of effort could lead to a failure to harvest the crop in sufficient amount to feed the family in the coming weeks and months. This might cause the family to face a harsh and hungry winter.

To summarize this section, we have seen that the fool, regardless of the Hebrew term used, can cause emotional pain for parents by his actions, by rejecting them or by treating them with contempt or disrespect. Most of the sayings in this category are not specific. They do not describe a particular action which leads to a painful reaction on the part of the parents, but rather describe the emotional reaction of the parents to the actions or attitudes of the child. The possible exceptions to this are 15:5 where spurning or rejecting parental discipline is mentioned, and 15:20 which describes despising a mother, thereby causing them to suffer for no

⁹⁴ S. Erlandsson, "חַוְּוָה *havvah*," *TDOT*, vol. 3 (1978), 357.

⁹⁵ Meinhold, *Die Spruche*, 2.318.

other reason than the poor choices of the child. It should be noted that these sayings reflect situations where the child has made the choice to carry out certain actions or hold certain attitudes which go against the training given by the parents, thus showing them innocent of any wrongdoing.

B. Parents and Public Shame, Mocking, Disgrace, etc.

Under this heading the issue to be addressed is the poor treatment of parents by their children under rubrics such as shame, mocking, scorning and cursing, and then the occurrence of the only instance of actual physical abuse, robbing.

1. Shame (יָבוֹשׁ) and Disgrace (כָּלָם)

There are four proverbs in this section, all sayings: 10:5; 19:26; 28:7; 29:15. All but 19:26 are stated antithetically, though 10:5 lacks the characteristic adversive וְ joining the two halves of the saying. But there is little doubt of it being antithetic, due to the contrastive vocabulary. All four sayings can be classified as מַשְׁלִי שְׁלֵמָה, two in Solomon B (10:5; 19:26) and two in Solomon C (28:7; 29:15).

Before these proverbs are examined a brief discussion of shame is necessary. Shame and its opposite, honor, are the main core values of the Mediterranean world in general and the world of the Bible as well.⁹⁶ Honor might be described as publicly acknowledged worth. Its opposite, shame, is when publicly acknowledged worth is denied or repudiated. Shame functioned as a social control. It was related to the "anxiety aroused

⁹⁶ Joseph Plevnik, "Honor/Shame," in *Biblical Social Values and Their Meaning: A Handbook*, ed. J. Pilch and B. Malina (Peabody: Hendrickson, 1992), 95-96.

by 'inadequacy' or 'failure' to live up to internalized, societal and parental goals and ideals."⁹⁷ Expectations and goals placed upon a person by society and by parents dictated what a person "should" be able to do, be, know or feel. It also gave the individual a window for viewing society, since these expectations showed how others were required to behave as well. Shame relates to a failure or inadequacy to reach these goals or live up to socio-parental expectations.⁹⁸ On the other hand, a healthy self-view is based on the attainment of these goals and ideals.

Though they are not identical, shame and guilt arise from both external and internal pressure. Shame arises predominantly from external or group pressure, and is reinforced by the internal pressure of fear of being shamed. Guilt relies mainly on internal pressure from the conscience and is reinforced by external pressure from society.⁹⁹

Shame functions most effectively as an agent of social control in group-oriented societies. Public opinion and outward appearance play key roles in this type of society because group rejection means being cut off from the major source of identity.¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Lyn M. Bechtel, "Shame as a Sanction of Social Control in Biblical Israel: Judicial, Political and Social Shaming," *JSOT* 49 (1991): 49 (emphasis in original).

⁹⁸ Bechtel, "Shame," 49.

⁹⁹ Bechtel, "Shame," 51. In older studies cited by Bechtel (51, n. 3), shame and guilt were categorically classified as exclusively external and internal respectively.

¹⁰⁰ Bechtel, "Shame," 52. In contrast, guilt works more effectively in individual-oriented societies since it relies heavily on the internal pressure of the conscience.

As a sanction shame functioned primarily:

- (1) as a means of social control which attempted to repress aggressive or undesirable behavior;
- (2) as an important means of dominating others and manipulating social status;
- (3) as a pressure that preserved social cohesion in the community through rejection and the creation of social distance between deviant members and the group.¹⁰¹

Ancient Israelite society was primarily group-oriented. This means that shame was of more use than guilt as a social control. Society relied more on public opinion, outward appearances and group pressure to enforce its norms. Violations led to threats of rejection or abandonment. Since status within the group was of such high value, "honor," a value ascribed by the group to an individual, raised the status of that person in the community, whereas "shame," also a value judgment, lowered an individual's status.

a. 10:5 (בֶּן מִבְּיָשׁ)

The placement of this saying in the first small poem in Solomon B has already been noted above. The agrarian culture provides the background for this saying, and the enormity of the problem stated in line two should not be underestimated. For people living in an agricultural society harvest was the most intensive operation of the agricultural year, often going beyond the work force available to the בֵּית־אָב

¹⁰¹ Lyn M. Bechtel, "The Perception of Shame within the Divine Human Relationship," in *Uncovering Ancient Stones: Essays in Memory of H. Neil Richardson*, ed. L. M. Hopfe (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1994), 81.

to include the entire village.¹⁰²

There were two main types of foods harvested in the summer: fruits and grains).¹⁰³ The grain harvest was primarily that of wheat, the main food crop, and occurred in *Sivan* (May/June). Barley, the other main food crop, was harvested earlier in *Nisan* (March/April). Grapes, figs and olives were harvested in *Ab* (July/August) and were valued for their use as food in the form of raisins, dried figs and, of course, the production of wine, which took place at the end of *Elul* (August/September).¹⁰⁴

The son who participates in the summer harvest is referred to as a **בֶּן מְשָׁכִיל**. The hot temperatures in that part of the world in summer would have made this extremely difficult and unpleasant work. Prov 25:13 comments on the desirability of cooler weather for the exertions required for this work. The son who sleeps during harvest is castigated as a **בֶּן מְבִישׁ**. The shame in this proverb is due to failure to live up to the expectations of the community during the most critical time of the agricultural year. This would cause not only the son to lose status but also his parents, since he would be known as the son of his father, thus associating the father with the humiliation of the son. The entire **בֵּית אָב** would have shared in the shame. All would know that when others were working to harvest the crops during the hot weather this person was too lazy to help. This would show that he could not be counted on to help in other important activities

¹⁰² Frank S. Frick, "Ecology, Agriculture and Patterns of Settlement," in *The World of Ancient Israel*, ed. R. E. Clements (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), 87.

¹⁰³ Oded Borowski, "Harvests, Harvesting," *ABD*, 3.64.

¹⁰⁴ J. A. Patch and L. Hunt, "Harvest," *ISBE*, vol. 2 (1982), 619.

such as community defense.

b. 19:26 (מַחְפִּיר//בֶּן מִבִּישׁ)

There is very little apparent structure in chapter nineteen. Whybray has identified several proverb-pairs¹⁰⁵ but Meinhold and Garrett see larger structures in this chapter. Meinhold's suggested structure for the latter part of this chapter is the more extensive, and in my view, the least likely.¹⁰⁶ Garrett's is only slightly smaller but has better associations, with 19:25-20:1 seen as a unit. In his structure an *inclusio* is formed with 19:25 and 19:29 on the beatings received by mockers and 20:1 is an afterword using mocker as a catchword.¹⁰⁷

My own suggestion for the structure of this poem is to limit it to the proverbs between v. 25 and v. 29:

- A 19:25 לֵץ תִּכָּה וּפְתִי יַעֲרֶם וְהוֹכִיחַ לְנִבּוֹן יְבִין דָּעַת:
- B 19:26 מַשְׁדֵּד-אָב יִבְרִיחַ אִם בֶּן מִבִּישׁ וּמַחְפִּיר:
- C 19:27 חֲדַל-בְּנֵי לְשֹׁמֵעַ מוֹסֵר לְשֹׁנוֹת מֵאִמְרֵי-דָעַת
- B' 19:28 עַד בִּלְיַעַל יִלְיָץ מִשְׁפָּט וּפִי רֹשָׁעִים יִבְלַע-אֶוֶן:
- A' 19:29 נִכּוֹנוּ לִלְצִים שְׁפָטִים וּמַהֲלָמוֹת לְגוֹ כְּסִילִים

In this format there is an *inclusio* in the A elements formed by the root לִיץ in v. 25 and v. 29, and a parallel occurrence of the verb in v. 28.

¹⁰⁵ Vv. 2-3, 6-7, 11-12, 13-14, 20-21, see his *Proverbs*, 275.

¹⁰⁶ He sees 19:24-20:1 as a unit which he entitles *Überwiegend negative Beispiele* (2.324).

¹⁰⁷ Garrett, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 172-173.

There is also a contrast seen in the *inclusio* between the נָבוֹן and the לֵץ in v. 25 and the לֵצִים and כְּסִילִים in v. 29.

The central element of this unit is 19:27 which uses the instructional address בְּנִי. This is one of its rare occurrences outside of Solomon A and the only one in Solomon B. Though Whybray rightly points out this address is usually found at the head of an instruction,¹⁰⁸ it functions here as the foundation of the poem, in my view. This proverb also has the unique feature of sarcasm associated with an instructional address, found nowhere else in the book. Here the son is "commanded" to stop listening. The sarcastic command makes the disastrous consequences for such action stand out all the more. There is no need to emend the text because of the unique use of sarcasm in Proverbs. In my opinion the MT should be retained.¹⁰⁹

There is also a link between v. 25 and v. 27 with the word In v. 25 the intended parallelism is strike/reprove; scoffer/man of discernment; learn prudence/gain knowledge. Perfect parallelism does not exist in this proverb. If it did we would expect the first line to end with a statement such as "...but he will not profit by it" or the like.¹¹⁰ This proverb teaches that the לֵץ does not learn even if he suffers a physical punishment, for misdeeds or misconduct, but the נָבוֹן needs only a spoken reproof for correcting inappropriate behavior. The second half of the A element, v. 29, has a

¹⁰⁸ *Proverbs*, 285.

¹⁰⁹ See Ploger, *Sprüche Salomos*, 219, 227; Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*, 2.324, n. 80; 2.326-327.

¹¹⁰ Suggested by Whybray, *Proverbs*, 285.

further comment on the fate of mockers and fools. Judgments (שְׁפָטִים¹¹¹) are prepared for mockers, and floggings or beatings for the backs of fools. Whybray makes the interesting observation that שְׁפָטִים occurs mainly in Exodus and Ezekiel, most often with reference to divine judgment. In this proverb, if other usage can influence the understanding of the word here, it is God who punishes mockers, whereas fools suffer from human punishment.¹¹² This adds an element of divine judgment and punishment to the poem, showing that the retribution exacted here may come from human agents or from Yahweh.

The B elements of this unit contain the proverb (v. 26) that led to its inclusion in this study. There is some degree of parallelism between v. 28 and v. 29, with the uses of the roots שָׁפַט and לִיץ. The B elements highlight the actions of those who defy two of ancient society's foremost authorities, parents and courts. The commands to honor and respect parents are well known. The abuse shown to them here by a son who leaves them destitute and homeless is described as shameful and disgraceful. The root translated disgraceful (חָפַר) is sometimes accompanied by language describing a body position which indicates lowered status such as blushing¹¹³ or covering the mouth (Mic 3:7), and cf. Ps 34:5[6] where the psalmist says וְפָנֵיהֶם אֵלֹ - יִחְפְּרוּ, "and their faces are not ashamed."¹¹⁴

There has been some discussion on the verbs in 19:26 1'SiM)

¹¹¹ LXX translates this word μάστιγες, "whips." Apparently the translator read שֻׁבָּטִים, "rods, sticks" (cf. 26:3), see Whybray, *Proverbs*, 287; Ploger, *Sprüche Salomos*, 219.

¹¹² Whybray, *Proverbs*, 287.

¹¹³ Bechtel, "Social Control," 54.

¹¹⁴ Note also the contrast of those who look to Yahweh being radiant.

in the past, especially in regards to suggested Ethiopic or Arabic cognates leading to emendations for the sake of a more exact parallelism.¹¹⁵ However, there is no compelling reason why these verbs must be synonymous. They may be expressing two different aspects of disgraceful behavior.¹¹⁶ The words translated shame and disgrace are probably intended as hendiadys, meaning an "absolutely disgraceful" son.¹¹⁷

The issue of authority is an important one in 19:25-29. Parents, courts and ultimately God are all part of the "chain of command." The mocker, the fool, the wicked, and the son who displays shameful behavior are shown to be those who act in defiance of recognized authority. The mistreatment of parents is the ultimate act of rebellion because it is a rejection of the most basic form of authority in ancient Israelite society.

c. 29:15 (מִבִּישׁ)

This proverb occurs in a small unit which is comprised of 29:15-18:

- A 29:15 שָׁבֹט וְתוֹכַחַת יִתֵּן חֻקָּה וְנֹעַר מְשֻׁלָּח מִבִּישׁ אָמוֹ:
- B 29:16 בְּרָבוֹת רָשָׁעִים יִרְבֶּה-פָּשַׁע וְצַדִּיקִים בְּמַפְלָתָם יִרְאוּ:
- A' 29:17 יִסֹּר בִּנְיָ וַיִּנְיֹחַ וַיִּתֵּן מַעַדְנִים נַפְשָׁה:
- B' 29:18 בְּאֵין חֲזוֹן יִפְרַע עַם וְשֹׁמֵר תּוֹרָה אֲשֶׁר־הוּא:

The first two parallel lines deal with discipline (note the use of the

¹¹⁵ E. g., D. Winton Thomas, "Textual and Philological Notes on Some Passages in the Book of Proverbs," in *Wisdom in Israel and in the Ancient Near East*, VTSup 3 (Leiden: Brill, 1955), 280-292, especially 289; G. R. Driver, "Proverbs xix.26," *ThZ* 11 (1955): 373-374.

¹¹⁶ See the discussion of McKane, *Proverbs*, 532.

¹¹⁷ Garrett, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 173.

roots (יֶסֶד, יִסָּד) in the home, the second pair with society at large. Again in 29:15 the main issue in parental suffering is discipline, or in this case, the lack of it. This is one of the rare proverbs addressed to parents. According to the sages corporal punishment was an essential part of a child's education.¹¹⁸ The construction in v. 15 tells us that it is the rod and discipline that bring wisdom to a child, one positive and the other negative. One punishes unacceptable behavior, designated as shameful or disgraceful (מְבִיֵּשׁ), while the other teaches proper behavior. The parallel proverb (v. 17) gives another view of the same theme, that of the rest or delight a well-disciplined child will bring to a parent.

In vv. 16 and 18 the lack of discipline in society at large is seen in the thriving of the wicked and a society that has cast off all restraint (see NIV). There is the unusual statement in v. 18 regarding the lack of מְנַחֵם.¹¹⁹ This word is usually associated with the prophetic ministry (1 Sam 3:1; Dan 8:13; Nah 1:1; Ezek 12:27; etc.). In this proverb those who no longer possess the vision of the prophetic oracle are more or less equated with those who fail to keep Torah. Thus the proverb asserts the value of the law and the prophets. The highest standards of authority in this unit are parents and the Torah. Chaos occurs in the home and in society when these proper authorities are no longer recognized.

¹¹⁸ See Whybray, *Proverbs*, 402; cf. Prov 13:24; 22:15; 23:13-14.

¹¹⁹ LXX translates this word ἐξηγητής, "guide." Apparently the translator read מְנַחֵם or מְנַחֵם, as in Mishnaic Hebrew, "superintendent," according to McKane, *Proverbs*, 641. Whybray (*Proverbs*, 403) suggests "political leader" or "magistrate."

d. 28:7 (פָּלֵם)

Following an unusually long poem in 27:23-27 which was evidently part of a separate collection, the predominant structure returns to two-line sayings, most of which are antithetical. In Prov 28 there are only two sayings which specifically refer to Yahweh; however, the operation of divine norms seems to be implied throughout.¹²⁰ The structural complexities and verbal connections surrounding 28:7 are extensive, and for the most part there is little agreement among the commentators who address the issue.

The unit this proverb occurs in seems to extend from 28:3-11, according to Garrett,¹²¹ although Meinhold includes 28:2 in his breakdown based on the occurrence of the word מִבֵּין, which he translates "*verstehen / Einsicht haben*."¹²² This word also occurs in 28:7, and the root occurs twice in 28:5. Also important in this section is the word תּוֹרָה (vv. 4, 7, 9), which could possibly refer to parental instruction but is more likely referring to the Torah due to its association with piety and its contrast to רָשָׁע (v. 4) and תּוֹעֵבָה (v. 9). Another emphasis in this passage is the contrast between rich and poor, using a variety of terms to express these conditions (vv. 3, 6, 8, 11).

My own suggestion for understanding the structure of this section is

¹²⁰ Ploger, *Sprüche Salomos*, 332.

¹²¹ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 222.

¹²² *Die Sprüche*, 2.466: "Die Vorkommen des Verbs 'verstehen/ Einsicht haben' fallen durch ihre Häufigkeit auf, so dass sie gewissermassen Leitwortcharakter besitzen. Zwei von ihnen kommen im ersten und letzten Spruch vor (V. 2.11), so dass sie das Ganze umfassen."

to see it divided into two similar subunits encompassing 28:1-11. The first subunit is vv. 1-5, the second vv. 6-11, and can be broken down as follows:

- A 28:1 נָסוּ וְאִין־רֹדֶף רָשָׁע וְצַדִּיקִים כְּכַפִּיר יִבְטַח:
- B 28:2 בְּפֶשַׁע אֶרֶץ רַבִּים שָׁרִיָּה וּבְאָדָם מִבֵּין יָדַע כֵּן יֵאָרִיף:
- C 28:3 גָּבַר רָשָׁ וְעָשָׂק דָּלִים מָטָר סִחָף וְאִין לָחֶם:
- B' 28:4 עֲזָבִי תוֹרָה יִהְלֵלוּ רָשָׁע וְשֹׁמְרֵי תוֹרָה יִתְגָּרוּ בָּם:
- A' 28:5 אֲנָשֵׁי־רָע לֹא־יָבִינוּ מִשִּׁפּוֹט וּמִבְקָשֵׁי יְהוָה יָבִינוּ כָּל:
- A 28:6 טוֹב־רָשׁ הוֹלֵךְ בְּתִמּוֹ מַעַקֵּשׁ דְּרָכִים וְהוּא עֹשִׂיר:
- B 28:7 נוֹצַר תוֹרָה בֵּן מִבֵּין וְרָעָה זוֹלָלִים יְכָלִים אָבִיו:
- C 28:8 מַרְבֵּה חוֹנוֹ בְּנֶשֶׁךְ וּבִתְרֻבִּית לְחוֹנֵן דָּלִים יִקְבְּצֵנוּ:
- B' 28:9 מִסִּיר אֲזוֹנוֹ מִשְׁמַעַ תוֹרָה גַּם־תִּפְלְתוּ תוֹעֵבָה:
- A' 28:10 מִשְׁגָּה יִשְׂרָיִם בְּדֶרֶךְ רָע בְּשָׁחוֹתוֹ הוּא־יִפּוֹל וּתְמִימִים יִנְחִלוּ־טוֹב:
- A' 28:11 חָכָם בְּעֵינָיו אִישׁ עֹשִׂיר וְדָל מִבֵּין יִחְקְרוּ:

The advantage of this structure is that it provides a theological foundation for understanding the saying in 28:7 regarding the abuse of parents and keeps it from being treated in isolation.

The A elements contain the ideas which form the limits of the poem, that of pursuing, examining or assessing (v. 1 רֹדֶף; v. 5 בָּקֵשׁ; v. 11 חָקֵר).

There is also the initial contrast in v. 1 between רָשָׁע and צַדִּיקִים, setting the tone for the remainder of the unit, climaxed by the assertion of what they are able or unable to discern in v. 5, and the concluding evaluation of wisdom and discernment having little relation to wealth in v. 11. The issue

of integrity (תָּמַם) appears in vv. 6, 10 with observations that both deny and affirm the so-called conventional wisdom as seen, for example, in Job's three friends, viz. wealth is a sign of piety and righteousness. After he lost his wealth, Job was a model of v. 6, a "poor man who walked in his integrity" yet he was subjected to the criticisms of his three friends, who simply could not accept the possibility of a righteous person suffering the calamities which had come upon Job. Then v. 10 seems to affirm the idea of conventional wisdom by asserting that the one who leads the upright down an evil path will fall. Verse 10 is also unusual in that it admits that an upright person can be led down an evil path. If the teaching of the sages was as superficial as some have claimed there would be no admission of this.

Another contrast that is seen in vv. 6, 10, 11 is that of the rich and poor. While Proverbs does not praise the poor for their financial state neither are they condemned for it. The issue in v. 6 has to do with lifestyle and values. What is more valuable, wealth or integrity? The lifestyle and values motif is prominent in the book of Proverbs, and often expressed in terms of walking, path or way. In v. 6 we find the root הָלַךְ in the first colon and דָּרַךְ in the second. The parallel saying in v. 10, also part of the A element in this poem, has reference to this as well. In v. 10a there is a statement regarding the one who leads the upright בְּדֶרֶךְ רָע, "on a bad (dangerous?) path." Verse 11 is part of the couplet which summarizes and closes this unit and also contains a contrasting evaluation of the rich (עָשִׁיר) and poor (דָּל) regarding their ability to discern and assess. The rich

one is called "wise in his own eyes" but the poor, it is claimed, have discernment and are able to evaluate.

The emphasis of the B elements is that of the **תּוֹרָה**. In many places in Proverbs **תּוֹרָה** refers to the instruction given by parents (e. g., 1:8; 3:1; 4:2; 6:20; etc.; 6:23 may be an exception) but here seems to be divine instruction. Whybray is hesitant to equate it with "law" in the Deuteronomic sense¹²³ but accepting or rejecting this equation will depend on one's view of the dates of authorship for the books in question, neither of which is settled. In v. 7 the discerning son who keeps **תּוֹרָה** is contrasted with the wastrel or profligate, who disgraces his father. In v. 4 to keep **תּוֹרָה** is to stand against the wicked (**רָשָׁע**) and in v. 9 it is only those who obey **תּוֹרָה** whose prayers are acceptable. The three proverbs are grouped around the Yahweh-proverb in v. 5, which is part of the middle of this section.¹²⁴

The C elements of the poem (vv. 3, 8) are related in content to the concepts and vocabulary found in the A elements. The rich and the poor are again given the central focus, and the emphasis is on the treatment of the poor. A suggested emendation of **רָשָׁע** to **רָאשׁ** may slightly change the emphasis but not the main subject.¹²⁵ If this emendation is accepted (cf. NIV, NRSV) it presents a parallel between a strong ruler and rich man, a

¹²³ Whybray, *Proverbs*, 388-389.

¹²⁴ See the comments of Meinhold in this regard. He calls vv. 5, 7 "die Mitte des Abschnitts" (2.466) but he sees a different structure here than the one I am proposing.

¹²⁵ See Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 223; McKane, *Proverbs*, 628-629. Whybray (*Proverbs*, 389-390) opposes the emendation, but leaving MT as is results in the unusual expression **רָשָׁע גִּבּוֹר**, two words that are not linked elsewhere.

theme which will be repeated in a chiastic structure as part of the conclusion in v. 11, although לַיָּל, a synonym, is used there rather than Verse 8 uses the plural לַיָּלִים in its expression of the slippery nature of wealth, thus making material gain of dubious value.

The main point to the study of this unit occurs in v. 7, and to a lesser degree, v. 10. In v. 7 a son who disgraces his father through his wasteful lifestyle is contrasted with a son who obeys the Torah. Issues of authorship and editing are too complex to enter into at this point but it is my belief that Yahweh's Torah is in view here, regardless of what one may think of the role of parental instruction, for it is ultimately Yahweh's Torah which forbids the abuse of parents. And it may be that both parental torah and Yahweh's Torah are in view. This possibility should be left open due to the identical term used for the teaching of parents' and Yahweh's law. Parents taught their children Yahweh's Torah. Deut 6:7 could hardly be clearer on this point.

If this proverb is understood in a rural agricultural setting this is likely a reference to a son who eats and drinks more than his fair share of the produce that was harvested, leaving others to go without. Even in a more urban setting with an upper-class family, a son who did this would cause financial hardship on other family members, since it is likely that a son who eats and drinks too much works too little.

The root כָּלַם indicates a sense of disgrace which results from public humiliation.

In the Hebrew OT, the meaning of *klm* appears to stay within the realm of "disaster" and "disgrace," both active and passive. The root conveys the notion of disintegration. A person to whom *klm* is applied is degraded both subjectively and objectively. That person is isolated within his previous world, and his own sense of worth is impugned. He becomes subject to scorn, insult, and mockery, and is cut off from communication. A person can be actively put in such a situation, so that the semantic domain of *klm* must include "put to shame." It must be noted that "shame" and "disgrace" denote the consequence, conscious or unconscious...of antisocial conduct on the part of the person described by *klm*.¹²⁶

It occurs as a parallel to the root בּוֹשׁ about thirty times¹²⁷ showing these two roots have little distinction. The public humiliation involves having a son who has turned a deaf ear to the Torah and is no longer functioning as a productive member of the family or the community. Rather than place the needs of the family and community in a place of priority as this group-centered culture would encourage, this son has expended time and resources toward selfish indulgence. But a worse fate has happened to this son. Not only is the family shamed as a result of his behavior, but his prayers are classified as תּוֹעֵבָה, "abomination," indicating that Yahweh will no longer listen to his prayers as a result of the son turning a deaf ear to the Torah. Thus he has brought public shame to his family and divine rejection upon himself.

The role of this poem in family, social and cultic areas has been set out, and one final point needs to be made. We have seen how the religious

¹²⁶ S. Wagner, "כָּלֵם *klm*," *TDOT*, vol. 7 (1995), 186.

¹²⁷ E. g., Isa 48:16-17; Pss 35:4; 49:14[15]; etc., note *HAL*, vol. 2 (1974), 457.

background of the poem has emphasized words such as righteous and wicked (vv. 1, 4), evil (v. 5) and abomination (v. 9). As is often the case in Hebrew poetry, the center of the poem is the main point. It is significant that 28:1-11 has v. 5 as the closing of the first subunit, but viewed another way, one could see vv. 5-6 (both A elements in the poetic structure) as a couplet occupying center stage in the larger unit. It ties together many of the themes found in the poem and bases the entire pursuit of living on a relationship with Yahweh, as the motto of the book (1:7) has already done, thus echoing the message of the first nine chapters.

2. Cursing (לָלַץ)

Formal cursing was an important element of many ancient societies. This was true especially in Egypt, where names of enemies were written on clay jars, bowls or figurines, cursed magically and then smashed with the belief that the curse held the inherent power of carrying itself into effect. This can be seen in the Execration Texts, and there is hardly a temple wherein these shards and fragments of broken pottery and figurines have not been found.¹²⁸ Ancient tombs were often protected by curses imposed on anyone who might attempt to break in and pilfer the contents.¹²⁹ A curse was considered efficacious by ordinary

¹²⁸ D. B. Redford, "Execration Texts," *ABD*, 2.681-682. For examples of curses on foreign enemies see *ANET*, 328-329.

¹²⁹ The earliest of these are the Pyramid Texts written by or for the pharaohs; see R. O. Faulkner, *The Ancient Egyptian Pyramid Texts*, 2 vols. (Oxford: Clarendon, 1969). Later when eternal life was extended to commoners many of the same ideas and themes were found repeated in the Coffin Texts; see A. de Buck, *The Egyptian Coffin Texts*, 7 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1935-1961).

persons, although sometimes it was associated with a god, who was thought to hasten it toward its mark.¹³⁰

Curses play an important role in covenants, especially in the vassal or suzerainty treaties. These were listed, usually at the end (cf. Lev 26; Deut 27-30) to warn of the awful punishments and consequences which awaited the one who failed to observe the treaty.

A curse, like its opposite, blessing, was considered more than a mere wish. This is another reason why the sages placed great importance on guarding the tongue.¹³¹ Cursing parents was a capital offense in ancient Israel (Exod 21:17; Lev 20:9), and was also condemned in Egypt¹³² and Mesopotamia.¹³³ There are other words translated "curse," some of which occur in Proverbs,¹³⁴ but to discuss them would digress from the subject.

a. 20:20

This proverb seems to begin a unit which ends at 21:4, according to Whybray.¹³⁵ It is structured around the word נֵר translated "lamp" (20:20, 27; 21:4).¹³⁶ In this unit there are signs of editorial

¹³⁰ T. Lewis and R. K. Harrison, "Curse," *ISBE*, vol. 1 (1979), 838.

¹³¹ See Prov 26:2; 27:14.

¹³² Ani 7-8, which speaks specifically of the mother; see *AEL*, vol. 2 (1976), 141.

¹³³ Ahiqar 49. This text speaks of divine sanction against one who fails to honor his parents, using the metaphor of darkness which we will also see in Prov 20:20; note Lindenberger, *Aramaic Proverbs*, 135.

¹³⁴ See 3:33, which uses the root אָרַר; and 11:26, where בִּרְכָה is used euphemistically, cf. Job 1:10.

¹³⁵ *Proverbs*, 288, 298.

¹³⁶ MT points it נֵר in 21:4 but has a textual note suggesting נֵר on the basis of the other readings, presumably in 20:20, 27. The meaning does not change regardless of the pointing.

activity in placing clusters of Yahweh-proverbs in groups of three, 20:22-24; 20:27 (an exception) and 21:1-3. Royal proverbs also, seem prominent (20:26, 28; 21:1) with one (21:1) having reference to both Yahweh and the king. Whybray says the intention of this structure is to explore three relationships: between Yahweh and man; between Yahweh and the king; and between the king and other men.¹³⁷

This proverb tells us

מִקְלָל אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ יִדְעֶךָ נִירוֹ בְּאֵשׁ חַשְׁךְ:

Sufficient attention has already been given to the action in the proverb, that of cursing parents (see above), and the final observation made here is that the punishment threatened, in keeping with the penalty prescribed in the *Torah*, is death. An expression similar to יִדְעֶךָ נִירוֹ "his lamp will be snuffed out" is also found in 13:9; 24:20. Virtually every occurrence of the verb יָדַע is associated with a light being extinguished. Or it may be used metaphorically for death, see Job 18:5, 6; 21:17; Isa 43:17; Ps 118:12. The only exception is Job 6:17.

b. 30:11

The comment in this proverb on cursing parents occurs in the Sayings of Agur at the head of a list of social offenses¹³⁸ in

¹³⁷ *Proverbs*, 298.

¹³⁸ Wolfgang Roth, *Numerical Sayings in the Old Testament*, VTSup 13 (Leiden: Brill, 1965), 38. Roth's supposition that this is a numerical saying whose title-line has been lost is hard to accept. He supplies "There are three kinds of men whom Yahweh hates and four that are abhorrent to

30:11-14, each of which is condemned elsewhere in Proverbs. The larger unit extends from 30:1 to 30:14.¹³⁹ It has been divided from the rest of the chapter on form-critical grounds, since 30:15-33 are verses primarily composed of numerical sayings. The textual and translation problems in this chapter are daunting,¹⁴⁰ especially in the early part of the chapter, and would require digression from the main topic.

This small unit runs from 30:11-14:

דֹר אָבִיו יִקְלָל וְאֶת־אִמּוֹ לֹא יִבְרָךְ:	v. 11
דֹר טָהוֹר בְּעֵינָיו וּמִצָּאתוֹ לֹא רֶחֶץ:	v. 12
דֹר מַה־רָּמוֹ עֵינָיו וְעַפְעָפִיו יִנְשָׂאוּ:	v. 13
דֹר חֲרָבוֹת שְׁנָיו וּמִמָּכְלוֹת מְתַלְעָתָיו	v. 14
לֹאֵכֶל עֲנִיִּים מֵאֶרֶץ וְאֲבִיוֹנִים מֵאֶדָם:	

There is no formal statement of condemnation in these verses, the words "There are" (NIV, RSV) being supplied in the English translations. Each verse in the section begins with דֹר, usually rendered "generation," but here probably referring to a type of person, or a class of person.¹⁴¹

Beginning a consecutive series of poetical lines with the same word is a

him" in his discussion but there are other ways to treat this material, see the criticisms of McKane, *Proverbs*, 650-651.

¹³⁹ According to Ploger, *Sprüche Salomos*, 356, and Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*, 2.495, who observe the order in the LXX, which has 30:1-14; 24:23-24; then 30:15-33, although they do not include 24:23-24 in this part of their discussion.

¹⁴⁰ Note Ploger's extended comments in *Sprüche Salomos*, 353-355.

¹⁴¹ See P. Ackroyd, "The Meaning of Hebrew דֹר Considered," *JSS* 13 (1968): 7-8; R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, AB vol. 18 (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1965), 178, cf. 181.

feature found in Hebrew poetry as well as Ugaritic and Akkadian poetry.¹⁴² Cursing parents is mentioned in the same vein as moral filthiness¹⁴³ (v. 12), arrogance or pride (v. 13) and mistreatment of the poor¹⁴⁴ (v. 14). The poetry of v. 11 is structured so that a negative statement (לֹא יְבָרֵךְ) follows a positive statement (יְקַלֵּל) in the parallelism regarding the father and mother. The same pattern (negative following positive) is also seen in v. 12, which may set these off as a couplet, with עֵינָיו (בְּ) serving as a link between v. 12 and v. 13, and v. 14 contains עֲנִיִּים (NIV: "poor"), a word which has a similar sound and appearance to עֵינָיו (בְּ), "(in) his eyes."

In the passages which speak of cursing a parent the actions of a child who would do this are associated with the vilest of actions (30:11-14) and punishable by death (20:20).

3. Mocking (לְעַג) and Scorning (לְבִיזָה) 30:17

This proverb is also located in the Sayings of Agur, if we may place all of chapter 30 under the superscription in 30:1. Though it is not a numerical saying it is part of the second section of the chapter, vv. 15-33, which is dominated by this form.¹⁴⁵ It is difficult to determine why this

¹⁴² See Prov 30:4, where all four cola begin with מִי. For references to Ugaritic and Akkadian poetry see Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 276.

¹⁴³ Hebrew צֹאָה is used to refer to vomit (Isa 28:8) and human excrement (Isa 36:12). The metaphor in this proverb is of disgusting attitudes and actions contrasted to טְהוֹרָה.

¹⁴⁴ BHS apparatus suggests emending מַאֲדָמָה to מַאֲדָם in parallel with מַאֲרָץ. M. Dahood, *Proverbs and Northwest Semitic Philology* (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1963), 57-58, says מַאֲדָם here is a masculine form of מַאֲדָמָה with the same meaning.

¹⁴⁵ For discussions of what actually comprised the Sayings of Agur see Whybray, *Proverbs*, 406; McKane, *Proverbs*, 643-647. For the view that

isolated proverb was placed here among the numerical sayings. It may be that נֶשֶׁר, "eagle" or "vulture"¹⁴⁶ in v. 17, provided a forward link to v. 19, while the terms associated with verbal abuse of parents in this verse look back to v. 11.¹⁴⁷ This verse is unique among the specific passages in this study in that it is a quatrain rather than a couplet.¹⁴⁸

עֵין תִּלְעַג לְאָב וְתִבּוֹז לִיקָהֶת אִם
יִקְרוּהָ עַרְבֵי־נַחַל וַיֵּאכְלוּהָ בְנֵי־נֶשֶׁר:

In the parallelism of the four lines, the first two lines are a synonymous couplet, as are the last two. The two verbs at issue, לַעַג and בּוֹז, are seen as parallel ideas here as well as in Ps 2:7; 123:3; 2 Kgs 19:21//Isa 37:22; Neh 2:19; 2 Chr 36:16.¹⁴⁹ The main difference between the two verbs in use here seems to be that לַעַג tends to be an action whereas בּוֹז is more often an attitude.

Questions have been raised regarding the reading of לִיקָהֶת in v. 17b. The BHS apparatus suggests emending this to לִזְקַנָּה, while the Hebrew word in the text is usually translated "obedience" and seen as a unique form

30:1-9 is a unity see P. Franklyn, "The Sayings of Agur in Proverbs 30: Piety or Scepticism?" *ZAW* 95 (1983): 238-252; Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 176.

¹⁴⁶ HAL, vol. 3 (1983), 691: "Adler u. Geier."

¹⁴⁷ Ploger, *Sprüche Salomos*, 355.

¹⁴⁸ 30:14 is a quatrain but it was not the main proverb of the study in that passage.

¹⁴⁹ C. Barth, "לַעַג, la'ag," *TWAT*, vol. 4 (1984), 584. Among other parallel roots are שָׁחַק in Pss 2:4; 59:9; Jer 20:7; Prov 1:26; 2 Chr 30:7; שָׂמַח in Ps 35:19, 24; Job 22:19; and כָּלַם in Ps 44:16; etc. For more on בּוֹז see the discussion of 15:20 above.

of a similar word found in Gen 49:10, where it is also rendered "obedience."¹⁵⁰ However, the LXX has γῆρας μητρὸς here and this reading is followed by the Syriac version and the Targum, which both appear to have accepted להק as the root rather than יקה.¹⁵¹ The translation of להק "to be old" has some backing.¹⁵² Those who hold this view make the ל part of the root rather than the preposition. It is normal for the preposition to be used following ו according to D. Winton Thomas, and it can also govern the accusative, as can be seen in Prov 1:7.¹⁵³ This would give the translation "aged mother" or something similar.¹⁵⁴ However, accepting this translation requires a transposition of the consonants in this word and I do not believe there is enough manuscript evidence to warrant this change.¹⁵⁵

The consequences for the one who abuses a parent in this way are far worse than it may appear to the modern reader. Birds (נשר "raven," ערב "vulture") which are usually characterized as scavengers or carrion-eaters will pluck out the eyes of the one who abuses his parents and feed them to their young. This would make "eagle" (NASV, KJV, NKJV) a less likely

¹⁵⁰ Meinhold, *Die Spruche*, 2.508.

¹⁵¹ Note BDB, 429, but cf. *HAL*, vol. 2 (1974), 429.

¹⁵² G. R. Driver, "Some Hebrew Words," *JTS* 29 (1928): 394, observes that lhq occurs frequently in Ethiopic. J. C. Greenfield, "Lexicographical Notes I," *HUCA* 29 (1958): 212ff. claims the translation of להק by γῆρας in the LXX argues for their knowledge of this root to mean "to be white of hair." Cf. also *HAL*, vol. 2 (1974), 429.

¹⁵³ D. Winton Thomas, "A Note on לִי־יִקְהָת in Proverbs xxx.17," *JTS* 42 (1941): 154-155.

¹⁵⁴ Cf. Scott, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 179; Ploger, *Sprüche Salomos*, 355; Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 240.

¹⁵⁵ Contra Whybray, *Proverbs*, 415.

translation for נֶשֶׁר here, since eagles are predators and rarely scavengers.

The fate of the one who mocks and scorns a parent is thus graphically described. After a probable violent death, his remains will be left in the open, unburied, fit only for scavengers. This seems to be a violent death since "to shun parental discipline is to embark on a life characterized by lack of discipline and violence, and such persons are naturally prone to die a violent death."¹⁵⁶ Anyone who died in a more honorable fashion as a respected member of the community would have been given a decent burial, since leaving a dead body unburied was considered an ultimate indignity in the ancient world, cf. Deut 28:25-26; 1 Kgs 14:10-11; Jer 21:22-23; but note 2 Sam 21:10.¹⁵⁷

Thus the child who abuses, ridicules, mocks, or despises his parents will come to no good end. But even after his life is gone his humiliation is not over. This strong warning served to reinforce the commandment in the Torah to honor parents, and to graphically illustrate the consequences that come upon those who choose to ignore Yahweh's law.

4. Robbery (גָּזַל) 28:24

It is difficult to discern any poetical structure surrounding this proverb although there are many verbal links and associations. Sayings regarding the poor (vv. 19, 27) may be seen as the boundaries of this section, and virtually every proverb in this unit makes an observation regarding the general topic of wealth and poverty.¹⁵⁸ Other links in this

¹⁵⁶ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 240.

¹⁵⁷ J. Barton Payne, "Burial," *ISBE*, vol. 1 (1979), 556.

¹⁵⁸ Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*, 2.473, says "V.19-27 zielt auf das barmherzige Verhalten gegenüber dem Armen ab (V. 27f.), nachdem zuvor vor

passage are the use of **לָחַם** in vv. 19, 21; the repetition of **רָב**, vv. 20, 22, 27; the use of the root **חָסַר** in vv. 22, 27; **עֵיץ** and its plural in vv. 22, 27; the root **פָּשַׁע** in vv. 21, 24; and the word **בֹּטֵחַ** in vv. 25, 26.

This proverb is stated in very strong terms:

גֹּזֵל אָבִיו וְאִמּוֹ וְאָמַר אֵין-פָּשַׁע חֵבֵר הוּא לְאִישׁ מְשַׁחֵית:

The word translated "he who robs" (NIV), **גֹּזֵל**, is used of violent seizure of possessions in Mic 2:2, and is also found in Prov 22:22 in a prohibition against robbing the poor. In this proverb it is paralleled with **אִישׁ מְשַׁחֵית**, "man of destruction." This evidently indicates the worst kind of criminal,¹⁵⁹ and the use of **חֵבֵר** (NIV: "partner") here as well as Isa 1:23; Ps 119:63, means someone of like character.

The action depicted in this saying may be the ultimate in antisocial behavior for the sake of wealth since there is no institution more honored or basic to society in the wisdom literature than parenthood.¹⁶⁰ Though there is no law which specifically addresses this action the general commands to honor and respect parents would certainly exclude this type of behavior. A similar proverb is found in 19:26, see above. For all the horror of this action, it is the attitude of the offending child that makes this deed so

allem Erwerbsweisen (V.19-24) und die Grundfrage Gott- oder Selbstvertrauen (V.25f.) zur Sprache kommen. Die Herrschaft der Reichen über die Armen, das Gewinnstreben, aber auch das sonstige Verhalten, sind an den Aussagen zum Gottesverhältnis zu messen."

¹⁵⁹ According to Whybray, *Proverbs*, 396.

¹⁶⁰ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 227.

terrible, since the child sees nothing wrong in his actions. No legal sanction or punishment is stated here, thus making this proverb operate in the moral sphere rather than in a judicial setting.

C. Conclusion

To summarize the discussion on parents and public shame or mocking and physical abuse, we have seen that there are several sayings which address this subject, and range from general comments to specific activities, such as the refusal to participate in harvest or actually displacing aged parents from their home or robbing them. An examination of the literary structure of the sayings and the attempt to place these proverbs in their larger literary context (when appropriate) served to provide a basis for interpretation which avoided the atomistic treatment which isolates individual proverbs and disallows an interpretation in context. It also gave a theological basis for the interpretation of many of the sayings since Yahweh-proverbs were seen occupying an important place in the poetic structure.

The book of Proverbs seems to be, by and large, optimistic in tone in its overall view of the ability of a person to change surrounding circumstances, situations and society. In effect, individuals can have influence on the world around them and there is a pervading order to life which makes it sensible and worth living. Sometimes it is overly so since wealth, respectful and well-mannered children, long life and good reputation often seem to be virtual guarantees for those who live according to Yahweh's laws. However, there are several proverbs which break out of this mold. The "act-

consequence" or the "character-consequence" relationship is not always carved in stone. This study has shown the existence of the knowledge among the sages and those responsible for the wisdom movement that child-rearing was not formulaic. There would be those children who would choose to go their own way, regardless of the best and most sincere parental guidance and instruction. The proverbs dealing with the ungrateful child, the abusive child or the one who shames a parent do not necessarily cast blame on the parent, although there are those which do. Human beings are shown to be free to choose the path they will take, as well as being subject to the plan of Yahweh. Thus the doctrine of the "Two Ways" is an important feature of the book of Proverbs.

CHAPTER FOUR

EMOTIONAL SUFFERING IN THE BOOK OF PROVERBS

Introduction

This chapter will focus on the emotional aspects of innocent suffering in the book of Proverbs. Prominent in this part of the study are the words **לֵב**, **רִיחַ** and **נֶפֶשׁ**. The broader meanings and usages of these terms are well established and need not be discussed in detail. However, this does not mean there are no passages where the meaning of one or another of these words is unclear. The first part of the chapter will set out the various shades of meaning these words carry. Then I will show briefly that many similar ideas are found in other Semitic languages as well as in Egyptian. The final part of the chapter will be a detailed look at the various proverbs and sayings where the emotional aspects of innocent suffering are referred to.

I. The Somatic Expression of Ancient Hebrew Psychology

This section will focus on the anatomical terms used in describing or attributing human emotions. First, the Hebrew terms will be examined and then the similar ideas in the languages and cultures which surrounded and, in some cases, may have influenced ancient Israel. Due to the vast scope of this topic, the discussion will of necessity be limited.

A. Pre-Scientific Terminology and Broad Meanings

1. Heart (לֵב/לֵבָב)

The most prominent word in the study of Hebrew

psychology is the word **לֵב** or **לִבָּ**. Because of the large number of occurrences in the Hebrew Bible¹ the discussion here must be limited to the major and prototypical uses of this term since it carries a great many shades of meaning, thus the discussion will be of a general nature. Among its meanings are: (1) the anatomical organ, (2) the center of inner life, (3) the center of ethical and religious life, (4) a representative term of a whole person, and (5) a remote place.²

a. **לֵב** as the Anatomical Organ

In a pre-scientific society it was difficult to locate and describe the physiological functions of most internal organs. However, the heart was easily located in the thoracic cavity due to the sound made when the valves close.

The use of **לֵב** in reference to the anatomical organ is rare in the OT. Jer 4:19;³ Ps 38:11[10]; 2 Kgs 9:24; Hos 13:8 are places where this usage is in view. Another possibility is 1 Sam 25:37-38.⁴ 2 Kgs 4:31 may refer to the

¹ H.-J. Fabry, "**לֵב**," *TWAT*, vol. 4 (1984), 420: "*leb/lebab* begegnet im AT insgesamt 853mal, davon im hebr. AT *leb* 596mal..., *lebab* 249mal..., in den aram. Teilen *leb* 1mal, *lebab* 7mal."

² See the discussion of David G. Burke in "Heart," *ISBE*, vol. 2 (1982), 650-653.

³ H.-W. Wolff, *Anthropology of the Old Testament* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1974), 42, apparently feels very confident in calling this angina pectoris and a heart attack (myocardial infarction). At best we can say that the stress Jeremiah went through brought on an acute case of cardiac arrhythmia, but no more. Wolff's assessment bases too much on non-technical language and attempts to diagnose by non-specific symptoms. Jeremiah's complaint of inner pain may be angina pectoris, but this does not require myocardial infarction to result.

⁴ Wolff, *Anthropology*, 41, calls this a stroke. It could have been a

lack of sound within the chest cavity, though **לֵב** does not occur.

b. **לֵב** as the Center of Inner Life

As an indicator of inner life or psychical activity the words **לֵב/בֶּלֶב** may refer to emotions (Exod 4:14; Deut 28:47; Prov 14:13), volition and purpose (Deut 8:2; 1 Sam 2:35; Prov 16:9), or intellectual processes or perception (Deut 29:3[4]; 1 Kgs 8:47; Prov 18:15) and knowledge (Prov 2:2; 2:10; 4:4-5). As such these mental activities are those which English-speaking people would attribute to the "mind." However, the Hebrew language had no separate equivalent for "mind" and ancient scientific knowledge had not progressed sufficiently to understand the function of the brain.

c. **לֵב** as the Center of Ethical and Religious Life

By this usage **לֵב** often most approximates what modern English speakers refer to as "conscience."⁵ Since the heart functions as the seat of moral and ethical thought it may sometimes be used with adjectives such as "pure" (**טָהוֹר** Ps 24:4; 73:1) or "blameless" (**שָׁלֵם** 2 Chr 15:17) or a large number of other terms.⁶

coronary occlusion just as easily as a cerebrovascular accident. The language of the text, like the medical knowledge of the day, is not sufficiently clear to make an accurate diagnosis. Note Ronald F. Youngblood's comments on Nabal's death in "1, 2 Samuel," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. F. Gaebelin, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1992), 3.763.

⁵ According to Burke, "Heart," 652. Cf. 2 Sam 24:6[5].

⁶ See Gen 20:5; 1 Kgs 9:4; Deut 9:5; 1 Kgs 3:6; Ps 119:7; 1 Sam 7:3; Jer 3:10; Neh 9:8; Ps 78:37; 112:7. The negative qualities are mentioned as well: Ps 101:4; Prov 11:20; Jer 23:9.

d. **לב** as Representative of the Whole

The heart sometimes represents the whole person, Prov 24:17; Lev 26:41; Deut 11:16; etc. This is a figure of speech known as synecdoche. An example of this can also be found in Lachish Ostracon III:

ky. lb 'bdk dwh. m'z. slhk. 'l. 'bd

For your servant has been sick at heart ever since you sent (that letter) to your servant.⁷

e. **לב** as a Remote Place

The fact of the heart being an internal organ which was, by and large, inaccessible led to anthropomorphic expressions such as the "heart of the sea" (Exod 15:8; Prov 23:34; 30:19; Ezek 27:4; 28:2; etc.). In this expression it refers to unreachable depths. There is also the expression "heart of heaven" in Deut 4:11 which probably refers to the heights or the innermost part of heaven.

2. Spirit (**רוח**)

Etymologically this word is connected with a. root which occurs in all but the eastern branch (Akkadian) of the Semitic languages, and points to an initial awareness of air in motion, particularly "wind."⁸ Thus **רוח** is a term for a natural power, the wind, in 113 out of 389

⁷ Dennis Pardee, *Handbook of Ancient Hebrew Letters*, SBL SBS 15 (Chico: Scholars Press, 1982), 84; cf. *ANET*, 322. Both of these translations have "your servant" even though there is no second person suffix on 'bd.

⁸ A. R. Johnson, *The Vitality of the Individual in the Thought of Ancient Israel*, 2nd ed. (Cardiff: University of Wales, 1964), 23.

occurrences (see e. g., Hos 8:7) which is slightly less than one-third of its occurrences in the Hebrew Bible.⁹ According to E. Kamlah:

The idea behind *ruah* is the extraordinary fact that something as intangible as air should move; at the same time it is not so much the movement *per se* which excites attention, but rather the energy manifested by such movement. The basic meaning of *ruah*, therefore, is more or less that of "blowing."¹⁰

Other usages include breath (Judg 15:19; Num 16:22), the animate principle of life (Isa 42:5; Job 10:12), the seat of emotions (Ps 106:33; Job 7:11; Num 5:14), intellectual functions and will (Ps 32:2; 78:8), and then finally, God's Spirit (Ps 51:11). Again due to the large number of possible examples only a few of the representative ones have been cited.

3. Soul (נֶפֶשׁ)

This word has such a large number of occurrences and breadth of meaning and usages it is difficult to discuss in a brief way. The common meaning running throughout the Semitic languages in which it occurs (Hebrew, Akkadian and Ugaritic) is "throat," an exception being Arabic.¹¹ Some of the more obvious examples of נֶפֶשׁ being used as throat are Isa 5:14; Ps 69:2[1]; Jonah 2:6[5]. Other uses include animate forms of

⁹ Wolff, *Anthropology*, 32; but cf. Johnson, *Vitality*, 24, n. 1. Wolff cites 378 occurrences in Hebrew, 11 in Aramaic. For a breakdown of the word in the various blocks of the Hebrew Bible see S. Tengstrom, "נֶפֶשׁ," *TWAT*, vol. 7 (1993), 393-418. For a more topical treatment see F. Baumgartel, "πνεῦμα, πνευματικός, etc." *TDNT*, vol. 6 (1968), 359-367.

¹⁰ Eberhard Kamlah, "Spirit," *NIDNTT*, 3.690.

¹¹ Johnson, *Vitality*, 4.

life or life itself (Prov 8:36; Ps 30:4[3]; Lev 17:11; 24:17-18; Deut 12:23), person or individual (Lev 18:29; 23:30; Jer 43:6), the locale of emotion (2 Sam 5:8; Jer 13:17; Ps 35:9), the seat of desire (Deut 12:15; 14:26; 1 Sam 2:16; Ps 107:5, 9) and a form of personal pronoun (Gen 12:13; Judg 16:30 Job 16:4; Ps 54:6[4]).¹²

B. Similar Uses in Egyptian, Akkadian and Ugaritic

The initial section of this discussion will address briefly the Egyptian meanings behind the two words translated "heart," *ib* and *ha.ty*; then the uses of cognates in other Semitic languages will be mentioned, including Akkadian and Ugaritic.

1. Egyptian

a. Heart (*ib* and *ha.ty*)

Many of the same meanings of the Hebrew word for heart can also be found in ancient Egyptian, even though Egyptian and Hebrew are not cognate languages.¹³ The semantic difference between *ib* and *ha.ty* is difficult to determine. In Egyptian, "heart" may stand for the anatomical organ, the seat of reason and understanding, the residence of feelings, or may represent the character or nature of humankind, among other things.¹⁴

¹² See the categories of Ellis R. Brotzman, "Man and the Meaning of *לֵב*," *BibSac* 145 (1988): 401-407.

¹³ N. Shupak, *Where Can Wisdom be Found? The Sage's Language in the Bible and in Ancient Egyptian Literature*, OBO 130 (Goettingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 297-299. I use cognate in the sense of having the same root and used with similar meaning(s).

¹⁴ See Shupak's discussion in *Where Can Wisdom Be Found?*, 299-311; and H. Brunner, "Herz," *LA*, vol. 2 (1977), 1158-1168.

b. Spirit (*ba* and *ka*)

This aspect of Egyptian anthropology is almost completely lacking in the Israelite view, and Egyptian has no equivalent for the Hebrew רוח.¹⁵ The Hebrew ideas contained in רוח are not used in the word *ka* which is sometimes translated "spirit," or *ba*, the "soul." Since *ba* and *ka* are two separate elements in Egyptian anthropology they will be given separate treatment.

In Egyptian, another word, *akh*, is sometimes translated "spirit" because of its relation to the Egyptian word "to shine, to be resplendent," and thus signifies the transcendent life-form of a person and the transfigured existence in the afterlife.¹⁶

(1) *ba*

This word has been discussed at some length above in chapter one regarding the Egyptian document called *The Dispute of a Man with His Ba*.

(2) *ka*

The *ka* or the "double" of a person is sometimes seen as the life force within. H. Seebass says, "Der Ka is der 'Doppelgänger' des Menschen, bezeichnet aber zugleich 'Lebenskraft' und 'Nahrungsmittel.'"¹⁷ This spirit-double comes into existence when the

¹⁵ See S. Tengstrom, "רוח," *TWAT*, vol. 7 (1993), 391-392, for a brief discussion of the Egyptian concept, which seems tied to the "air" and its association with the *Luftgott* Amun.

¹⁶ John Baines, "Society, Morality and Religious Practice," in *Religion in Ancient Egypt*, ed. B. E. Shafer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 145; cf. E. Otto, "Ach," *LA*, vol. 1 (1975), 49-52.

¹⁷ H. Seebass, "נַפֶּשׁ," *TWAT*, vol. 5 (1986), 533.

child is born and enables the generations to continue and receive offerings in the next life.¹⁸ The *ka* can be seen as something passed down from parent to child or from one god to another.¹⁹

2. Akkadian and Ugaritic

a. Akkadian

(1) *libbu*

In Akkadian *libbu* carries the same range of meanings as Hebrew לֵב/לִב. ²⁰ Included in its many uses are heart as an anatomical organ, as the center of inner life, including emotions, volition, purpose, wish or desire, intellectual activity, and a remote or inner place.

(2) *napistu*

Since the root *rwh* does not occur in the eastern branch of the Semitic languages, the discussion will pick up with *napistu*.²¹ There is a very wide range of meaning displayed in this root. The large number of possibilities include life, vigor, vitality, good health, living things, person, somebody, (negated) nobody, capital case, personnel, persons of menial status, animals counted in a herd, body, self, breath,

¹⁸ Baines, "Society," 145; cf. also P. Kaplony, "Ka," *LA*, vol. 3 (1980), 275-277.

¹⁹ See Kaplony, "Ka," 276; L. H. Lesko, "Ancient Egyptian Cosmogonies and Cosmologies," in *Religion in Ancient Egypt*, ed. B. E. Shafer (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 92; and Pyramid Text §600.

²⁰ For an extensive list of the occurrences of *libbu* see *CAD*, vol. 9 (1973), 164-176.

²¹ As indicated above, see Johnson, *Vitality*, 23; and S. Tengstrom, "רִוּחַ" *TWAT*, vol. 7 (1993), 390.

livelihood, provisions, sustenance, throat, neck, opening, air hole and neckerchief.²²

b. Ugaritic

(1) *lb*

In the literature recovered from Ras Shamra the word translated "heart" is not as prominent as one might have expected. Too much significance should not be placed on this, however, since the relatively small number of occurrences of *lb* may be no more than accidental. Similar to its cognate languages, Ugaritic uses *lb* to mean the anatomical organ, the seat of emotion, the seat of desire, the locale of intellectual activity and as reference to a remote place.²³

(2) *rwh*

In the west Semitic languages *rwh* carries many similar meanings already attested in the above discussion on רִיחַ, making further comments unnecessary.

(3) *nps*

Due to the similarities between the Hebrew and Ugaritic languages, many of the meanings of Hebrew נֶפֶשׁ and Ugaritic *nps* overlap. Gordon gives the primary meaning of *nps* (possibly *napsu*) as "soul," along with "appetite" and "sexual appetite." He compares it to

²² *CAD*, vol. 11/2 (1980), 296; cf. Seebass, "נֶפֶשׁ," *TWAT*, vol. 5 (1986), 535.

²³ See the references listed under *lb* in J. Aistleitner, *Worterbuch der Ugaritischen Sprache* (Berlin: Akademie Verlag, 1965), 1616-1.67; as well as R. E. Whitaker, *A Concordance of the Ugaritic Literature* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1972), 395.

Hebrew and Arabic cognates which mean "appetite," "soul," "person," or, when used collectively, "people." It may also mean "throat" like the Akkadian *npst*.²⁴

In summarizing this section we can observe that the words used in this study of Hebrew psychology have similar uses in Egyptian and other Semitic languages, although Egyptian contains some ideas and implications the Semitic languages did not have due to cultural and religious factors.

II. Analysis of Specific Proverbs Related to Emotional Suffering

The previous section on terminology has helped to prepare the way for this part of the study by laying a foundation for the various terms used as references to emotions, or the location of the experiencing of emotions. First I will look at individual proverbs which use **לֵב** in a setting of emotional suffering, then **רוּחַ**, and lastly **נֶפֶשׁ**.

A. Heart (לֵב)

There are six proverbs which will be discussed in this section: 12:25; 13:12; 14:10, 13; 15:13; 25:20. In each case the discussion will be limited to issues which are directly tied to interpretation along the main theme.

1. 12:25

This saying is set in antithetical parallelism and contains a word-play on the similar sounds of the last word in each colon:

²⁴ UT, 3.446.

דָּאָגָה בִּלְב־אִישׁ יִשְׁחָנָה וְדָבָר טוֹב יִשְׁמָחָנָה:

The grammar in this proverb is difficult. According to Whybray the verse has two grammatical anomalies: first, דָּאָגָה, a feminine noun, has a masculine verb, יִשְׁחָנָה; and secondly, both verbs in the saying have feminine suffixes instead of masculine suffixes.²⁵ One attempt to solve this problem is to see the third feminine singular suffix on the verb referring to בִּלְ.²⁶ The problem of the gender of the verbs²⁷ may possibly be solved by comparing them to the energetic use of the ל as in Ugaritic.²⁸ These "nunnated" forms in Hebrew would bear witness to archaic forms, or at least the appearance of such.

Whybray sees no evidence of editing to make larger structures in chapter twelve but notes that vv. 14-25 are almost all concerned with various

²⁵ R. N. Whybray, *Proverbs*, NCBC (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 198. BHS suggests emending the יִשְׁחָנָה-- endings to יִשְׁחָנֵּה the third masculine singular suffix.

²⁶ See W. L. McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach*, OTL, (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 446. For an explanation of the gender problem that does not resort to emendation see Otto Ploger, *Sprüche Salomos*, BKAT 17 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), 147.

²⁷ G. R. Driver's collection of texts in which there is disagreement between the gender of the subject and the verb contains several proverbs, so this may not be quite as unusual as one might think, see his "Hebrew Studies," *Journal of the Royal Asian Society* (1948): 176. See also Stephen A. Geller, *Parallelism in Early Biblical Poetry*, Harvard Semitics Monograph 20 (Missoula: Scholars Press, 1979), 24.

²⁸ Cf. *UT* 1.72-73; and S. Segert, *Basic Grammar of the Ugaritic Language* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 91.

aspects of speech.²⁹ In the structures suggested by Meinhold and Garrett, there is agreement of a vague sort, with Meinhold seeing 12:24-28 as a group of proverbs while Garrett expands it to 12:23-28.³⁰ In Garrett's structure there is a six-verse parallel pattern:

- A : Caution and incaution (v. 23)
- B: Diligence and laziness (v. 24)
- C: Anxiety and joy (v. 25)
- A': Caution and incaution (v. 26)
- B': Laziness and diligence (v. 27)
- C': Life and immortality (v. 28)³¹

Meinhold goes to greater lengths to tie vv. 24-28 to the previous proverbs of the chapter:

Vom Inhalt her ergibt sich, dass sie alle mehr oder weniger deutlich auf Vorangegangenes im Kapitel bezogen sind. V.24 und 27 gehören durch je ein Vorkommen von "Nachlässigkeit" und "fleissig," die zueinander chiasmisch stehen, zusammen und klingen mit den Thema Fleiss-Faulheit an V.11 und V.9 an. V.25 erwähnt ein "gutes Wort" und nimmt die Thematik Rechtes and falsches Reden der Verse 13-23 auf. V.26 enthält den Gegensatz Gerechter-Frevler and verweist damit auf die Verse 1-12; V.28 bildet dazu einen generellen Abschlusssatz, in dem "Gerechtigkeit" erwähnt wird and--wie in V.26--das Wort für "Weg" vorkommt.³²

²⁹ Whybray, *Proverbs*, 190.

³⁰ See A. Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*, 2 Teile (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1991), 1.213-214; D. A. Garrett, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC vol. 14 (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 133.

³¹ Garrett, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 133. Garrett's suggested poetic structures sometimes suffer from a lack of real verbal links between the parallels. His titles for the various components can be vague and general at times, and often not reflective of true parallelism.

³² Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*, 1.214.

Both see the chiasmic structure in vv. 24 and 27. Since 12:25 fits no clear structural pattern we will leave it as a proverb that is not joined to any obvious context.

The root of the verb in the first line is a matter of debate. As it appears in the MT, the word is generally seen as based on the root **שָׁחַ**, "to bow down."³³ Hubbard suggests **שָׁנַח** "to sink" as the root³⁴ (cf. NKJV, "depression") and cites similar usage in reference to emotional despair in Ps 44:26[27] and Lam 3:20. Regardless of whether the root is **שָׁחַ** or **שָׁנַח** the notion of going down is present and the contrast with the verb in the next line, **שֶׁחֲקָהּ** shows it to be a negative idea. Dahood offers the possibility that this word is derived from the root **שָׁחַ** on the basis of Ugaritic parallels and the Hebrew noun **שָׁחַ** "inflammation," and suggests "feverish" as a translation here.³⁵ However, this seems strained, and there is no good reason to seek a parallel in Ugaritic when there are two roots in Hebrew that fit the context better.

The root of the word translated "anxious" occurs thirteen times in the OT. It signifies anxiety, with a shading toward the meaning "fear" in some places. In virtually every occurrence it seems to refer to the cares and concerns of everyday life and survival.³⁶ Despite the assurances of many

³³ HAL, vol. 4 (1990), 1351: *beugen, niederdrucken*.

³⁴ D. A. Hubbard, *Proverbs* (Dallas: Word, 1989), 223; cf. also G. R. Driver, "Hebrew Studies," 176.

³⁵ M. J. Dahood, *Proverbs and Northwest Semitic Philology* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963), 27.

³⁶ 1 Sam 9:5; 10:2; Jer 17:8; 38:19; 42:16; 49:23; Josh 22:24; Ezek 4:16; 12:18, 19. There seem to be two exceptions: Isa 57:11 speaks of fear and dread of other gods, while Ps 38:19[18] refers to being troubled by sin.

other proverbs such as 12:11, 12, 14, 21, 24 and 27, that hard work, righteousness and wisdom will pay off, it is interesting to note the formulation of a proverb like this. In a day and time when subsistence living was the norm it is easy to see how this kind of anxiety might weigh a person down. Since the cause of the anxiety is not specified we must leave it as the general stresses of daily life. In this setting the next line of the saying becomes all the more important. A "good word" to cheer or encourage would have been an important show of support and concern. The pressure on a parent to provide for the needs of a family must have been immense at times, since survival depended on the parent's ability in trade or agriculture, and was subject to the vagaries of climate and nature, quite apart from any sin or wrongdoing on their part.

2. 13:12

This proverb is also antithetic in its parallelism and comments on the results of hope being delayed, deferred or being "long drawn out,"³⁷ the word מִשְׁכָּח being based on a root; (מִשָּׁךְ) meaning "to draw, drag, seize."³⁸

In examining the poetic structure of the small unit composed of 13:12-19 there is general agreement among those who see smaller poems in the book of Proverbs that the phrases translated a "longing fulfilled" in

³⁷ D. Kidner, *The Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*, TOTC (Downers Grove: InterVarsity, 1964), 102, who says the verb here means delayed or denied by all reasonable expectations.

³⁸ HAL, vol. 2 (1974), 610: *packen, wegraffen, hinziehen, ziehen, schleppen*. In the *pu'al* with reference to Prov 13:12: *hingehalten*.

13:12b (תָּאָהָ בָּאָה) and 13:19a (תָּאָהָ נְהִיָּה) form an *inclusio*.³⁹ My own suggestion for structuring this small poem is as follows:⁴⁰

- A 13:12 תּוֹחַלַת מִמְשָׁכָה מִחֲלֵה-לֵב וַעַץ חַיִּים תָּאָהָ בָּאָה:
 B 13:13 בָּז לְדָבָר יִחַבֵּל לוֹ וִירָא מִצָּהָ הוּא יִשְׁלָם:
 B' 13:14 תּוֹרַת חָכָם מְקוֹר חַיִּים לְסוֹר מִמִּקְשֵׁי מוֹת:
 C 13:15 שְׂכָל-טוֹב יִתֵּן-חֵן וְדֶרֶךְ בִּגְדִים אֵיתָן:
 C 13:16 כָּל-עָרוֹם יַעֲשֶׂה בְדָעַת וְכֶסֶל יִפְרֹשׂ אֲוֵלֶת:
 C 13:17 מִלְּאֵךְ רָשָׁע יִפֹּל בָּרָע וְצִיר אֱמוּנִים מִרְפָּא:
 B 13:18 רֵישׁ וְקֶלֶן פּוֹרֵעַ מוֹסֵר וְשׁוֹמֵר תּוֹכַחַת יִכְבֹּד:
 A' 13:19 תָּאָהָ נְהִיָּה תַעֲרַב לְנֶפֶשׁ וְתוֹעֲבַת כֶּסֶלִים סוֹר מִרָע:

The A elements of the poem contain the saying that caused this passage to be included in this study. The issue of the "sick heart" (מִחֲלֵה-לֵב) in v. 12a is less a piece of advice and more a psychological observation, cf. 12:25a. V. 19a contains a similar idea to v. 12b but the parallel line in 19b is virtually unrelated, leading Whybray to assert that the two lines in v. 19 were originally two separate sayings. The reason for their joining was due to the similarities in sound between the two words which begin the respective lines, תָּאָהָ and תוֹעֲבָה, which may have led to their

³⁹ Whybray, *Proverbs*, 200, 205; Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 137; O. Ploger, *Sprüche Salomos*, 162; Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*, 1.222-223.

⁴⁰ My suggested structure is more similar to Whybray's than to Garrett's or Meinhold's, though Whybray (*Proverbs*, 205) believes v. 17 is an exception to the poetic structure but does not enlarge on this thought.

association in oral transmission.⁴¹ Ploger disagrees, saying that the second line presents a warning that to have one's desire fulfilled depended on making the correct decision to turn from evil.⁴² Thus there is no need to hold to two originally independent sayings which were later joined in this saying.

Prov 16:6b says by the fear of Yahweh one turns from evil (סִיּוֹר מִרָע), the same phrase as in v. 19b. In 16:6b we see the combination of turning from evil with the theme or driving force behind the book of Proverbs, that of the fear of Yahweh.⁴³ In v. 19b the opposite is stated. A completely different system of values is in operation regarding turning from sin. Those who fear Yahweh turn from sin, but for fools the same action is deemed an abominatic.

The B elements are centered around the topic of instruction, with vv. 13-14 being virtually identical in meaning. The terms תּוֹרָה, מִצְוָה, and דְּבַר are often used interchangeably in the first nine chapters to denote instruction,⁴⁴ and it is also the subject of 13:1. These two sayings reflect the

⁴¹ Whybray, *Proverbs*, 207-208, citing F. Delitzsch, see C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon*, tr. M. E. Easton (1872, repr. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972), 284. Meinhold (*Die Sprüche*, 1.225) also attributes the association of these two lines to alliteration.

⁴² *Sprüche Salomos*, 162-163.

⁴³ The association of fearing Yahweh and turning from evil is also found in Prov 3:7 where the verbs are couched as imperatives. Note that the assessment of Job's character in Job 1:2; 2:3 and the conclusion to the wisdom poem in Job 28 also combine these expressions, although אֱלֹהִים or אֲדֹנִי is used rather than יְהוָה.

⁴⁴ For דְּבַר see 4:4b, 20a; 8:6a; for מִצְוָה see 2:1b; 3:1b; 4:4c; 6:20a; 7:1b, 2a; and for תּוֹרָה see 1:8b; 3:1a; 4:2b; 6:20b; 7:2b. The latter two terms often occur as parallel members.

doctrine of the two ways, which is very prominent in the first nine chapters of Proverbs. The goals of instruction are stated positively and negatively in vv. 13-14 as a matter of life and death. Those who obey the instruction enjoy the reward, while those who ignore it are trapped in the snares of death.⁴⁵ The fountain of life (v. 14) is an image similar to the tree of life in v. 12, and is not intended to validate foreign mythology.

In v. 18 the words **מוֹסֵר** and **תּוֹכַחַת** are used in a saying that emphasized the importance of the discipline and instruction offered. The reward and punishment mentioned revolve around the social values of honor and esteem in the eyes of the community. Scorning instruction and ignoring discipline will bring a heavy penalty in poverty and shame. On the other hand, observing the teaching of the wise will bring life and honor.⁴⁶

The C elements are three examples of those who fail to heed the instruction given. Cited for their lack of insight are the unfaithful, the fool and the untrustworthy messenger. The unfaithful person will have difficulty in interpersonal relationships because of their lack of integrity. In a society where personal integrity was often based on a person's good word, the person who was unfaithful would have a difficult time in a barter system. Since their word may not be taken at face value others in the community might be hesitant to trade with them. The actions of the fool

⁴⁵ McKane, *Proverbs*, 455, suggests a Canaanite background for the image of the god Mot as a hunter or fowler entrapping the unwary in his snares. In a book that is thoroughly monotheistic and Yahwistic, the burden of proof rests with McKane to provide more evidence for this assertion.

⁴⁶ See the previous chapter for a discussion of honor and shame, and the importance of these two ideas in ancient Israelite society.

have already been discussed at length in the previous chapter and need not be repeated here. The untrustworthy envoy was one who delivered messages for another, whether in the royal court or outside it. In a day when communication was done by messengers who were often entrusted with the power of negotiation for, e. g., the price of livestock or the like, one who could not be trusted to negotiate fairly or truthfully would cause problems for both parties in the negotiation process.⁴⁷

Returning to the main saying in this discussion (13:12), we observe that the heart is sick (מַחֲלָה) when hope (תּוֹקֵלֶת) is delayed.⁴⁸ The word translated "sick" can have a variety of meanings, including sick, weak, diseased, grieved, injured, etc. Essentially it is a general term for physical weakness. Seybold says of this word, "Das Bedeutungspotential sowohl des Verbums wie der Nomina ist au charakterisieren als allgemeine Bezeichnung eines 'Zustands körperlicher Schwache.'" ⁴⁹ The root חלה is the basis of the proper name מַחֲלֹן (Ruth 1:2, 5; 4:9), one of Naomi's sons who died young. However this root can also be used to refer to conditions other than sickness, Jer 12:13; Ezek 34:4, 21; etc. Since the root can have such a broad range of meanings it is difficult to place this proverb specifically in the realm of physical illness to the exclusion of emotional pain. Hubbard takes it as depression rather than physical pain.⁵⁰

⁴⁷ McKane, *Proverbs*, 460-461.

⁴⁸ Paronomasia is present here to call attention to the contrast between מַחֲלָה and תּוֹקֵלֶת.

⁴⁹ K. Seybold, "חלה," *TWAT*, vol. 2 (1977), 964.

⁵⁰ *Proverbs*, 196. Building on Kidner's observation regarding the translation of מַמְשָׁכָה, Hubbard says that when hope is long drawn out, i. e.,

Disappointment or discouragement is set in contrast to the second line of the proverb: when a longing is fulfilled it is likened to a tree of life. The question of interpreting the image of the tree of life is a matter of ongoing debate. Some see it as an allusion to the tree of life in Gen 2:9; 3:23-24; or possibly to a tree growing in the temple grove which was constantly fed by the nearby streams of the water of life.⁵¹ Christa Kayatz discusses the tree of life in connection with taking hold of a particular tree in order to gain eternal life, a thought that was current in the mythology of the Egyptian cult of the dead.⁵² W. L. McKane is of the opinion that the expression "tree of life" in Proverbs is "just a pretty figure of speech."⁵³ Whybray suggests that the word עץ is more exactly "wood" or a wooden object, and frequently means stick or staff (2 Sam 21:19; 23:7; 2 Kgs 6:6; Ezek 37:16), so the phrase may be more accurately "staff of life."⁵⁴ The difficulty with Whybray's suggestion is that "staff of life" is no more clear in its intent or image than "tree of life." And accepting it as the translation in this saying suffers from the absence of usage elsewhere in the OT. It may be better to accept the idea of a tree in this proverb, realizing the value of a living tree in a hot, barren desert region for its shade and fruit.⁵⁵

rewards for hard work do not appear within a reasonable schedule, hopelessness and the accompanying depression often set in.

⁵¹ See G. Widengren, *The King and the Tree of Life in Ancient Near Eastern Religion* (Uppsala: Lundquistska, 1951), 19.

⁵² C. Kayatz, *Studien zu Proverbien 1-9*, WMANT 22 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1966), 105-107, cf. plate opposite 105.

⁵³ McKane, *Proverbs*, 296.

⁵⁴ *Proverbs*, 67.

⁵⁵ Whybray alludes to the possibility of this interpretation (*Proverbs*,

There are a few distant parallels to the idea of eating something to acquire eternal life in ANE literature. In the Gilgamesh Epic⁵⁶ Utnapishtim gives Gilgamesh a plant, which if eaten, would bestow eternal life. Unfortunately, a snake eats it while Gilgamesh is bathing. The Akkadian myth Adapa also shares the theme of eating something in order to acquire eternal life, but in the case of Adapa it is the bread or food of life rather than fruit from a tree, as in Genesis.⁵⁷ Some of these stories contain elements that are similar to the account of the fall in Genesis, but the contexts are very different and should not be pressed too closely as parallels.⁵⁸

In all four occurrences of the expression עץ החיים in Proverbs (3:18; 11:30; 13:12; 15:4) the definite article is missing. This is not the case in Gen 2:9; 3:23-24, where the phrase reads עץ החיים. The absence of the article in Proverbs may be so that readers will not make a direct association with the tree of life in Genesis.⁵⁹ In this case Kidner is correct in seeing this expression as a "graceful metaphor."⁶⁰ It is also due to the infrequent use

67) in reference to the occurrence of the same expression in Prov 3:18. He draws attention to Mesopotamian literature where eating the fruit of a sacred tree conferred immortality on the eater. Though I do not believe this is the concept behind this expression in Proverbs, the translation "tree of life" should be retained.

⁵⁶ 11:268-269; *ANET*, 96.

⁵⁷ *ANET*, 102.

⁵⁸ Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 1-15*, WBC vol. 1 (Waco: Word, 1987), 52-53. See also Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis, Chapters 1-17*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1990), 162-163.

⁵⁹ E. B. Smick, "Tree of Knowledge, Tree of Life," *ISBE*, vol. 4 (1988), 901.

⁶⁰ Kidner, *The Proverbs*, 65. For a discussion of expressions regard-

of the definite article in poetry,⁶¹ and this is the reason for the difference in the two occurrences. It is simply prose as opposed to poetry.

While we may never know exactly what the Hebrew sages had in mind regarding the "tree of life" it seems obvious that it was meant to be in contrast to the "heartsick" person. This contrast will be best understood in light of a metaphor in the absence of any solid indications of the mythical notions associated with the tree of life, whether it be in Genesis or in foreign mythology.

The frustration or discouragement in this proverb is not tied to actions that the heartsick person can be blamed for. This person seems to be a victim of harsh circumstances that apparently work against or hinder someone from achieving goals or receiving rewards for the work invested.

3. 14:10; 14:13

The two observations on human nature in 14:10 and 14:13 are part of a larger poem which occurs in 14:8-15.⁶²

A 14:8 חֲכָמַת עָרוֹם הָבִין דְּרָכֹוּ וְאוֹלֵת כְּסִילִים מְרָמָה: 14:8

B 14:9 אוֹלִים יֵלִיץ אֶשֶׁם וּבֵין יִשְׂרָאֵל רָצוֹן: 14:9

C 14:10 לֵב יוֹדֵעַ מָוֶת נִפְשׁוֹ וּבִשְׁמֹחָתוֹ לֹא יִתְעַרֵּב זֶר: 14:10

D 14:11 בֵּית רָשָׁעִים יִשְׁמַד וְאֹהֶל יִשְׂרָאֵל יִפְרֹיחַ: 14:11

ing life and death in Proverbs see his "Subject Study: Life and Death," 53-56, esp. 54.

⁶¹ See the discussion in F. I. Andersen and A. D. Forbes, "'Prose Particle' Counts of the Hebrew Bible," in *The Word of the Lord Shall Go Forth: Essays in Honor of David Noel Freedman in Celebration of His Sixtieth Birthday*, ed. C. L. Meyers and M. P. O'Connor (Philadelphia: American Schools of Oriental Research, 1983), 165-183.

⁶² Adapted from Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 142.

D' 14:12 יֵשׁ דֶּרֶךְ יֵשׁר לְפָנַי־אִישׁ אַחֲרֵיתָהּ דֶּרֶךְ־יָמוֹת:

C' 14:13 גַּם־בְּשָׁחוֹק יִכָּאֵב־לֵב וְאַחֲרֵיתָהּ שְׂמֵחָה תִּוְגָּה:

B' 14:14 מִדֶּרֶכָיו יִשְׁבַּע סוֹג לֵב וּמַעַלָיו אִישׁ טוֹב:

A' 14:15 פֶּתִי יֹאמִין לְכָל־דִּבָּר וְעֵרוֹם יִבִּין לֹאֲשֶׁרוֹ:

This series of proverbs appears to be set in a carefully balanced chiasmus expounding the general theme of appearance and reality. Each saying is antithetic. The two proverbs that are our immediate concern are the C elements of the poem and make statements regarding emotions that are fleeting and temporary, or simply superficial.

The poem is bracketed by the chiasmic occurrence of the word עֵרוֹם (14:8a, 15b) and its contrast with כָּסִילִים (14:8b) and פֶּתִי (14:15a). In the A element (vv. 8, 15) the prudent one⁶³ discerns his way or steps, while fools lack any sense of direction⁶⁴ (מְרֻמָּה) and the simple believes everything he hears (כָּל־דִּבָּר). Essentially the fool and the simple lack discernment (בִּין).

The B element presents some daunting grammatical problems, most notably v. 9, which literally reads "Guilt (or a guilt offering) mocks fools." A small emendation of the verb from singular to plural would allow us to read "Fools mock a guilt offering," or "Fools mock at guilt." The B element picks up the vocabulary of the previous saying in its reference to the אֱוִלִים (cf. v. 8b), presenting a contrast between the אֱוִלִים and יֵשָׁרִים, the former

⁶³ The word עֵרוֹם sometimes means cunning. Cf. *HAL.*, vol. 3 (1983), 839: Klugheit. Whybray (*Proverbs*, 214) suggests "intelligent person" as a translation for עֵרוֹם in these sayings.

⁶⁴ So McKane, *Proverbs*, 466-467.

mocking the אָשָׁם, while the latter discerns (בִּין cf. v. 8a) what is deemed רָצוֹן.⁶⁵ The issue of retribution for sin is in view in v. 14, the אָשָׁם in v. 9 being a parallel element to the root שָׂבַע, which does double duty for both lines in v. 14. In 14a it carries the sense of being filled, satisfied or having abundance in a negative sense and 14b has a positive connotation.

The C element of this small unit contains the two proverbs that are the main foci of this study. Both refer to the לֵב as possessing a condition that is not evident to the outward appearance. As the seat of knowledge the לֵב knows bitterness (מָרָה), a word based on the root מָרַר. The adjective מָר is frequently used to express an emotional response to a destructive or heart-rending situation, cf. 1 Sam 1:10; Job 3:20; 7:11 10:1; Gen 27:34; Est 4:1; Isa 38:15; etc.

The merism of מָרַר and שָׂמַח in v. 10 intends to cover the whole range of human emotions and the comment in this proverb refers to feelings too deep to share in public.⁶⁷ Others see this saying referring to emotional isolation.⁶⁸ This would be very unusual in a culture which downplayed individualistic expression, yet the originator(s) of this proverb knew there was a sense in which each person is a lone individual with feelings and

⁶⁵ According to McKane, *Proverbs*, 476. For discussions of the singular verbs with plural subjects see Whybray, *Proverbs*, 214-215; Ploger, *Sprüche Salomos*, 167.

⁶⁶ An unusual spelling due to the dagesh forte in the ר, a consonant which usually does not geminate. מָרָה occurs twice in Gen 26:35 (without the dagesh) and these are its only occurrences in the Hebrew Bible.

⁶⁷ Hubbard, *Proverbs*, 317.

⁶⁸ Kidner, *Proverbs*, 107-108; McKane, *Proverbs*, 471.

situations that may not be shared with others.⁶⁹ There are other proverbs which state or imply that only God has access to the most private parts of the human heart, 17:3; 21:2; 24:12; cf. also Ps 44:22[21].

The point of v. 13 seems to be that there is no complete separation of one emotion from the other, even the extremes. Or that even in the best of times there may be underlying grief over something, or that all emotional states are temporary. The word translated "ache" in v. 13 is based on the root **כָּאַב**. This root can be understood as pain or sorrow. Its cognates in Aramaic and Akkadian emphasize physical pain, while in Arabic the cognate stresses the emotional aspect.⁷⁰ The term paralleled with **יָכַזְב** is **תִּגְהָ**, from the root **יָגַה**, a noun that occurs also in Prov 10:1; 17:21; Ps 119:28. The use of these two terms in a parallel construction shows them to refer to an inner pain or emotional distress, without reference to a physical aspect, or at least; placing any physical aspect that might be present in a secondary position.⁷¹

The gender-matched parallelism of v. 13 functions to heighten the antithesis or contrast between the two parts of the saying.⁷² If vv. 10 and 13

⁶⁹ Whybray (*Proverbs*, 215) is of the opinion that this proverb shows awareness of the inviolate part of every person which no one can fully penetrate.

⁷⁰ J. N. Oswalt, "**כָּאַב**," *TWOT*, 1.425.

⁷¹ S. Wagner, "**יָגַה**," *TWAT*, vol. 3 (1982), 407: "Mit 'Kummer' ist nicht an einer einzelnen physischen oder psychischen Schmerz gedacht, sondern an eine Grundstimmung des Lebensgefühls, die sich aus dem unterschiedlichsten Erleben von Schmerz, Leid, Gram u. a. ergeben kann. 'Kummer' ist das Gegenteil von Freude und Jubel."

⁷² Wilfred G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry*, JSOTSS 26, 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1986), 125.

are truly part of a structured poem then the genders may function to emphasize the last line, which is feminine, and works as a sort of "punch-line" to the previous lines, which are masculine.

There are two important words common to both of these proverbs, לֵב and שִׁמְחָה, as well as נֶפֶשׁ functioning as a referent to "self."⁷³ In v. 10 לֵב probably carries the meaning of the inner person, and specifically the part that "knows," hence the translation "mind" would be appropriate here. In v. 13 לֵב is the location where feelings are experienced. There is no statement in either v. 10 or v. 13 which fixes blame or sin on the suffering person, which is all the more amazing when one notes the presence of the retribution principle in vv. 11, 14. The emotional suffering portrayed here is simply part and parcel of an experience common to almost everyone. This forces the reader to recognize that there is a sense of retribution, and that there are certain actions that will lead to negative results. However, there are also certain problems all people face that have little or nothing to do with sin or a fault on the part of the person. They are problems all people face at one time or another quite apart from any sin.

4. 15:13

It is difficult to construct a larger poetic structure for chapter 15,⁷⁴ although there are many linking verbal associations and thematic similarities. Vv. 8-9 can be taken as a pair, as well as vv. 10-11.

⁷³ The words מָרָה and נֶפֶשׁ are also associated in 1 Sam 30:6; 2 Kgs 4:27.

⁷⁴ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 143-154, esp. 150 argues for a large poetic unit which extends from 15:1 to 16:8.

As I will show below, vv. 12-15 are a small unit in an ABA'B' format, then vv. 16-17 are *Tob-Spruche*. The links are too complex to explain in complete detail.⁷⁵ In the proverbs surrounding v. 13 there are several verbal links, with a "vocabulary chain" forming in vv. 12-17 (and v. 11), but not necessarily having a similar theme.⁷⁶ In vv. 11, 13, 14 and 15 we find לֵב, while vv. 15, 16 and 17 are further linked by the occurrence of טוֹב.⁷⁷ The comparison made between the "joyful heart" and the "broken heart" in 15:13 is seen as a contrast of result. The happy face is antithetic to a crushed spirit. This may be seen more emphatically if Garrett's suggestion of a parallel structure in 15:12-15 is correct.⁷⁸

- | | |
|----|---|
| A | 15:12: לֹא יֵאָהֵב-לֵץ הוֹכֵחַ לוֹ אֶל-חֲכָמִים לֹא יֵלֵךְ: |
| B | 15:13: לֵב שִׂמְחַ יֵּיטֵב פָּנִים וּבְעֵצָבֹת-לֵב רוּחַ נִכְאָה: |
| A' | 15:14: לֵב נָבוֹן יִבְקֹשׁ-דָּעַת וּפְנֵי כְסִילִים יִרְעָה אִוֵּלֹת: |
| B' | 15:15: כָּל-יָמֵי עֲנִי רָעִים טוֹב-לֵב מְשֻׁתָּה תָמִיד: |

A closer look at vv. 13, 15 shows some parallel ideas:

⁷⁵ See Whybray, *Proverbs*, 225-238 for a brief discussion of the key word associations in this chapter. The latter part of chapter 15 contains many links to previous sayings in the chapter and is similar in theme to proverbs in other parts of the book. For example, vv. 26, 29 have similarities to vv. 8-9; and cf. v. 30 with vv. 13, 15. Other examples could be cited as well.

⁷⁶ Whybray, *Proverbs*, 225.

⁷⁷ See Ploger, *Sprüche Salomos*, 182: "Im mittleren Teil des Kapitels sind inhaltliche Zusammenhänge kaum erkennbar, doch sind gelegentlich Stichwort-Verbindungen festzustellen, so לֵב in den Versen 13-15 and טוֹב in den Versen 15-17."

⁷⁸ Garrett, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 153, n. 318.

- (1) happy heart//cheerful heart;
- (2) cheerful face//continual feast;
- (3) heartache//oppression;
- (4) crushed spirit//wretchedness.

These parallels occur in a chiasm, which reveals an intricate arrangement of structure and substructure.

In 15:13 we are told that a "happy heart" makes the face cheerful, but the results of a broken heart can be devastating. The NIV translates the phrase **עֲצַבַּת לֵב** "heartache." The root **עצב** has a wide range of meaning but here takes on the nuance of spiritual or psychical pain,⁷⁹ although this root is also associated with labor (Gen 3:17; 5:29; Isa 5:29; etc.), pain in childbirth (Gen 3:16, note the close proximity with "labor" in 3:17), and physical pain (Eccl 10:9).⁸⁰ When reference is made to emotional pain the word is not specific enough to designate a particular kind of pain. As we have it in this proverb, the expression **בְּעֲצַבַּת לֵב** can be understood as virtually any kind of emotional trauma which leads to a "crushed spirit." This should not be too surprising, since one would expect this kind of generality from a proverb.

5. 25:20

This proverb is set in a smaller poetical unit made up of 25:18-20, which is in turn part of a larger piece comprised of 25:2-27.⁸¹

⁷⁹ C. Meyers, "עצב," *TWAT*, vol. 6 (1989), 299.

⁸⁰ In 1 Chr 4:9-10 there is an extended word-play on this root regarding the name Jabez, the pain his mother experienced giving him birth and his own desire to avoid pain.

⁸¹ R. C. Van Leeuwen, *Context and Meaning in Proverbs 25-27*,

Garrett recognizes the placing of 25:18-20 together but does not treat 25:2-27 as an entire unit.⁸² Meinhold also groups the chapter under one main heading, "Konigsspruche and Arten von Selbstbeherrschung," but sees the material subdivided into three smaller units--vv. 2-10; vv. 11-22; vv. 23-28--with vv. 18-20 being treated as a subunit of vv. 11-22.⁸³

Difficulties abound in this proverb.⁸⁴ Driver almost totally reconstructs this proverb on the basis of two occurrences of the root נתר, the first meaning like the Arabic *natru(n)*, "plunging a weapon deeply in," and *natratu(n)*, "deep wound;" and the second usage similar to Egyptian *ntry*, Akkadian *nitiru* and Aramaic *nitra*, "natron."⁸⁵ His claim is based on the belief that the problem is a result of vertical haplography. His reconstruction, based on the LXX,⁸⁶ reads:

SBLDS 96 (Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1988). He treats 25:2-27 as a unit (57-86) and 25:18-20 as a form critical unit of sayings (64), dealing with relations to one's neighbor, 25:18-19; and propriety of behavior, 25:20 (85).

⁸² Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 208. He sees the three proverbs in 25:18-20 referring to people one should avoid: the perjurer, the undependable, and the tactless.

⁸³ Meinhold, *Die Spruche*, 2.415ff.

⁸⁴ McKane (*Proverbs*, 588) calls the textual problems associated with this saying "formidable." Whybray (*Proverbs*, 366) says the Hebrew text is "seriously corrupt, and no convincing restoration has been proposed."

⁸⁵ G. R. Driver, "Problems and Solutions," *VT* 4 (1954): 241. Natron is a very hydrated form of sodium carbonate, which is highly soluble in water, and effervesces with cold dilute acid, see Andree Rosenfeld, *The Inorganic Raw Materials of Antiquity* (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1965), 120.

⁸⁶ For this proverb LXX has:

Ὅσπερ ὄξος ἔλκει ἀσύμφορον
οὕτως προσπесὸν πάθος ἐν σώματι καρδίαν λυπεῖ,
ὥσπερ σῆς ἐν ἱματίῳ καὶ σκώληξ ξυλωῶ,
οὕτως λύπη ἀνδρὸς βλάπτει καρδίαν.

[מים על-נתר] מעדה בגד ביום קרה
 חמץ על-נתר שר בְּשָׂרִים על-לב רע
 [כסס בבגד ורקב לעץ כן תוגת איש מחלה לב]

(Like) water on natron is (one) removing a garment in cold weather;
 (Like) vinegar on a wound is (one) singing among singers with a heavy heart;
 (Like a moth in a garment or rot in wood,
 so is a man's grief making the heart sick.)

According to Driver the occurrence of the textual confusion was due to the positioning of **מים על-נבר** and **חמץ על-נתר** one above the other, resulting in haplography.⁸⁷ This reconstruction also requires Driver to emend MT's **בְּשָׂרִים** to **בְּשָׂרִים**, "among singers," claiming this change is "surely required by the sense; for the point is that one reveller with a heavy heart spoils good company."⁸⁸ While it might be doubted that this interpretation was truly the original intent of the proverb, I can agree with his translation of the preposition in the second line, which will be discussed more below. Ross suggests that the first line in v. 20 could be a dittogram from the previous proverb (v. 19), since many of the consonants are similar.⁸⁹

מועדת מבטח בוגד ביום צרה v. 19b
מעדה בגד ביום קרה v. 20a

⁸⁷ Driver, "Problems and Solutions," 242.

⁸⁸ Driver, "Problems and Solutions," 241-242.

⁸⁹ A. P. Ross, "Proverbs," in *Expositor's Bible Commentary*, ed. F. Gaebelin, 12 vols. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1991), 5.1084.

This idea, though it preserves the reading of the text as it stands, is still not very convincing and the LXX is too far removed to be of help in the matter, according to Ross.

It is probably better to stay with the MT and see two images at work here, which conjure up extreme reactions. The first is the removal of clothing on a cold day, and the second having to do with vinegar, an acid, being poured on natron, which would produce a bubbling reaction. This is not a pleasant thing, since it indicates that the specific qualities of the natron are being destroyed.⁹⁰

Aside from textual problems which make this saying difficult to interpret, the action described by the prepositions is not consistent. In the first action the preposition **כִּי** actually describes the "when" of the occurrence rather than the object receiving the action. Removing the outer garment is a negative action which might lead to great discomfort on a cold day, and Exod 22:26-27 says this garment was to be returned at night if the garment was taken in pledge, otherwise the owner would be forced to sleep without proper cover. At best this would cause discomfort but it could also be a factor in the owner suffering from hypothermia, which can have disastrous results, and lead to death if not remedied. The second action is that of pouring (though the verb is lacking) vinegar upon (**עַל**) soda, which results in a destructive chemical reaction. In the third line the "destructive" behavior is that of singing to a heavy or troubled heart (**לֵב כָּבֵד**). Though the action of singing to a heavy, troubled or grieving heart is consistent with the

⁹⁰ Kidner, *The Proverbs*, 159.

use of לְּ in the previous line of the saying, the action itself seems out of place. Music (or at least certain types of music) to a person who is discouraged, distressed or depressed often has a calming, soothing effect. One can note the incident of the similar effect David's music had on King Saul (I Sam 16:23). However, we are not told what type of music is in view in this proverb. It seems to go against consistent usage either way לְּ is taken, and we as modern readers may have to settle for ambivalency of meaning. If it is translated "to" in consistency with one of the most accepted translations of this preposition it then goes against a common notion that music is soothing. But if the translation "with" is allowed in order to make the actions seem more logical, it strains the parallelism of the previous lines. While the translation of לְּ will vary from one context to another,⁹¹ it would not be unusual to render it "with" in this saying.⁹² In fact, Driver has it this way (though I disagree with his interpretation of the proverb, see above) as well as Whybray⁹³ and McKane, who says, "[t]he singing of songs on a sad heart is...the same type of expression as marching on an empty stomach."⁹⁴ While it is not the most common way to translate this

⁹¹ Note the range in translation of this preposition by P. Jouon, *A Grammar of Biblical Hebrew*, rev. and tr. T. Muraoka, 2 vols. (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1991), 2.489-490; and cf. B. K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to Biblical Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 216-218.

⁹² M. J. Dahood, "Northwest Semitic Philology and Job," in *The Bible in Current Catholic Thought*, ed. J. L. McKenzie (New York: Herder and Herder, 1962), 69-70, suggests "in the presence of" as the translation of לְּ based on Ugaritic parallels and usage, and the similar occurrence in Job 33:27.

⁹³ Whybray, *Proverbs*, 367.

⁹⁴ McKane, *Proverbs*, 588.

preposition, it occurs often enough to be considered an acceptable translation.⁹⁵

Another possibility is that the word **עָרַב**, which is usually rendered in this proverb as grieving, sad, troubled, heavy, or the like, be understood in one of its most basic meanings--"evil." This gives the meaning of singing (a good outward action) with an evil (a bad inward motive) heart, i. e., a mixed circumstance, similar to the action of mixing an acid with bicarbonate of soda.

Although there is no outside influence mentioned in the saying that identifies the reason for the sadness, there is no ground for applying a strict doctrine of retribution. Nothing forces a reader or listener to posit a sin or wrongdoing bringing about this sadness or heaviness, if the word **עָרַב** is translated this way. The situation in this proverb is presented as a "fact of life," an ordinary, though unfortunate circumstance, that could happen to anyone.

Summarizing the findings regarding the term **לֵב** we note that all but one occurrence of the sayings which use this word in association with innocent suffering are found in Solomon B, and that one, 25:20, is in Solomon C. Four of the seven proverbs are antithetic (12:25; 13:12; 15:13; 17:22), while 14:10 and 25:20 are synthetic and 14:13 is synonymous. Three of the seven use either **וְעָרַב** or **וְנָפַשׁ**; as a parallel or contrasting term (14:10;

⁹⁵ See Gen 32:12; Exod 12:8, 9; 23:18; 34:25; 35:22; Lev 2:2; 3:4; 4:11; 19:26; Num 9:11; Deut 16:3; 22:6; 1 Sam 14:32, 33; 1 Kgs 15:20; Jer 3:18; Ezek 33:25; Hos 10:14; Mic 5:2; Job 38:32; 1 Chr 7:4; BDB, 755; *HAL*, vol. 3 (1983), 782.

15:13; 17:22), while the dominant expression in this group seems to be associated with the root שִׁמַּח, which appears in five of the seven (12:25; 14:10; 14:13; 15:13; 17:22).

B. Spirit (רוּחַ)

Under this heading there are four sayings, two of which (15:13; 17:22) have already been examined in some detail in the previous section. The other two are 15:4 and 18:14. In this section the discussion will be limited to issues surrounding רוּחַ.

1. 15:4

As noted above in discussions regarding Prov 15, there is no clear poetic structure, but seemingly a series of verbal links and thematic ties which are found throughout this chapter. Since these matters have been dealt with previously I will limit the discussion to this saying:

מִרְפָּא לְשׁוֹן עֵץ חַיִּים וְסֵלָף בָּה שֶׁבֶר בְּרוּחַ:

The point of this proverb is a comparison of the results of words on someone else's life, whether for good or bad. The effect of these words is communicated by the use of "tongue" to refer to words, speech, etc. This result is contrasted by calling the positive result a "tree of life"⁹⁶ and the negative result is described as a "crushed spirit." Though the English translations make this proverb sound like the idea of the crushed spirit is

⁹⁶ For more on the expression "tree of life" see the discussion under 13:12 above.

identical to the expression found in 15:13; 17:22 and 18:14 the wording here is actually quite different. In these proverbs crushed spirit is **רוּחַ נִכָּאָה** a feminine noun followed by a feminine adjective, whereas the phrase in 15:4, **שֹׁכֵר בְּרוּחַ** is a verbal noun followed by a preposition with a feminine noun. So literally we could translate this "crushed in spirit." This differs very little from saying that someone has a crushed spirit, and to draw a distinction in meaning here is to split linguistic hairs.

2. 15:13

Matters of poetic structure and vocabulary links have been discussed at length above and need not be repeated here.

The association of the root **נכא** with **רוּחַ** occurs only three times in the OT, and all three are in the book of Proverbs.⁹⁷ The similar root **נכה** occurs much more frequently and may have a physical meaning ("to strike, hit, beat, slay") and a related noun form (**מַכָּה**) means "plague" or "affliction" (Num 11:33; 1 Sam 4:8; etc.). There is also an occurrence in Ps 102:5[4] which uses **נכה** to describe emotional distress:

הוּכָה-כָּעֵשֶׂב וַיֵּבֶשׁ לִבִּי

Smitten like grass and withered is my heart.⁹⁸

The conclusion that can be drawn from the usage of the roots **נכא** and **נכה** is that though one might function primarily in the domain of the physical both can be found used to refer to emotion or emotional states.

⁹⁷ See also 17:22 and 18:14, which will be discussed below.

⁹⁸ NIV has "My heart is blighted and withered like grass."

The parallel of נִכְאָה רֹחַ in 15:13 is רָעִים 15:15. The similar expression בָּרוּחַ שֹׁכֵר in 15:4 is also noted. Concerning the word רָע, the root is often set in contrast to :In, showing these two words to be corresponding opposites,⁹⁹ and this is the case in 15:15, where NIV translates it "wretched."¹⁰⁰ It is also possible that the adjective רָעִים was intended to call forth subtle hints of the secondary meaning of רָעַע, which is "to shatter," making itself a closer parallel to נִכְאָה in 15:13 and שֹׁכֵר in 15:4.¹⁰¹

3. 17:22

This antithetical saying has been discussed above in relation to the heart, but the purpose here is to examine the results of a crushed spirit. The expression נִכְאָה רֹחַ is again the focus and the cause of the psychosomatic expression תִּי־יָשׁ-גָּרָם, "dries up the bones."

This expression is contrasted with "good medicine" in the first line. The word גָּהֵה, translated "medicine," is based on a root whose Aramaic usage includes "to be set free from guilt, pain or disease" (cf. Hos 5:13).¹⁰² Whybray observes that this word occurs only here in the OT and the meaning is uncertain.¹⁰³ Driver takes it to be related to the Arabic *jihatu*,

⁹⁹ C. Dohmen, "רָעַע," *TWAT*, vol. 7 (1993), 586. The same is true whether it occurs as a verb, a noun, or an adjective.

¹⁰⁰ This word has a wide range of meanings, but the most common way to render it seems to be "evil," "bad," or the like, cf. Ploger (*Sprüche Salomos*, 177) and Meinhold (*Die Sprüche*, 1.253) who have *bose*; NASV has "bad"; RSV "evil"; NRSV "hard."

¹⁰¹ This observation is made by G. H. Livingston, "רָעַע," *TWOT*, 2.856-857.

¹⁰² E. B. Smick, "גָּהֵה," *TWOT*, 1.152.

¹⁰³ Whybray, *Proverbs*, 261.

"face" (cf. Prov 15:13),¹⁰⁴ but it is probably better to see it as a rare word meaning "healing" or "health."¹⁰⁵

In this saying we are told that a crushed spirit "dries up the bones." This is likely an observation on the effect of the psychological state on one's physical health, a fact now recognized by the medical field.¹⁰⁶ The expression used here is unique to the OT and carries with it a negative connotation. Though a different word for "bone" is used, this proverb can be compared with the similar idea found in Ezek 37:11:

וַיֹּאמֶר אֵלַי בֶּן-אָדָם הָעֲצָמוֹת הָאֵלֶּה כָּל-בֵּית יִשְׂרָאֵל הָמָּה הֵנָּה
אֹמְרִים יָבֹשׁוּ עֲצָמוֹתֵינוּ וְאֶבְדָּה תְּקִוְתֵנוּ נִגְזְרָנוּ לָנוּ:

Both גֶּרֶם and עֲצָם are used as affective organs.¹⁰⁷ In both cases, regardless of whether the word is גֶּרֶם or עֲצָם, the action of drying is seen in a negative way. The image lying behind this is a human skeleton bleaching in a hot, arid desert. This seems very likely in Ezek 37:11 and I suggest it here also as an image behind Prov 17:22. This stark physical image of the "long dead" would be a grim reminder of what emotional stress could do to

¹⁰⁴ G. R. Driver, "L'interpretation du texte masoretique a la lumiere de la lexicographie hebraique," *Ephemerides Theologicae Lovanienses* 26 (1950): 344.

¹⁰⁵ HAL, vol. 1 (1967), 174, has *Heilung*. In keeping with McKane's observation that this is a statement regarding psychosomatic relations (*Proverbs*, 506), it can be noted that Ploger (*Sprüche Salomos*, 206) and Meinhold (*Die Sprüche*, 2.294) both translate this word as *Wohlbefinden*.

¹⁰⁶ Note the comments of Hubbard, *Proverbs*, 207, in this regard.

¹⁰⁷ Of the two עֲצָם is found more often, see 15:30, where it parallels לֵב (cf. Isa 66:14; Jer 20:9; 23:9; Ps 22:15[14]); and 16:24 where it parallels נֶפֶשׁ (cf. Ps 35:9-10). As a figure for strength Gen 49:14 has גֶּרֶם, cf. Prov 25:15.

a person. The pressures of everyday living can sometimes be such a heavy drain on a person's inner strength that it feels like inner vitality is gone, or the "life juices" have simply dried up, leaving nothing but a "skeleton" of a person in its place. This proverb expresses an extreme, since bones are seemingly the most durable part of a person.

4. 18:14

There are no poetic structures obvious in chapter 18. The discussion of this saying will relate to similar vocabulary in 15:13 and 17:22.

רוח־אִישׁ יִכָּלֵל מִחֲלָהוּ וְרוּחַ נִכְאָה מִיִּשְׁאָנָה:

The similarities to 15:13 and 17:22 in terms of a common phrase and a contrast to a cheerful or a happy heart have been noted above. In each case the **רוּחַ נִכְאָה** is a sad or unfortunate case. But in the first two proverbs the **רוּחַ נִכְאָה** is contrasted to a pleasant or happy situation whereas the comparison in 18:14 seems to be between two cases of adversity, one being a physical illness, the other some type of emotional distress. The former situation is presented as endurable, the latter is less endurable. Complicating the interpretation is the occurrence of **רוּחַ** in both halves of the saying. Though **מִחֲלָה** can be translated in a variety of ways it usually has to do with physical injuries or disease. This proverb tells us that situations or circumstances arise in which a person may endure and survive a pathological illness only to be defeated by a psychological condition. Whether the psychological condition results from the illness or

injury, or whether it is a separate and unrelated problem is not the issue. If we understand the "crushed spirit" as depression, or some similar clinical problem, then it can be observed that this may refer to what we would now call the "will to live," which is sometimes a strong factor in the body's recovery process. It is often missing in those suffering from depression.

Each of the four proverbs examined in this category is antithetic, all four occur in Solomon B, and all four describe and contrast the results of a crushed spirit, regardless of whether the qualifying word used is שָׁבֵר (15:4) or נִכְאָר (15:13; 17:22; 18:14). In each case an anthropological term is used in the parallel construction to contrast with the crushed spirit. In 15:4 it is tongue (לִשׁוֹן); in 15:13 heart (לֵב); in 17:22 heart (לֵב) and bone (גִּרְם); and in 18:14 the contrast is made between two different types of strain or adversity that may be inflicted on the רֹחַ.

C. Soul (נֶפֶשׁ)

I recognize that נֶפֶשׁ does not carry the typical meaning which many modern day English speakers associate with it, and therefore it is a misnomer to call this section "Soul," but in order to remain consistent with previous reference and usage as well as easy identification this one-word translation has been retained. It is probably more accurate in this case to translate the word as "person."

Finding proverbs which associate נֶפֶשׁ with innocent suffering was much more difficult than locating ones using לֵב or רֹחַ. This may be due to the broader variety of translation possibilities involved with נֶפֶשׁ.

1. 14:10

This proverb is discussed in a previous section (II.A.3.) and need not be discussed again.

2. 28:17

For a discussion of the poetic structure of Prov 28 see the previous chapter, III.B.1.d. and III.B.4. The proverb in 28:17 is part of an unconnected series between two larger sections composed of 28:1-11 and 28:19-27.¹⁰⁸ It seems to contain no formal attachments or associations with either of the two larger pieces in the chapter; thus we will approach it as an individual saying:

אָדָם עֶשֶׂק בְּדָם־נִפְשׁ עַד־בּוֹר יָנוּס אֶל יִתְמָכו־בוֹ:

This proverb has both a theological and social sense. Theologically, the murderer may be oppressed (עֶשֶׂק) by a guilty conscience, and no one should attempt to make him feel better about his deed, or socially, the courts should punish murderers to the greatest extent allowed.¹⁰⁹ NIV interprets the passive participle עֶשֶׂק to refer to the action of a guilty conscience, a meaning not usually associated with this root.¹¹⁰ The second part of 'the proverb literally says "as far as the pit he will (or 'let him') flee," and is

¹⁰⁸ I do not see a tight poetic structure in 28:19-27 as I did in 28:1-11. In 28:19-27 there are many verbal links but I have been unable to discern a clear structure.

¹⁰⁹ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 225.

¹¹⁰ Note also RSV and the comment of Whybray, *Proverbs*, 394.

taken by NIV to be a reference to the grave, apparently as a term similar in usage to **שְׂאִיל**. The last part is a social injunction against rendering aid or assistance to those who are attempting to escape justice. Whybray observes that the verb in the last line is ambiguous and can also be translated "to seize."¹¹¹ This may be true but would make a nonsense statement out of the proverb, since it would then be encouraging the opposite action.

The use of **נֶפֶשׁ** in this saying is unusual in that it does not refer to the inner person, qualities, seat of emotion or intellect, as is so common with **לֵב** or **רוּחַ**. Here **נֶפֶשׁ** refers to a victim of a crime, specifically murder. RSV reflects this clearly: "If a man is burdened by the blood of another..." So **נֶפֶשׁ** functions as a reference to another person in this proverb. This is especially interesting and important since modern readers, particularly those who speak English, associate "soul," one of the more common translations for **נֶפֶשׁ**, with the immaterial part of humans, yet here it stands for a person, and specifically, a dead body. This will also be shown in the next proverb.

3. 29:10

There is virtually no agreement on the structure of Prov 29. Whybray sees very little structure for the entire chapter, with the possible exceptions of vv. 12-14 and vv. 25-26, which use references to Yahweh occurring in close proximity to those mentioning kings or rulers.¹¹² By far the largest structural development is seen by Meinhold, who believes 29:1-15 stands as a piece, with three subdivisions: vv. 1-7, vv.

¹¹¹ Whybray, *Proverbs*, 394.

¹¹² Whybray, *Proverbs*, 397-398.

8-10, and vv. 11-15.¹¹³ Garrett treats the chapter in a more piecemeal fashion and suggests vv. 8-11 as a section, with v. 7 serving as a possible heading for vv. 8-11.¹¹⁴

If Garrett's structure is accepted it presents a unity of text indicated by the presence of catchwords in a chiasmic sequence. The text can be structured in an ABAB' format:

- A 29:8 אֲנָשִׁי לְצוֹן יִפְיחוּ קִרְיָה וְחֲכָמִים יִשְׁיבוּ אָף:
 B 29:9 אִישׁ-חָכָם נִשְׁפָּט אֶת-אִישׁ אֱוִיל וְרָגַז וְשָׁחַק וְאֵין נֶחֱת:
 A' 29:10 אֲנָשִׁי דָמִים יִשְׁנְאוּ-תָם וְיִשְׁרִים יִבְקְשׁוּ נַפְשׁוֹ:
 B' 29:11 כָּל-רוּחוֹ יוֹצִיא כֶסֶל וְחָכָם בְּאַחֹר יִשְׁבְּחֶנָּה:

In vv. 8, 10 there are the plural constructs אֲנָשִׁי לְצוֹן and אֲנָשִׁי דָמִים as close parallels, straddling a singular construct, אִישׁ-חָכָם in v. 9.

Garret observes the tight parallel structure of vv. 8, 10 with both verses having an evil subject + imperfect verb + object + conjunction + good subject + imperfect verb + object. The elements of the chiasms in vv. 9, 11 are composed of חָכָם and אֱוִיל (v. 9) to חָכָם and כֶסֶל (v. 11).¹¹⁵

Similar to 28:17, the proverb in 29:10 contains the use of "blood" (דָמִים)

¹¹³ Meinhold, *Die Spruche*, 2.481. Vv. 8-10 are structured around the *Stichwort* "Mann." He treats 29:16 as a stand-alone proverb and 29:17-26 as a unit.

¹¹⁴ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 229. He sees the chapter as a series of small groupings rather than the larger units suggested by Meinhold.

¹¹⁵ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 230, n. 78.

to refer to murder, דָּם being used in 28:17 and the plural here.¹¹⁶ The singular form is also used in Prov 1:11 and 6:17 to refer to the crime of murder, although there is little distinction to be drawn between the use of the singular as opposed to the plural for this word in legal texts.¹¹⁷

The second line of 29:10 is problematic. Some have observed the difficulty of the line if it is translated "and the upright seek his life." The expression which causes the problem is יִבְקֶשׁוּ נַפְשׁוֹ, which normally denotes an intention to kill. For some this presents the unthinkable possibility that the יִשְׂרָאֵל would be involved in criminal activity of this type.¹¹⁸ This difficulty has also led to a suggestion of יִבְקֶרֶוּ (cf. Ezek 34:11) in place of יִבְקֶשׁוּ resulting in the sense that the upright will place a high value on the life of the תָּם.¹¹⁹ G. R. Driver translates this line "The upright amply esteem his life," associating יִבְקֶשׁוּ with the Akkadian *baqasu*, which means "to enlarge."¹²⁰ Driver believed this root in the pi'el could mean "to value, esteem," but Whybray is unsure of this and concludes that no satisfactory solution has been found.¹²¹

¹¹⁶ The two forms are used indiscriminately, see B. Kedar-Kopfstein, "דָּם," *TWAT*, vol. 2 (1977), 250.

¹¹⁷ For a discussion of דָּם in legal and ethical contexts see Kedar-Kopfstein, "דָּם," 256-259.

¹¹⁸ This apparently has led to the emendation of יִשְׂרָאֵל to יִרְשָׁעִים in the BHS apparatus, cf. Whybray, *Proverbs*, 400 and RSV.

¹¹⁹ C. H. Toy, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book of Proverbs*, ICC (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1899), 510.

¹²⁰ G. R. Driver, review of *The Assyrian Dictionary of the Oriental Institute of the University of Chicago* by A. L. Oppenheim et al., Vol. II B. 1965 in *JSS* 12 (1967): 108.

¹²¹ Whybray, *Proverbs*, 401.

This problem can be solved by seeing the chiasmic arrangement of the proverb, with the **אֲנָשִׁי דָמִים** in the first line parallel to the pronoun in **יִבְקֶשׁוּ** in the second. The problem is based on the assumption that the one whose life is being sought is the **תָּם** and it is the "upright one" who is doing this. But the phrase can be translated "but the upright seek his life," referring to the wicked, using **נִפְשׁוּ** in the distributive sense, in reference to the **אֲנָשִׁי דָמִים**.¹²² This allows **תָּם** to be parallel with **יֵשָׁרִים** and the action of hating in the first line parallel to pursuing with lethal intent in the second line. Reading the proverb in this way gives a smooth parallel structure and negates the need for emendation, since the roots **תָּם** and **יֵשָׁר** occur as synonymous word pairs quite frequently in poetry, see Ps 37:37; Job 1:1, 8; 2:3; Prov 2:21; 11:3, 5; etc.; and it is common in poetry to have parallel members differ in gender or number.¹²³

Each of the three proverbs that are tied to innocent suffering and use **נִפְשׁוּ** do so from the standpoint of reference to person, whether to the self (as in 14:10) or to another (as in the murder victim in 28:17 and 29:10). In no instance does **נִפְשׁוּ** mean "soul" in the sense of inner qualities, character, etc., as is the case with **לֵב** and **רוּחַ**.

All three of these sayings occur in the Solomonic collections, one in Solomon B (14:10), the others in Solomon C (28:17; 29:10). In one of these, 28:17, there is a unique injunction against aiding a fugitive from justice, which combines a saying with a prohibition.

¹²² Garrett, Proverbs, 230, n. 79.

¹²³ For examples of poetic parallels with mixed gender and/or number Geller, *Parallelism in Early Biblical Poetry*, 24.

D. Conclusion

The previous examination of the three anthropological terms **נֶפֶשׁ**, **רוּחַ** and **לֵב** shows them to be much broader terms than one might initially expect. And the fact that these terms are often used together in poetic parallelism shows that they were seen as similar ideas as well. This study of Hebrew psychological terms was much more difficult to carry out than other parts of this study. Part of the difficulty is the ambiguity of the terminology.

Another difficulty, along with the intended ambiguity of the terms, is the fact that emotion, like pain is subjective and therefore difficult to gauge or measure on any kind of objective scale. Because of this subjectivity any evaluation of "emotional suffering" is a difficult task. Each person has their own "pain threshold" for physical trauma and the same is true of emotional distress. What one person finds completely debilitating may be only a minor nuisance for another.

But in the final analysis it is important for this study to point out the fact that the Hebrew sages were very much aware of emotional suffering by innocent people. There were no hard and fast rules which said that the righteous always prospered and the wicked *always* suffered, whether it was physical, emotional or spiritual. The seemingly superficial views of life portrayed in some of the individual proverbs where there are only two choices or two results is due more to the poetical structure of the sayings than a view of life held by the sages which was simplistic and unrealistically naive. The placement of some of the proverbs in larger

poetic structures allowed a broader context of interpretation. This was noted in many of the examples in this study, and the placement of the concept of innocent suffering in the context of the covenant allowed a theological interpretation to take place where previous studies only allowed a secular view.

The harsh view of retribution was a distinction for the Mesopotamians with their mechanical view of the world, and also for the Egyptians who had a static view of the universe with *ma'at* governing the scales of reward and punishment. The ancient Hebrews, by recognizing the possibility of an innocent sufferer, showed that they did not have a view of life that demanded the exercise of blind equitable retribution.

The proverbs examined in this chapter have shown that those who were behind the wisdom movement in ancient Israel were aware of the general stress of everyday living. In a culture where subsistence living is the norm this type of outlook should not be seen as unusual. Just like daily setbacks may occur in agricultural pursuits, one could also expect emotional setbacks as well. It was simply a part of life. The expected rewards or results of hard work were sometimes unfortunately delayed or denied due to unforeseen circumstances, or in some cases, the malign behavior of those who were living outside the standards of the community. In these cases there is no blame attached to the person who has suffered these setbacks.

CHAPTER FIVE

INNOCENT SUFFERING DUE TO THE WORDS AND DEEDS OF OTHERS

Introduction

The title for this chapter may be too general, yet in some ways this chapter is something of a "catch-all." It is the place where I must assess the proverbs which do not fit under any clear category, especially after the proverbs dealing with the legal system are discussed.

This chapter will look at the judicial process in the ANE and in Israel so that an analysis of the legal system may be carried out. Then we will briefly examine the legal process at work, taking examples from the OT to show how various legal situations were handled and what sort of steps were taken to see that justice was served.

Then the book of Proverbs will be combed for references to the legal process or comments regarding the justice system. Once this has been accomplished I will analyze the sayings which specifically address the matter of innocent suffering involving the legal process.

The last two major sections of the chapter will examine texts which deal with the pain of the innocent brought on by damaging words and harmful actions.

I. The Legal System

When we look at the administration of justice and the legal system of ancient Israel we must first understand that their judicial courts are not to

be understood in the modern sense. There was no appointed session of the court, and no lawyers functioning as prosecuting attorneys or defense attorneys in a professional sense. These came into operation only when a case was presented and only with a judge (or judges) and witnesses.¹ The same applies to legal terminology. Our modern terms rarely carry the same meaning when used in the OT.² An example of this is the almost uniform translation of שֹׁפֵט as "judge" because it often misleads or conceals other meanings which elucidate the function of the שֹׁפֵט in Israel.³

A. Judicial Process in the Ancient Near East

Since Israelite practices were essentially based on the same or similar principles as those of neighboring cultures, especially those of Mesopotamia, a brief discussion of justice in the ANE is in order. The discussion will be very limited here and serves only to give the background for the sake of further discussion rather than detailed specifics.

According to Boecker the process of law derived from arbitration.⁴ Since there was no formal judicial apparatus the initiative to begin legal proceedings lay with the concerned parties. There was no differentiation between civil offenses and criminal ones, nor was there an organized police force.

Before a case could be dealt with, the opponent was summoned

¹ F. C. Fensham, "Courts, Judicial," *ISBE*, vol. 1 (1979), 788-789.

² H. J. Boecker, *Law and the Administration of Justice in the Old Testament and the Ancient East*, tr. J. Moiser (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980), 18.

³ T. L. J. Mafico, "Judge, Judging," *ABD*, 3.1104-1105.

⁴ Boecker, *Law*, 21.

through a whole series of protocols, the summons consisting of a citation of the plaintiff given before witnesses and a reply by the defendant. The defendant was required to respond and could possibly do so in a way that satisfied the plaintiff's claim, thus avoiding trial. If the summons was disobeyed the person risked losing the ensuing lawsuit by default.

The judge then took his seat, once the parties had been assembled, evidently standing before the judge. Although written documents were often used as evidence, verbal testimony was the primary means of presenting one's side of the case.⁵ The testimony of witnesses was confirmed with an oath, sometimes with a single witness accepted as sufficient.

If there was enough evidence to allow a verdict the judge(s) pronounced one and passed sentence. Insofar as the sentence was considered binding, it drew the case to a close. However, it had to be accepted by both parties. An agreement or reconciliation was possible at any stage in the trial.⁶ If a party disagreed with a verdict there was no appeal to a higher authority, although a case might be accepted again and there could be a second trial over the same charge or charges.

The so-called "codes" of law used in the ANE were not intended to be complete treatments of all phases of life, so in this sense they should not be referred to as codes unless their non-comprehensive nature is realized.⁷ For example, the *Code of Hammurapi* has been divided into 282 para-

⁵ It is possible that a high illiteracy rate was a factor in this, since a written document was virtually useless if no one, or very few individuals involved, could read it.

⁶ For more on this whole process, see Boecker, *Law*, 22-24.

⁷ Samuel Greengus, "Law," *ABD*, 4.243; cf. Boecker, *Law*, 76.

graphs with no apparent organization or attempt at complete treatment of subjects at hand.⁸ It has been suggested that the *Code of Hammurapi* refers to cases that he himself judged.⁹ If this is true it would help explain the apparent lack of organization. Boecker, however, says, "The order must have been as understandable and practical to the contemporary user as it is objectionable and irrational to the modern jurist."¹⁰

But this still does not solve the problem of the non-comprehensive nature of the ancient lists of laws. Greengus suggests that the validity of the Babylonian laws was not dependent upon their being written down, since the art of writing was not necessarily an inherent part of the legal process.¹¹ Only the more complicated, potentially contestable situations generated a written law. Examples of those kinds of situations might be real estate sales and manumission. Other types of legal proceedings apparently needed no documentation. Legal documents and contracts in the Sumerian, Babylonian and Assyrian languages have been recovered from a wide geographical and chronological span. These business contracts were often sealed in a clay "envelope," which had all or part of the text of the contract on the outer shell. If it was necessary to read this document at a later date the envelope had to be shattered to gain access to the original text. Although there was a great deal of local differentiation there were widely established formulae for the various types of documents.¹²

⁸ Boecker, *Law*, 79.

⁹ R. K. Harrison, "Law in the OT," *ISBE*, vol. 3 (1986), 78.

¹⁰ Boecker, *Law*, 80.

¹¹ Greengus, "Law," 243.

¹² Wolfram von Soden, *The Ancient Orient: An Introduction to the*

In terms of organization, three types of legal proceedings were distinguished, depending on whether it was administered by (1) the king, (2) the temple priest, or (3) the elders.¹³ Obviously the most important of these was the king, who was often seen as the lawgiver and judge.¹⁴ However, the task of the administration of justice was not the king's alone. Other officials were appointed to act as judges by authority of the king, who usually got his authority from a deity. An example of this was Hammurapi, who got the right to judge from Shamash, the god associated with justice.¹⁵

It is unknown whether judges received technical training in legal matters. There are no texts which tell how they were prepared for the responsibilities of their profession following their basic education as scribes.¹⁶ It seems likely that a scribe would have to participate in the legal process for an extended period under the tutelage of a more experienced judge before being qualified to function as a judge.¹⁷ All we can deduce is that the scribe is the official who is responsible for preparing the documents for the case and directing the process since the scribe is often listed immediately following the citation of witnesses. There is no

Study of the Ancient Near East, tr. D. Schley (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994), 139.

¹³ Boecker, *Law*, 25-26.

¹⁴ Greengus, "Law," 244.

¹⁵ Fenshar, "Courts, Judicial," 789; cf. *ANET*, 164.

¹⁶ Von Soden, *Ancient Orient*, 141.

¹⁷ This is the view of von Soden (*Ancient Orient*, 141) but there is no way to prove it from the primary sources, since von Soden admits there are no texts informing us of judicial training.

indication that there was any person who functioned in the role of attorney.¹⁸

The temple priests held varying levels of importance at different stages. In the neo-Sumerian period there is virtually no evidence for priestly involvement.¹⁹ But as the temple grew in importance, so did its influence on the legal system. This might have been because of the prominent role oaths played in justice and that an oath could only be made in the temple area.²⁰ The oath was seen as a critical part of the legal proceeding in that the one giving testimony was taking a curse on himself if the testimony proved to be false. This was generally done before the symbol of a deity, and a lie under oath became an insult to the deity.¹¹ This is an important point to remember because there was no law in the strictly secular sense. Since the gods were responsible for the protection of law and justice as administered by the king and his appointees, all law was religious law.¹²

The third type of legal proceeding was handled by elders. This probably went back further than the king, chronologically speaking. A court of elders was most likely to be found dispensing arbitration and justice in the smaller towns and villages. According to Boecker, it is difficult to assess the relationship between royal justice and that of the elders

¹⁸ Von Soden, *Ancient Orient*, 144.

¹⁹ Boecker (*Law*, 25) suggests this might be due to the monarchy tolerating no competition.

²⁰ Boecker, *Law*, 25-26.

²¹ Von Soden, *Ancient Orient*, 143.

²² Von Soden, *Ancient Orient*, 131.

since the source material is so meager.²³ It is not known if the king sanctioned these legal decisions or not. The assumption is that the elders handled minor affairs, while the more important cases were dealt with by the king.²⁴

B. Judicial Process in Ancient Israel

When discussing judicial process in ancient Israel it is important to recognize the differences between historical eras in the way justice was dispensed. There was the semi-nomadic era with Moses as leader, the period of the judges, and then later, the monarchy. In each era there were different institutions for enforcing justice or arbitrating disagreements. The purpose here is not to discuss these institutions in detail, but to simply call attention to them.

The formal basis of Hebrew law was the covenant at Sinai.²⁵ Since Israelite law was covenant law the ultimate authority was seen as coming from God.²⁶ In this respect Israelite society was very different from neighboring societies. Although other ANE cultures saw their laws as divinely given (see above), no other nation was in covenant with a deity in quite the same way. This placed the laws, the patterns of behavior, what was acceptable treatment of fellow human beings, and the like, in a different frame of reference from the surrounding cultures.²⁷

²³ Boecker, *Law*, 26.

²⁴ Exod 18:13-26 may provide an analogy for this situation. Moses appointed a body of judges to handle minor disputes.

²⁵ Harrison, "Law," 80.

²⁶ Greengus, "Law," 244.

²⁷ For discussion of the antiquity of the covenant concept in Israel see chapter two. For a comparison of the way justice was viewed in Israel and

In early Israel during the semi-nomadic period Moses functioned as leader and judge, with a great number of minor judges or elders working under him (Exod 18:13-26). Upon entering the land and following the conquest the same procedure was followed, more or less, with the judges acting as military and political leaders who often gave legal decisions. Some were local, others may have had more widespread influence but none of the judges had the prominence and authority Moses had exerted.

When the monarchy was established the king became the judge, with the elders or priests in the small towns and villages functioning as minor judges. Although the situation under Saul was somewhat less organized, 1 Chron 26:29-32 says David appointed judges from among the Levites. Apparently a need to reorganize was recognized by Jehoshaphat, whose name means "Yahweh judges," with minor offenses being handled by the local elders or priests and the major ones referred to the king. This policy seems to have been carried on down to the exile.²⁸ During the exile the priests as well as the elders seemed to have acted as judges in the absence of a ruler (cf. Ezek 44:23-24). In the post-exilic community the appointed governor was responsible for justice, along with the elders.

C. The Legal Process at Work

The process the ancient Israelites might have gone through in dealing with a legal dispute must remain hypothetical. The following steps

Mesopotamia, see M. Weinfeld, *Social Justice in Ancient Israel and in the Ancient Near East* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1995), though Weinfeld's treatment rarely mentions the covenant basis for the application of justice.

²⁸ Fensham, "Courts, Judicial," 789.

might have been typical of the procedure in a small town or village: (1) confrontation, (2) arbitration, (3) consultation, (4) announcement of verdict, (5) sentence, and (6) punishment.²⁹ However, it must be emphasized that no complete court records exist and all reconstructions are tentative.

D. Proverbs and Legal Action

In reading through the book of Proverbs one can note the large number of references to the legal system or the judicial process. These references are found in every collection within the book except chapter 30, the Sayings of Agur.

Because of the large number of proverbs which refer to this subject, and their inclusion in almost all sections within the book, an analysis of the topic by section would be too fragmented and repetitious. In view of this difficulty I will briefly attempt to list the major themes relating to justice and the legal system, with no intent to be exhaustive or to exegete each proverb.

1. False Witness/False Accusation

The most numerous category of proverbs dealing with the legal process are observations regarding giving false witness and false accusations.

Those which mention the false witness are: 6:19; 12:17; 14:5, 25; 19:5,

²⁹ This is based on the hypothetical case used to illustrate the process in D. A. McKenzie, "Judicial Procedure at the Town Gate," VT 14 (1964): 100-104. For the sake of brevity I have omitted Hebrew terminology and OT references. These may be seen in McKenzie's article. This type of reconstruction must remain hypothetical since there were no court stenographers and we have no record of court proceedings.

9, 28; 21:28; 25:18. These proverbs tend to be statements saying what the false witness does or what will happen to someone who gives false witness. None of these proverbs were formulated as prohibitions, i. e., "do not..." although there is certainly a commandment in the decalogue (Exod 20:16) that is intended this way, even though it is worded with the much stronger **אל** plus imperfect.

Other proverbs deal with false accusations: 3:30; 24:28; 25:7b-8, 9-10. These are prohibitions, some with the typical **אל** plus jussive or imperfect followed by a motive clause, and differ from the previous type not only in grammar but also in audience. These prohibitions are directed against those who might bring about legal action which harms the innocent. The proverbs that make observations regarding false witnesses are directed toward those called by a litigant to testify before the judge(s). So we see in the collections of Proverbs advice given regarding both instigating lawsuits as well as being called upon to testify in them.

2. Reversal of Justice

In Solomon B (10:1-22:16) there are proverbs that refer to the reversal of justice due to dishonest judges, who are called "abomination" (17:15), and bribes, which may be paid to a witness or a judge (17:26). The reversal of justice is called **לא־טוב** in 17:26 where the innocent are punished. Another **לא־טוב** statement speaks of showing partiality to the wicked and depriving the innocent of justice. In 13:23 an unnamed agent causes a poor man to lose the crop he had worked for. All three of these proverbs will be addressed in more detail below.

The only saying outside the Solomonic collections dealing with the reversal of justice is in the Further Sayings of the Wise in 24:23b-25, which warns judges not to pervert justice, with the reason given that one who does this will be cursed and denounced. Positive results are also given to show the rewards of honesty in judging.

3. Value of the Legal Process

Chapter 21 of Proverbs (Solomon B) has three proverbs which reflect the value and positive results of the legal system in society. In 21:3 we are told that justice is more acceptable than sacrifice, whereas in 21:11 the value of justice is seen when a mocker (מְצַחֵק) is punished (עָנָה [ב]), cf. 17:26). Here justice is portrayed as instructional. When the mocker is punished the simple (פְּתִי) gain wisdom. The brevity of this proverb makes it difficult to determine whether the simple is equated with the mocker, or is a bystander who learns by seeing what happens to the mocker. Another positive result of the legal system functioning properly is that it brings joy to the righteous but terror to those who do evil (21:15), presumably working as a deterrent to crime.

Other proverbs which speak of the value of the judicial process are 16:8 and 17:10. In 16:8 a sage observes in a מְעַט...טוֹב statement that a "little with righteousness is better than wealth gained by injustice." In a similar fashion to 21:11, in 17:10 a sage compares the value of punishment meted out by the courts (here, flogging a fool) to that of a rebuke to a discerning person. The "hundred lashes" was more than double the prescribed number of forty (Deut 25:2-3) and probably meant to communicate an unlimited

number, i. e., the fool (כָּסִיל) never learns, no matter how much punishment is given.

Although the value and results of the judicial process were generally seen as positive there is also a warning in 29:9 (Solomon C) that entering litigation with a fool (אִיל) could cause an uproar and disrupt society.

4. Royal Justice

In Solomon B there are three proverbs which speak of the king's role as one who enforces justice.³⁰ The proverb in 16:10 is striking for its description of a king's word as an oracle. Normally, "oracle" (קֶסֶם) is used to refer to divination of pagans and false prophets, but here it speaks metaphysically of the king's deep, mysterious wisdom, cf. 2 Sam 14:17, 20.³¹ There is a strong Egyptian parallel to 16:12 if one is willing to see *ma'at* as a parallel to צִדְקָה.³² But I believe equating *ma'at* with צִדְקָה in a royal context fails to take into account the large differences between the office of king in Egypt and that of king in Israel.³³ It also

³⁰ For a detailed discussion of the king's role in enforcing justice see Boecker, *Law*, 40-49; Weinfeld, *Social Justice*, 45-56.

³¹ Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, NAC vol. 14 (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 156. R. N. Whybray, *Wealth and Poverty in the Book of Proverbs*, JSOTSS 99 (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1990), 51, n. 1, points out its usual association with pagan divination.

³² The possibility of an Egyptian parallel is discussed by J. A. Crenshaw in "The Sage in Proverbs," in *The Sage in Israel and the Ancient Near East*, ed. J. G. Gammie and L. G. Perdue (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1990), 214. In my opinion it is problematic to equate *ma'at* with צִדְקָה, see chapter two above.

³³ See the discussion of the roles of kingship in these two countries in H. A. Frankfort, *Kingship and the Gods* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1948; repr. Phoenix Books, 1978), 337-344.

ignores the nature of *ma'at*, which simply could not and did not exist in a Hebrew context.³⁴

Another proverb along similar lines as 16:12 is found in 20:8. This "idealized"³⁵ view of royal authority was not always reflected by Israelite or Judahite kings. The need for moral insight in governing and dispensing justice was an acute one, just as it is today.

The next two proverbs are found in Solomon C, the collection compiled by the scribes of King Hezekiah (25:1-29:27). In 29:4 and 29:14, critical attitudes³⁶ toward the monarchy are expressed regarding matters of security and stability. A nation's stability is based on the king's enforcement of justice,³⁷ according to 29:4, whereas 29:14 says a king's throne will be secure if he judges the poor fairly. One of the chief duties of a king was to dispense equity and guard the rights of every individual. This was especially needful in the case of the poor who have no strong political base of support and are the most readily taken advantage of.

In 31:8, 9 the Savings of Lemuel, there is further confirmation of the royal responsibility for the poor. These admonitions may be another indication of the international character of wisdom.³⁸ Lemuel is unknown, and

³⁴ Again, see the discussion in chapter two above, which addresses this matter in more detail.

³⁵ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 176.

³⁶ Whybray, *Wealth and Poverty*, 53.

³⁷ W. L. McKane, *Proverbs: A New Approach*, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1970), 637.

³⁸ Other royal instruction includes the Egyptian *Instruction for King Merikare* (*ANET*, 418-419) and the Babylonian *Advice to a Prince* (*BWL*, 110-115).

מִשָּׁא, translated "oracle" in NIV and NASB, could be Massa³⁹ (cf. RSV), a north Arabian tribe.⁴⁰ In these proverbs the king is to speak out on behalf of the mute,⁴¹ who are physically unable to speak out in their own defense, and the poor and needy (עָנִי וְאֶבְיָר), who may not be able to garner proper respect in society to gain a fair hearing, or may be taken advantage of by more wealthy litigants.

5. The Legal Process and Everyday Life

In Solomon A there is a short essay in 6:30-35 comparing the lot of a thief and an adulterer in the legal process and how society views them. Even if the thief is required to pay back sevenfold (6:31), which is more than double what the law required (see Exod 22:1-8), and it destroys him financially, the adulterer is worse off. Not only is he stupid because he destroys his finances, but much more seriously, he destroys himself (6:32). Even worse for the adulterer, the legal system is incapable of compensating for the wrong done in the eyes of the jealous husband (6:34-35), and no amount of repayment can replace what was taken. Whether or not capital punishment was carried out (Lev 20:10) things would never be as they once were.

In the Sayings of the Wise there are admonitions not to engage in

³⁹ But see NIV textual note, and cf. O. Ploger, *Sprüche Salomos*, BKAT 17 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1984), 369.

⁴⁰ A. Meinhold, *Die Sprüche*, 2 Teile (Zurich: Theologischer Verlag, 1992), 2.517; cf. McKane, *Proverbs*, 407.

⁴¹ Some commentators see "mute" (אֵלֵּם) as a figure for those who may be intimidated at the legal process (e. g. R. N. Whybray, *Proverbs*, NCBC [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1994], 424), but I see no reason why this word could not mean mute in the sense of physically unable to speak.

behavior which abuses the poor because Yahweh will be their defender in court, 22:22-23. In this set of admonitions it is advised not, to exploit the poor (לֹא) or take legal advantage of the needy (עֲנִי) because Yahweh will avenge them. Both lines of v. 22 probably refer to the same thing: the use of judicial procedures, such as the hiring of perjured witnesses or the bribing of judges, to defraud the poor of their rights.⁴²

Proverbs 19, part of Solomon B, contains two proverbs, 19:18, 19, which deal with practical issues regarding the legal system. In 19:18 parents are told to discipline a child in order to avoid having him put to death, as Deut 21:18-21 allows.⁴³ In this passage a rebellious son can be brought before the elders and charged with being a profligate and a drunkard, where upon conviction he could be stoned to death. While no evidence exists in the OT that this was ever carried out, it must have been a deterrent in a society which had no organized professional police force or probation officers.

Although 19:19 is obscure, McKane envisions a forensic background.⁴⁴ The one who fails to control his temper and commits impulsive crimes should be left to pay his own penalty. The hope here, of course, is that this person will soon learn self-control. Relieving someone of legal consequences may have the result of the person acting in excess again,

⁴² Whybray, *Wealth and Poverty*, 94. Whybray also points out the common theme these admonitions reflect in ANE instructions, citing the Egyptian Tale of the Eloquent Peasant. See also chapter one above.

⁴³ For more on this see my discussion in "The Doctrine of the 'Two Ways' in the Book of Proverbs," *JETS* 38 (1995): 508-509.

⁴⁴ McKane, *Proverbs*, 529.

leaving them in the same situation as before, requiring a fine to be paid. And worse, it may provide another opportunity for a crime to be committed, thus causing someone else to be another victim of his wrongdoing.

In 24:7, in the Sayings of the Wise, a fool (כֹּחַל) is shown to have nothing to say in court since wisdom is lacking. In a legal setting, where judicious insight is at a premium, the fool can offer nothing worth hearing.

In 29:7 (Solomon C) there is an observation regarding justice for the poor. The righteous are said to be concerned over this matter, the wicked are not. This stands to reason, since Yahweh has expressed much interest in looking out for the poor. Those who are righteous would be more likely to hold interests similar to Yahweh, whereas the wicked would be less likely.

In 29:24 there is a word of advice for a thief's accomplice. According to Lev 5:1 anyone who has direct knowledge of a crime must respond and give testimony in court. To fail in this makes that person guilty before God. "Oath" (NIV), אָוֶן, can also mean curse, since to break an oath is to put oneself under a curse.⁴⁵

The last two proverbs discussed under this heading are both found in the concluding poem of the book in the Sayings of King Lemuel regarding the good wife (31:10-31). While the "city gate" in 31:23 and 31:31 may only be a general reference to public activities⁴⁶ it would also include legal procedures, since the city gate was often the place where legal cases were heard and decided.

⁴⁵ Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 233.

⁴⁶ McKane, *Proverbs*, 669-670.

6. How Can Justice Be Understood?

Just as wisdom was often hard to come by for the sages, justice was also sometimes difficult to determine. Prov 18:17 deals with this quandary, observing that one side of a case may sound correct until the other party presents his side. Participants in our legal system are very frequently beset with the same problem. Faulty memory, false information, misinterpretation of events, lying on the witness stand, concealment of information, etc., all have the possible effect of leading to incorrect verdicts. How did the ancient Israelites determine justice?

According to the sages learning wisdom would aid in this. Among the purposes of the book in 1:3 is to do "what is right (צֶדֶק), just (מִשְׁפָּט) and fair (מִיֶּשֶׁרִים)." Learning from the sages (note the instructional address, 2:1) in 2:6-9, 12-15 would give the wisdom of Yahweh and enable students to understand justice, among other things.

In the speech of Lady Wisdom in 8:12-21 there is reference to rulers governing in justice, רוֹזְנִים יִחְקְקוּ צֶדֶק (8:15-16), based on wisdom, which comes ultimately from Yahweh, note 8:22ff.

Finally, 28:5 sums up the matter: "Evil men do not understand justice, but those who seek Yahweh understand it fully." This proverb, tells us that understanding justice is based on the pursuit of the knowledge of Yahweh himself. Justice is based on Yahweh's law. The law is based on the covenant. The covenant relationship with Yahweh gave Israel its basis for ethics, morality and human relationships, rather than economic or social motives. In this way a well-ordered society guaranteed the rights of

the individual.⁴⁷

E. Analysis of Individual Proverbs Regarding Innocent Suffering and the Legal System

Under this heading I will discuss four proverbs (3:30; 13:23; 17:15; 17:26) with an eye to how innocent suffering is treated in the book of Proverbs in relation to the legal system. Some of these passages have been discussed before, and matters of poetic structure and verbal links may have been addressed elsewhere. When this is the case I will draw attention to the fact rather than repeat the previous discussion.

1. 3:30

This proverb, a prohibition against bringing an unnecessary lawsuit against a neighbor, is part of a poetic unit⁴⁸ beginning in 3:21 with the instructional address "my son" and continuing through 3:35. This passage will also be discussed in more depth below.

In 3:21-26 reasons are given for the addressee to observe the instruction offered. They center on the concepts of security and safety. Following this are four prohibitions against types of actions that will harm society in 3:27-30. The first two (vv. 27-28) are stated in ways that indicate that the reader should not fail to do good, whereas the last two (vv. 29-30) prohibit harmful behavior. The last section is a prohibition against blatantly

⁴⁷ See John H. Walton, *Ancient Israelite Literature in Its Cultural Context*, rev. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), 87-92, for a brief comparison of the different purposes and ways law functioned in Egypt, Mesopotamia and Israel.

⁴⁸ For more details on the structure division see Whybray, *Proverbs*, 69-70.

criminal activity, followed by a motive clause which is expanded into a statement of Yahweh's retribution (3:31-35).⁴⁹

In 3:30 there is a specific injunction against a lawsuit intended to harm the innocent:

אַל-תָּרוֹב⁵⁰ עִם-אָדָם חֲנָם אִם-לֹא גַמְלָךְ רָעָה:

The word translated "for no reason" (חֲנָם) is the same word used by the Satan when Job's piety is questioned (1:9), and also Yahweh's response (2:3) in describing the Satan's inciting action which caused damage to Job, who was undeserving of such treatment.

The reasons for this prohibition would be very much the same then as today. The wasting of resources, time, and effort in order to carry out a frivolous lawsuit would cause a drain on a person, especially a poor person, who could not take time away from making a livelihood or providing for a family. And it would also tie up other people who had to function as judges and witnesses, distracting them from legitimate cases, or from their own daily occupations.

⁴⁹ See my discussion of this passage in relation to this passage in chapter two above. W. G. E. Watson, *Classical Hebrew Poetry: A Guide to Its Techniques*, JSOTSS 26; 2nd ed. (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1995), 278-279, cites the repetition of אַל plus jussive in Prov 3:25-32 as a dramatic effect of emphatic negation

⁵⁰ If we are to see any consistency in the grammar of this passage אַל-תָּרוֹב should be read as תָּרוֹב in keeping with the other verbs, cf. *BHS* textual note.

2. 13:23

Following Garrett I see a small poem or grouping of proverbs in an ABAB' pattern in 13:22-25:⁵¹

- A 13:22 טוֹב יִנְחִיל בְּנֵי-בָנִים וְצָפוֹן לַצַּדִּיק חֵיל חוּטָא:
 B 13:23 רַב-אָכַל נִיר רָאשִׁים וַיֵּשׁ נִסְפָּה בְּלֹא מִשְׁפָּט:
 A' 13:24 חוֹשֶׁךְ שִׁבְטוֹ שׁוּנָא בָנוּ וְאַהֲבוּ שְׁחָרוּ מוֹסֵר:
 B' 13:25 צַדִּיק אָכַל לְשֹׁבַע נִפְשׁוֹ וּבָטָן רְשָׁעִים תִּחְסֹר:

The linking vocabulary between the A elements is "son" (10) in vv. 22a and 24a, and in the B elements, the root אכל in vv. 23a and 25a.

The specific proverb dealing with legal injustice is v. 23, which is an antithetical contrast of result, rather than a type of person, as seen so frequently in this section of Proverbs.⁵² This proverb is also characterized by a metrical rhythm and alliterative assonance.⁵³

Through no fault of his own, a poor man⁵⁴ loses the abundant produce of his field due to injustice. There is no specific agent cited as causing the unjust circumstances. This leaves the situation undefined,

⁵¹ Proverbs. *Ecclesiastes*, 139.

⁵² I. e., contrasts between the wise and the fool, the righteous and the wicked, etc. The antithetical saying is a dominant stylistic feature in Prov 10-15, according to R. E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature*, FOTL vol. 13 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1981) 50; cf. Meinhold, *Die Spruche*, 1.19.

⁵³ Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 315.

⁵⁴ McKane (*Proverbs*, 463) reads רָאשִׁים in its usual sense of "head, chief, notable or grandee." In a textual note Ploger (*Sprüche Salomos*, 157) says, "Eine besser Parallele ergibt die Lesung רְשָׁים ('Armee') statt רָאשִׁים ('Haupter')." Garrett agrees with the translation, but ties רָאשִׁים to the root רוֹשׁ, "poor" (Proverbs. *Ecclesiastes*, 139, n. 274).

and the cause of the injustice may be from outside the poor man's sphere of activity or influence, or it may be due to his actions, if we see v. 25 working in conjunction with v. 23. Since the situation is left undefined it may be caused by a natural act, such as fire or locusts, which are not under the jurisdiction of any legal code, but quite often those who suffer these types of tragedies question the "justice" of such events.

In light of the poetic structure of the grouping it seems that a general theme of providing for the needs of one's family dominates these four antithetical sayings. The inheritance left for a good man's grandchildren is contrasted to the wealth of a sinner, which will be lost to the righteous (v. 22). Discipline is emphasized in v. 24 as an important influence in child-rearing. It contributes toward a child being considered righteous by peers in the community. However, this process is not mechanical or automatic. Injustice may occur due to one agent or another (v. 23), but the grouping closes with a general maxim (v. 25), that the righteous will be provided for but the wicked will not. Garrett's comments along this line are particularly apt:

On the one hand it may be injustice in society (i. e., it is not the family's fault, and their hunger points to a need for changes in the system). On the other hand, poverty may be a result of sin in the family. Addiction to alcohol, indolence, and financial irresponsibility are all potential causes of poverty, although the terms "righteous" and "wicked" imply divine favor or disfavor as well. Proverbs takes a balanced position; it neither dehumanizes the poor on the grounds that they are to blame for all their troubles nor absolves the individual of personal responsibility.⁵⁵

⁵⁵ *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 139-140.

3. 17:15

For discussion of the vocabulary links and structure of Prov 17 see chapter 3 III.A.4. above.⁵⁶

The Hebrew terminology used in this saying makes it clear that a legal setting is in view:

מַצְדִּיק רָשָׁע וּמַרְשִׁיעַ צַדִּיק תּוֹעֵבַת יְהוָה גַּם־שְׁנֵיהֶם:

Acquitting the wicked and convicting the righteous--
Both are an abomination to Yahweh.⁵⁷

The first line of this proverb reverses the normal phrases "acquit the innocent" and "convict the guilty" as seen in Deut 25:1, where they define the proper functions of judges. The perversion of the legal system is condemned as תּוֹעֵבַת יְהוָה, one of the strongest expressions of disapproval found in Proverbs.⁵⁸

This is not unique, of course, since corrupt judges were a target of

⁵⁶ Whybray (*Proverbs*, 259) believes there is a link between 17:15 and vv. 11, 12, and 13 of that chapter, all of which speak of the mysterious fates which will befall the enemies of society.

⁵⁷ Author's translation. NIV is very close to this, but RSV is less clear that this is a judicial situation.

⁵⁸ "Abomination" indicated that which offended another's sensibilities, according to B. K. Waltke, "Abomination," *ISBE*, vol. 1 (1979), 13-14. A stronger meaning is claimed for the word by R. E. Clements, "The Concept of Abomination in the Book of Proverbs," in *Texts, Temples and Traditions: A Tribute to Menahem Haran*, ed. M. V. Fox et al. (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 1996), 211-225, who calls it "abhorrent behavior."

condemnation in ANE literature as well as the OT.⁵⁹

4. 17:26

This proverb should be understood in connection with 17:23, which comments on the problem of bribes and their effect on justice.⁶⁰

שֶׁחָד מִחֵיק רָשָׁע יָקָה לְהַטּוֹת אֲרָחוֹת מִשְׁפָּט:	v. 23
גַּם עֲנוֹשׁ לִצְדִיק לֹא-טוֹב לְהַכּוֹת נְדִיבִים עַל-יִשְׂרָאֵל:	v. 26

The two sayings contain a contrast between the wicked (v. 23a) and the righteous (v. 26a), both make remarks on financial matters (bribes, v. 23a; fines, v. 26a) and there is a similar sound to the words which begin the second line of each saying (לְהַטּוֹת, v. 23b; לְהַכּוֹת, v. 26b).

The two matters in 17:26 are the fining of the righteous and subjecting nobles to corporal punishment, in a statement that begins with גַּם, often left untranslated in English versions.⁶¹ Imposing a fine (עֲנוֹשׁ) is the pre-

⁵⁹ In Egypt virtually the entire *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* is concerned with this, and in Mesopotamia, see the so-called *Babylonian Theodicy* (lines 267-274, *BWL*, 87). In the OT see Exod 23:6-8; Deut 16:18-20.

⁶⁰ Garrett (*Proverbs, Ecclesiastes*, 162) sees 17:23-26 as a group of connected sayings but I have difficulty seeing the association beyond the similar ideas of injustice in vv. 23-26, unless the connections are seen as very loose, with vv. 24-25 making the observations on the fool (כָּסִיל). If this is the case this grouping is structured in an ABB'A' pattern. I believe the associations are stronger between vv. 21-25 than between vv. 23-26, see Whybray, *Proverbs*, 260-262.

⁶¹ This is true of RSV, NRSV, NW, and NASV; but note KJV and NKJV which have "also." McKane (*Proverbs*, 506) suggests גַּם may indicate a previous statement on the topic that was not preserved.

scribed punishment for certain offenses, see Exod 21:22, where flogging (נכה) is called for in others, see Deut 25:2-3.⁶² In both cases these penalties are used as examples of inappropriate legal practice.

The presence of גַּם and the unusual statement עַל-יֵשֶׁר make this proverb difficult. The particle גַּם may be here for emphasis similar to its use in 1 Sam 19:19-24, where it states that Saul sent messengers to arrest David on three occasions. Each time the messengers saw Samuel and the others prophesying, they also prophesied, or possibly "indeed they prophesied." Then Saul "indeed" he went and "indeed" he took off his royal robe all night. The use of גַּם here does not indicate that the others joined him in all these actions, it is simply an emphatic or intensive.⁶³ Thus it is possible to translate Prov 17:26a as above, using גַּם as an intensive.

The expression עַל-יֵשֶׁר may mean "contrary to what is right."⁶⁴ If this is the case the need for the emendation suggested by BHS and followed by RSV is unnecessary.⁶⁵

To summarize the discussion of Proverbs and the legal system, we have briefly observed the workings of the court system in the ANE and

⁶² NIV translates עֲנֹשׁ as "punish," whereas RSV, NRSV, and NASV have "fine." The word can be used either way, but it seems better as a specific term of legal redress, cf. *Code of Hammurapi* § 209-214; and Deut 22:19. In Prov 21:11 fines are shown to be instructive but here in 17:26 the issue is one who is penalized unjustly. The fact that it is paralleled with הַכּוֹת, "flogged, beaten" makes the monetary punishment a more specific translation, cf. Ploger, *Sprüche Salomos*, 200, 207.

⁶³ R. L. Harris, "גַּם," *TWOT*, 1.167.

⁶⁴ Whybray, *Proverbs*, 262; McKane, *Proverbs*, 507.

⁶⁵ *BHS* apparatus suggests that the text be emended to read יֵתֶר, "excessively" or "beyond measure," cf. RSV's "abundantly."

Israel. In looking at the way the book of Proverbs addresses the legal system with its problems as well as its positive features one can see the mixed bag presented by the book. On one hand, the legal system is affirmed and the king is saluted as the idealized defender of the rights of the oppressed. On the other, the sages admit to the possibilities of abuses, citing the false witness or the false accuser, or even dishonest judges.

When we turned our attention toward specific instances of legal abuses in Proverbs we found harmful lawsuits being brought against people, cases where the righteous were convicted of crimes and the criminal declared innocent, injustice occurring to the poor due to unknown or unnamed reasons, and the application of legal punishments in an inappropriate manner.

The opinion of some who have claimed that Proverbs contains generalized, conventional wisdom that rarely goes beyond the superficial should be re-evaluated.⁶⁶ An investigation of the proverbs addressing the matter of legal injustice has shown that several issues were brought up, many of which still cause problems for today's legal participants. Just because a legal matter can be summarized in a few words does not necessarily mean it is trite, superficial or painless. It may be tempting for some to relegate proverbs to this superficial classification because of their brevity. Because they are not essays, they are considered to lack depth. The study of the proverbs dealing with legal issues has shown that this is not the case.

⁶⁶ See specifically the quotes above in chapter two, I.B.

II. Damaging Words (11:9, 11)

There is only one small grouping of proverbs where the suffering of the innocent or righteous is attributed to words, speech, or mouth of another without reference to a setting, such as the legal system (in the case of the false witness), or in an undefined situation where a shameful son, for example, may show disdain or contempt for parents. This may include verbal abuse but it is not limited to speech. Hence this is a unique passage in the book of Proverbs. No other setting or situation is envisioned wherein we might place the damaging words. The point of reference is left undefined, and we cannot place this passage in any other category in this study.

Determining the limits of this small group of sayings is an issue of discussion among those who attempt to discern structure within the chapters of Proverbs.

Ploger sees 11:9-14 as a group of sayings concerned with the relationship of the individual to the community as a whole rather than with individuals and involvement with others,⁶⁷ citing the occurrence of words such as "neighbor" (vv. 9, 12), "city" (vv. 10, 11), "gossip" (v. 13), and "people" (v. 14).

However, I believe that a tighter structure may be observed if the passage is limited to vv. 9-12, and noting the emphasis on speech in every verse. In vv. 9-12 each verse begins with the Hebrew letter **א**, giving the passage an initially identical look and sound:

⁶⁷ *Sprüche Salomos*, 137.

- A 11:9 בָּפֶה חֲנָף יִשְׁחַת רֵעֵהוּ וּבְדַעַת צַדִּיקִים יִחְלֹצוּ: 11:9
 B 11:10 בְּטוֹב צַדִּיקִים תַּעֲלֶיז קִרְיָהּ וּבְאַבֶּד רָשָׁעִים רִנָּהּ: 11:10
 B' 11:11 בְּבִרְכַּת יֹשְׁרִים תָּרוּם קִרְתָּהּ וּבְפִי רָשָׁעִים תִּהְרָס: 11:11
 A' 11:12 בִּזְלָלְרֵעֵהוּ חָסֵר-לֵב וְאִישׁ תְּבוּנוֹת יַחֲרִישׁ: 11:12

In addition to the initial line of every proverb beginning with the same letter the second line of the first three all begin with the conjunction ו followed by ב.

The A elements make reference to the "mouth" (v. 9), one who belittles or derides⁶⁸ another and remaining silent (v. 12). There are also parallels between the godless (v. 9a) and the one who lacks judgment (v. 12a), both of whom do or say things to harm a neighbor (vv. 9a, 12a) The righteous (v. 9b) are compared to the one who possesses understanding (v. 12b).

The B elements are a parallel pair due to their remarks on the "city"⁶⁹ and various references to speech, such as rejoicing (v. 10), blessing, and the mouth (v.11). The initial saying of the B element (v. 10) picks up the term "righteous" (צַדִּיקִים) from the first saying in the A elements (v. 9) and comments on the similar reactions to the fate of the righteous (v. 10a)

⁶⁸ The root ב ז is also found in Prov 6:30; 30:17; where it is a verbal expression of contempt and associated with לַעֲג, "to mock," see also 2 Kgs 19:21; Isa 37:22.

⁶⁹ In v. 10 the Hebrew word for city is קִרְיָהּ; in v. 11 it is קִרְתָּהּ. Whybray (*Proverbs*, 179) believes the two different words indicate separate composition and later linking, but it could simply be stylistic variation. קִרְתָּהּ occurs only in wisdom materials, see Job 29:7; Prov 8:3; 9:3, 14.

in contrast to the wicked (רָשָׁעִים v. 10b). Then v. 11 compares the positive effects of words with the damaging results that can occur. The upright (יָשָׁרִים), a parallel to the righteous, can build up or exalt a city⁷⁰ by their blessing. But words can also be used to the detriment of others to overthrow or destroy?⁷¹ a city, when coming from the mouth of the wicked, a contrasting term to both righteous and upright, and here seen as a parallel term in vv. 10-11 to godless (תָּנִיף v. 9) and one who lacks judgment (חָסֵר-לֵב v. 12). The two final words of vv. 11 and 12 have similar sounds (תִּהְרָם v. 11b; יִהְרֵשׁ v. 12b), which may also contribute to the linking of these sayings.

III. Harmful Actions

Again, this tends to be a "catch-all" category because many of the sayings which mention innocent suffering do not specify an action, or they are so general they can not be placed in any other category. When proverbs have been discussed under related categories in our earlier discussion the

⁷⁰ The Hebrew word תָּרַם is from the root רוּם (lit. "to be high"). It may refer to enhanced status, cf. Ps 89:17[16]; Isa 52:13; or to a general prosperity. The contrast to the next verb (from the root הָרַס, see below) has led some to suggest the root רָמַם, "to build, build up" based on Ugaritic or Arabic analogies, see Whybray, *Proverbs*, 180; McKane, *Proverbs*, 432. Regardless of which is accepted it is obvious that it refers to a positive idea.

⁷¹ The root הָרַס means to tear down or destroy, usually with reference to cities (2 Sam 11:25; 2 Kgs 3:25; Isa 14:17; Jer 31:40; Ezek 36:35), walls (Jer 50:15; Ezek 13:14; 26:4, 12; Prov 24:31), strongholds (Mic 5:10[11]; Lam 2:2), a house (Prov 14:1) as well as altars and cultic sites (Judg 6:25; 1 Kgs 18:30; 19:10, 14; Ezek 16:39). God can tear down or destroy mountains (Ezek 38:20) and break the teeth of the wicked (Ps 58:7[6]). This root sometimes appears in contrast to גָּנָה "to build," see Ezek 36:36; Mal 1:4; Ps 28:5; Prov 14:1; Job 12:14; see G. Munderlein, "הָרַס *haras*," *TDOT*, vol. 3 (1978), 462.

reader will be referred to those discussions rather than repeat the information.

A. 1:8-19

Following the title (1:1), purpose (1:2-6), and theme (1:7)⁷² the first instruction⁷³ found in the book of Proverbs tells young people of the dangers they may face by associating with criminals.

This passage is structured along clear lines, with vv. 8-9 constituting an introductory appeal, v. 10 containing the specific situation to be avoided, vv. 11-14 comprising an imagined quote of the robbers, vv. 15-18 expanding on the prohibition in v. 10, as well as a warning about the fate of the brigands, and v. 19 a concluding summary of the destiny of those who pursue a criminal life-style.⁷⁴

The specific part of this instruction that is important for this study is the statement in 1:11, where the robbers seek to entice a young person into their gang with the lure of easy wealth:

נֶאֱרָבָה לְדָם נִצְפָנָה לְנֶקֶי חַנָּם:

The usual expression for innocent blood (נֶקֶי דָם) is spread over both

⁷² Meinhold (*Die Spruche*, 1.46-50) calls these elements *Überschrift*, *Vorspruch* and *Motto*. Garrett (*Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 66-67) refers to 1:1 as the title and 1:2-7 as the prologue. Whybray (*Proverbs*, 30) entitles 1:1-7 the preface.

⁷³ Whybray, *Proverbs*, 37.

⁷⁴ I have dealt with structural matters in more detail elsewhere. See my article "The Doctrine of the 'Two Ways' in the Book of Proverbs," *JETS* 38 (1995): 511-512.

halves of this proverb. Watson calls this the break-up of a composite phrase, a phrase found over eighteen times in the OT.⁷⁵ One can also see this phenomenon in 1 Sam 25:31; 1 Kgs 2:31.

As many commentators point out, the two verbs used (צפן, ארב) are repeated in v. 18, showing the doctrine of retribution at work.⁷⁶ The repetition of these verbs in association with the punishment exacted on the criminals attempts to show young people that crime does not pay. The structure of the exhortation strengthens the message. There are alternative appeals between the wisdom teacher (vv. 10, 15-18) and the robbers (v. 11-14), with the verbs in vv. 11, 18 forming an *inclusio*.⁷⁷

The agent of punishment is left unnamed in order to leave open the possibilities for human agents to bring punishment or for judgment to be carried out by Yahweh. In v. 11b the innocent (נָקִי) are attacked wantonly (חֲנָנִים) or without reason. Whybray says the attack on unsuspecting travelers is carried out for the sake of the enjoyment of violence by the criminals, with the acquisition of loot being secondary.⁷⁸ However, the remainder of the imagined quote in vv. 12-14 places strong emphasis on the plunder associated with this activity, making it appealing to a young person who might otherwise live in a manner which was much less exciting and less

⁷⁵ Watson, *Hebrew Poetry*, 328-329; see Deut 21:8; Isa 59:7; Ps 106:38; etc.

⁷⁶ For a discussion of retribution in Proverbs see chapter two above (I.A.2.), and L. Bostrom, *The God of the Sages* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1990), 90-140.

⁷⁷ Garrett, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 69.

⁷⁸ *Proverbs*, 39.

lucrative by comparison.⁷⁹ The instruction makes the point of avoiding criminal activity with its promise of easy wealth, and places an implied value on work and industry.⁸⁰

B. 3:27-35

Part of this passage has been discussed above in relation to legal injustice, since one of the "harmful actions" (3:30) occurs in a legal setting.⁸¹ It is not my intent to discuss this passage in its entirety nor deal with its relation to the larger context and role within the context, but to limit the present study to the topic of the innocent sufferer.⁸²

This passage contains six prohibitions, four of which have to do with antisocial behavior which will harm the innocent. The fifth and sixth prohibitions (v. 31) are against envying the violent and following their example.

Verses 27-28 warn against "sins of omission," the failure to do good:

אַל-תִּמְנַע-טוֹב מִבְּעַלְיוֹ בְּהִיּוֹת לְאֵל יְדִיךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת:

אַל-תֹּאמַר לְרַעֲיָךְ לֵךְ וְשׁוּב וּמָחָר אֶתֶּן וַיֵּשׁ אֶתְּךָ:

Essentially these two prohibitions are referring to the same action.

⁷⁹ See my comments on this in "Doctrine of the 'Two Ways,'" 512.

⁸⁰ Other proverbs also promote these values, see 10:4-5; 12:14; 14:23; 27:18, 23-27; 28:19; etc.

⁸¹ See also my previous discussion in chapter two in relation to retribution (I.A.2.).

⁸² Because this chapter is such a complex work scholars divide it up differently. Whybray (*Proverbs*, 69-70) and Meinhold (*Die Spruche*, 1.82-84) see 3:21-35 as a unit, whereas McKane (*Proverbs*, 297-300) and Ploger (*Sprüche Salomos*, 39-43) separate vv. 21-26 from vv. 27-35, with a possible further division between vv. 30 and 31.

The statements are general enough to include a broad range of activity from a simple acknowledgment of someone to repayment of a loan.⁸³

Verses 29-30 contain "sins of commission," actions committed against another:

אַל-תִּחַרֵּשׁ עַל-רֵעֶךָ רָעָה וְהוּא-יֹשֵׁב לְבִטָּח אֶתְךָ:
אַל-תִּרְיֵב⁸⁴ עַם-אָדָם חָנָם אִם-לֹא גִמְלָךָ רָעָה:

In v. 29 the activity is premeditated, and with intent to harm another. It may include spreading damaging rumors or a scheme to deceive the neighbor and put him at a disadvantage.⁸⁵ There is an extreme contrast in this saying between the one who plots⁸⁶ harm and the neighbor who dwells trustfully nearby.

Although v. 30 has been treated above in regard to legal injustice the root is not limited to the legal sphere. It often contains legal juridical implications but can also refer to physical combat (Exod 21:18; Deut 33:7; etc.) or quarreling (Exod 17:2; Hos 4:4). The various possibilities of translation are reflected in English versions: NIV, "accuse;" RSV and NASV, "contend;" NRSV, "quarrel;" NKJV, "strive." Regardless of whether this prohibition is against legal action, an argument or a fistfight it is still seen

⁸³ Whybray, *Proverbs*, 72.

⁸⁴ Following *Qere* and *BHS* apparatus.

⁸⁵ E. g., on a larger scale Jezebel's scheme against Naboth in 1 Kgs 21, or in the book of Esther, Haman's plot to destroy Mordecai.

⁸⁶ The root שׁח can mean "to plan, plot" and is used this way in Proverbs (6:14, 18; :12:20; 14:22). It can also be translated "to plow" (Prov 20:4). Hos 10:13 contains both ideas.

as groundless and unnecessary, as חנם (see above) indicates.

Then following these four prohibitions is a double prohibition in v. 31 with a motive clause in v. 32. The double prohibition does not specifically mention the violent man (חמס) causing harm to the innocent but it is inferred. This is a person who uses physical force to intimidate others or, as in 1:8-19, to take what belongs to others in order to profit by it (cf. 2:12-15). The motive clause is expanded in vv. 33-34 and the section is concluded by a final antithetic proverb:

- | | |
|--|-------|
| אֶל-תִּקְנֵא בְּאִישׁ חָמָס וְאֶל-תִּבְחַר בְּכָל-דֹּרְכָיו: | v. 31 |
| כִּי תוֹעֵבֶת יְהוָה נָלוֹז וְאֶת-יִשְׁרָיִם סוֹדוֹ: | v. 32 |
| מֵאַרְצַת יְהוָה בְּבֵית רָשָׁע וּנְוֶה צַדִּיקִים יִבְרָךְ: | v. 33 |
| אִם-לִלְצִים הוּא-יִלְיָץ וּלְעֲנָיִים יִתֵּן-חֵן: | v. 34 |
| כְּבוֹד חֲכָמִים יִנָּחֵלוּ וְכִסְיֵי לִים מֵרִים קִלּוֹן: | v. 35 |

If 3:21-35 is a cohesive unit of poetry, it is a condemnation of those who harm the innocent. The six prohibitions against this behavior in vv. 27-31 are then further described as perverse (נָלוֹז⁸⁷) and an abomination to Yahweh (תוֹעֵבֶת יְהוָה⁸⁸). The perverted one is one whose conduct goes against Yahweh's way.⁸⁹ In v. 32 the נָלוֹז is an antonym to those who are upright

⁸⁷ Cf. also the occurrence of the root נלז in 3:21. Here it is seen as an antonym of ישר.

⁸⁸ For further discussion of תוֹעֵבֶת see chapter two above, and cf. Prov 11:20; 15:9.

⁸⁹ The predominant context of the root לז is in wisdom texts and often associated with the idea of a path, cf. 2:15; 14:2. Since Proverbs uses the idea of a path as a metaphor for the course of life or conduct, one who chooses the wrong path is one who chooses the wrong values. For more

(יֵשָׁר), a group of people Yahweh claims as intimates,⁹⁰ an idea that is also associated with a path or way, cf. 3:6; 4:11; 12:15; 14:12; 15:19; 16:17, 25; 21:2; etc.

Verses 33-34 expand on the content of v. 32, stating that the curse⁹¹ of Yahweh is on the house⁹² of the wicked (v. 33a) and, in a case of exact retribution, Yahweh mocks those who mock (v. 34a), but blesses the righteous (v. 33b) and gives grace to the humble (v. 34b). If v. 35 is seen as the concluding summary the last three verses can be charted thusly:

humanly chosen conduct	divinely assigned result
v. 33 wicked/just	curse/blessing
v. 34 mocking/humilty	mocks/gives grace
v. 35 wise/fools	glory/shame ⁹³

This passage, when taken as a unit, shows Yahweh's concern for those innocent victims in society who suffer abuse at the hands of those who seek to gain from the misery and pain they inflict on others. Though the

discussion of this idea see my article "The Doctrine of the 'Two Ways,'" 511-514. For discussion of the root לִיז see H. Ringgren, "לִיז *luz*," *TDOT*, vol. 7 (1995), 478-479.

⁹⁰ The meaning of סוֹד is that of an intimate and confidential relationship characterized by trust.

⁹¹ See chapter three above (III.B.2.) for more discussion on curses and cursing.

⁹² The extended family or בֵּית־אָב see chapter three above (I.A.1.c.). "Adapted from D. A. Hubbard, *Proverbs* (Dallas: Word, 1989), 79; cf. also the comments of McKane, *Proverbs*, 302, regarding the antithetic balance of these verses.

passage does not contain the passionate preaching of Amos or Isaiah on the social abuses of their day it shows an awareness of the suffering of the innocent that many would say the sages lacked. The passage is more sensitive to the psychological aspects of victimization by verbal violence.

C. 6:16-19

The form-critical category of this passage is the numerical saying, which consists of a title-line and a list. The title-line mentions the feature(s) which the items listed have in common.⁹⁴ Numerical sayings in Proverbs are found in 6:16-19; 30:15b-16; 18-20, 21-23, 24-28, 29-31. Quite often they show the $x, x + 1$ pattern. This form of speech was not limited to wisdom literature. It is also found in prophetic materials,⁹⁵ although it seems more common in wisdom literature (cf. Job 5:19) since the purpose was to function as a memory aid, to encourage repetition as a riddle or a game, and to place emphasis on the last item in the list.⁹⁶ The use of numerical sayings reflects the sages' use of comparable items to understand the order of their world.⁹⁷

⁹⁴ R. E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature*, 180.

⁹⁵ See Amos 1-2; Mic 5:5, and possibly Jer 15:2-3. For more on the numerical sayings in the prophets see M. H. Pope, "Number, Numbering, Numbers," *IDB*, 3.564. Pope also cites parallels of this form in Ugaritic literature, cf. *CTA*, 14:14-21. See also in Akkadian literature Erra L31-38. The most comprehensive study of the numerical saying is W. M. W. Roth, *Numerical Sayings of the Old Testament*, VTSup 13 (Leiden: Brill., 1965).

⁹⁶ Hubbard, *Proverbs*, 102.

⁹⁷ H.-P. Muller, "Der Begriff 'Ratsel' im Alten Testament," *VT* 20 (1970): 465-489; see also G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM, 1972), 35-37; and Roth, *Numerical Sayings*, 34-36.

- v. 16 שֶׁש־הֵנָּה שָׁנָא יְהוָה וְשַׁבַּע תּוֹעֵבָת⁹⁸ נִפְשׁוּ:
- v. 17 עֵינַיִם רָמוֹת לְשׁוֹן שָׁקֶר ויָדַיִם שִׁפְכוֹת דָּם-נָקִי:
- v. 18 לֵב חָדַשׁ מַחְשָׁבוֹת אָזָן רַגְלַיִם מַמְהָרוֹת לְרוּץ לְרָעָה:
- v.19 יָפִיחַ כְּזָבִים עַד שָׁקֶר וּמְשַׁלַּח מִדְּנִים בֵּין אֲחִים:

Following the title-line are seven actions or attitudes that are classified as an abomination to Yahweh, the usual sequence of these words being split up over two lines.⁹⁹ The first five elements of the list are parts of the body, in more or less descending order: eyes, tongue, hands, heart, feet. This list is an indication of things which destroy the possibility of a positive relationship with Yahweh.¹⁰⁰ The last two specifically belong to a social setting, the false witness and the one who disrupts relationships (cf. 6:14).¹⁰¹

In this list there are several items that could by implication be associated with innocent suffering, as well as one action that refers to it directly. In v. 17 "haughty (lit. "raised") eyes" are those lifted up in defiance or arrogance, the opposite of humility and respect (cf. Ps 18:28[27]; 131:1; Prov 30:13). The "lying tongue" (lit. a "tongue of falsehood," cf. 4:24; 6:12) is

⁹⁸ Following *Qere* and *BHS* apparatus.

⁹⁹ The usual expression is **יְהוָה תּוֹעֵבָה** but here the poet divided the expression to extend over two lines. This makes **יְהוָה שָׁנָא** in v. 16a parallel to **נִפְשׁוּ תּוֹעֵבָת** in v. 16b. For further discussion of **יְהוָה שָׁנָא** see chapter two above and R. E. Clements, "The Concept of Abomination in the Book of Proverbs," 211-225.

¹⁰⁰ For a list of ethical requirements for approaching Yahweh in the temple see Pss 15, 24; see Whybray, *Proverbs*, 100.

¹⁰¹ For an analysis of these seven elements from a practical viewpoint see Garrett, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, 98.

metonymy for one that has no regard for the truth, and "hands that shed innocent blood" describes the murderer (cf. 1:11), and is the specific example of causing the innocent to suffer in this list. A similar expression has already been discussed above under 1:8-19 and need not be elaborated on here. In v. 18 we see the heart that devises evil plans (cf. 3:29 and the discussion there) and feet that run swiftly to evil, which are possible instances of causing injury or pain to the undeserving, but the text is too general to allow a specific application. In v. 19 a legal situation may be pictured, as the false witness (עֵד שֶׁקָר) is listed as another abomination (cf. 14:5b). One who gives false testimony in court subverts justice in order to deflect their own deserved punishment for a crime, or to help convict someone else. Either way, the truth is covered and justice is denied. The final item in the list is one who spreads dissension or strife among brothers. This is not necessarily restricted to brothers in the sense of family, it can also refer to the fraternal bonds of society, since Israelite men commonly referred to themselves as "brothers," see e. g., 2 Sam 19:42[41]. The one who seeks to sever these bonds is a menace to society since in times of calamity such as natural disasters, war, or other problems, it is the cohesiveness of a society that contributes to its survival.

D. 16:29

Among the chapters in Solomon B, chapter 16 shows the most evidence of editorial structure and arrangement. The first nine verses show a heavy emphasis on Yahweh-proverbs, with all but one (v. 8) containing the divine name. The chapter also closes with a divine proverb,

echoing v. 1, to form an envelope.¹⁰² The other theme of chapter 16 is centered around the king, with royal proverbs gaining prominence in vv. 10-15, of which all but v. 11 make reference to the king. These two topics are intertwined in vv. 9-12 where the sequence is:

v. 9 Yahweh proverb

v. 10 Royal proverb

v. 11 Yahweh proverb

v. 12 Royal proverb¹⁰³

The rest of the chapter seems to be a miscellany of sayings on the virtues associated with wisdom, with little apparent organization, until we reach vv. 27-30. These verses are a group of sayings on evil schemes and have little association with the preceding sayings. Each proverb in vv. 27-29 begins with **וְיִשְׁכַּח** followed by a noun which describes the character of the type of person under consideration. Then v. 30 summarizes the section by pointing out the external signs which should give a clue regarding how these persons can be recognized:

¹⁰² See Whybray, *Proverbs*, 238-239, for discussion of the editorial structure of Prov 16.

¹⁰³ Whybray, *Proverbs*, 238.

- A 16:27 אִישׁ בִּלְיָעַל כֹּרֵה רָעָה וְעַל־שִׁפְתָיו כָּאֵשׁ צָרְבֶתָּ:
- A 16:28 אִישׁ תְּהַפְכוֹת יִשְׁלַח מְדוֹן וְנִרְגָן מִפְרִיד אֱלוֹף:
- A 16:29 אִישׁ חָמֵס יִפְתָּה רֵעֵהוּ וְהוֹלִיכוֹ בְּדֶרֶךְ לֹא־טוֹב:
- B 16:30 עֲצָה עֵינָיו לַחֲשֹׁב תְּהַפְכוֹת קִרְץ שִׁפְתָיו כָּלָה רָעָה:

This grouping of proverbs has several verbal links to 6:12-15 and 6:16-19.¹⁰⁴ In 16:27 the **אִישׁ בִּלְיָעַל** is similar to **אָדָם בִּלְיָעַל** in 6:12;¹⁰⁵ in 16:28, **תְּהַפְכוֹת** is found as well as in 6:14; **יִשְׁלַח מְדוֹן** is found in 16:28 and also in 6:14, where it appears as **יִשְׁלַח מְדַנִּים**; the idea of plotting evil in 16:27, **כֹּרֵה רָעָה**, is a similar idea to devising wicked schemes, **חֲדָשׁ מַחֲשָׁבוֹת אָוֶן**, in 6:18; and the rare root **קִרְץ** in 16:30 meaning "to compress" is also found in 6:13 in reference to winking the eyes.¹⁰⁶ Because vv. 27-29 are parallel statements we should probably not seek to make fine distinctions among the three types of people referred to. All can be classified under the category of antisocial attitudes and behavior, since all three cause damage, division and possibly even death. Speech figures prominently in this grouping as the area of offense, with lips (**שִׁפְתָיו** vv. 27, 30) and slander (**נִרְגָן**;¹⁰⁷ v. 28)

¹⁰⁴ There is also a statement of innocent suffering in 6:16-19 (see v. 17) and this passage is discussed above.

¹⁰⁵ McKane, *Proverbs*, 493, believes **בִּלְיָעַל** to mean a state of inner confusion and contrariness, referring to a deranged and destructive man rather than the usual meanings of "worthless, useless" or "profitless," see his discussion on 325 as well.

¹⁰⁶ Whybray, *Proverbs*, 250. The action of winking the eyes is also found in 16:30a but uses the root **עֲצָה** rather than **קִרְץ**. The root **קִרְץ** may refer to a "narrowing" of the eyes into a glare rather than winking, since winking is not generally considered a hostile gesture, cf. Prov 10:10.

¹⁰⁷ This word is found only in Proverbs, see also 18:8; 26:20, 22. The

being specified. Also mentioned twice is the idea of friends or a neighbor (vv. 28, 29). The slanderer is said to separate close friends (אֶלֹוֹף, a collective noun), and a man of violence entices his neighbor (רֵעֵהוּ) and leads him in a way characterized as לֹא־טוֹב. This verse is the specific action which an innocent person suffering or coming to harm due to the actions of another. The אִישׁ הַחֶמְסַס is a misanthropic person who employs deceit to lure his friend, neighbor or companion to no good end. It is difficult to discern whether this proverb is intended to be used literally or figuratively. If it is a literal use, the companion is "caused to walk down a path not good." Since walking down a path or way can be taken concretely, this may be a reference to an ambush, similar to the action of the robbers in 1:10-19, where the same verb for "entice" (פָּתָה) is used. If the proverb is seen figuratively then we have a violent man influencing his companion into a similar life-style, hence the violent man is a bad example. The word דָּרָךְ can function equally well in both spheres, and the beauty of this saying may be in its flexibility to function at both the literal level as well as the figurative.¹⁰⁸

There is no specific reference to an innocent sufferer in vv. 27-28 but on the other hand, there is no statement that the close friends deserved to be separated by a slanderer. The אִישׁ בָּלִיעַל, for example, is not specifically linked with plotting harmful actions against the innocent or the righteous but one may make the assumption that his actions will be directed against

verb רָגַז was used to refer to Israel's "murmuring" in the desert, Deut 1:27; Ps 106:25; cf. Isa 29:24.

¹⁰⁸ Cf. also 16:25 as an example of flexibility of the literal and figurative.

the unwitting or the defenseless in society, since they are usually the easiest marks, and because his actions are seen (as are all the people warned against in vv. 27-30) to be a disruption to society and going against the common good. If this were not the case they would not be categorized as scoundrels, perverts, and murderers.

In a chapter that emphasizes the role of Yahweh to direct the lives of people (16:1-9) and the duty of kings to enforce justice (16:10-15), followed by various sayings on the positive virtues associated with wisdom and the rewards of wise living (16:16-26), there follows an extraordinary group of sayings which admit to the fact that not all members of society will follow the wise instruction offered by teachers or leaders. They are characterized by antisocial behavior which brings harm and disruption to the community since their actions are directed toward those who are undeserving of the results of the actions of these misanthropic people. They live outside the law of the king and the law of Yahweh. If the law of retribution was as clean-cut and clear as some have accused the sages of believing, 16:27-30 would have never been included in the collection. It clearly acknowledges the existence of those living in society who are out to harm others who are innocent of their fate.

E. 17:13

For discussion of the structure and the possible vocabulary links in Prov 17 see the previous examination under I.E.3. The most obvious link between 17:13 and the surrounding sayings are the reversals seen in 17:13 and 17:15. The contrasting terms in these two sayings are typical of pro-

verbs which seek to show opposite actions. In 17:13 evil (רעה) and good (טוב) are found, whereas in 17:15 the roots רשע and צדק are used in a grammatically complex saying regarding the legal system (see above).

The saying in 17:13, which plays on a pun between the roots מוש and שוב, reads:

מִשִּׁיב רָעָה תִּחַת טוֹבָה לֹא־תִמְיֹשׁ¹⁰⁹ רָעָה מִבֵּיתוֹ:

The reversal in this saying is seen in the sphere of interpersonal relationships. Those who reward or repay kindness with evil (cf. the *lex talionis*) are examples of those who lack the sense to see that they are their own worst enemy. One who does harm to a benefactor brings evil on his own house (בֵּית), referring to the larger family unit.¹¹⁰

The proverb does not tell us how evil is introduced into this person's family, thus it may be the result of his own poor judgment or mistreatment of relatives; or it may be left undefined to leave open the possibilities of divine judgment.

IV. Conclusion

Conclusions to the various sections have been drawn at the end of the various discussions and need not be repeated here. However, I will

¹⁰⁹ Accepting the emendation in BHS apparatus as opposed to the MT's תִּמְיֹשׁ.

¹¹⁰ See the discussion of בֵּית־אָב and בֵּית־אֵם in chapter three above (I.A.1.c.).

reiterate that the legal system was not beyond misapplication of justice so as to cause innocent suffering. Whether this happened due to accident, bribes, false witness, poor memory of a witness, or a long list of other possibilities, it is impossible to deny that the wisdom movement was aware of the fact that injustice occurred, and that the innocent or righteous were sometimes wrongly convicted, or the guilty were declared innocent after they had committed crimes against the undeserving.

In cases of damaging words and harmful actions, the innocent are portrayed as undeserving of their fate, thus according to them a dignity which, for example, Job's friends did not allow him. Guilt was assumed by the three counselors as the cause of Job's pain, and any remedy they offered had to go through the initial step of admitting guilt. The book of Proverbs does not lend credence to the arguments of the three friends by painting the human condition in the broad-stroke categories as is often portrayed. Yes, there are proverbs which make general assumptions regarding retribution, but there are others, the subject of this study, which often state the exceptions to the doctrine of retribution.

CHAPTER SIX

FINAL SUMMARY

This study has examined issues of theodicy and the way suffering is portrayed in the literature of Egypt and the ANE and found that theodicy is wrongly applied to virtually all documents that have been discovered to this point. It is only in the literature of ancient Israel that this term accurately applies. When von Soden's four elements of theodicy¹ were used as a basis for comparison of the literature from ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt the conclusion was reached that there were social, cultural, and religious factors which made theodicy virtually non-existent in those settings.

In Egypt the main factor was the prominence of the belief in post-mortem judgment and reward or punishment. Each individual would have his or her actions weighed against *ma'at* in order for reward or punishment to be determined. The belief in a judgment after death relieved the need for equitable retribution during earthly life since all wrongs could be righted and all scores settled in the judgment. In a rare instance of blaming the gods for suffering the king responded that the people themselves were at fault by failing to observe *ma'at*.² Thus the conventional view was retained.

For the Mesopotamians the situation was more complex. There were frequent examples of protest over mistreatment, suffering, illness, and the

¹ See chapter one above, I.A.

² See the *Admonitions of Ipuwer* in *AEL*, vol. 1 (1973), 161, especially n. 29, and the discussion in chapter one above (II.B.2.a.).

like. However, these situations were usually seen as attacks from demons, or from an offended deity.³ Any suggestion of blame ascribed to a god or goddess was expressed in very cautious terms. The responsibility of the gods was not to humanity, their "employees," but to make the enormous and complicated machine of the world run effectively.⁴ The underlying assumption in Mesopotamian religion was that all people were ignorant of their sin but not innocent. Thus the burden was on individuals to determine how they had offended a god or goddess so appeasement could be initiated and their suffering halted.

All instances of suffering were directly attributable to sin, almost completely apart from divine responsibility. In other words, all people who were enduring times of suffering were assumed to be guilty. The action which caused the alienation between deity and human was often seen as a cult or ritual offense. The process of getting back into the good graces of the god or goddess assumed that all sufferers are sinners. This required the suppliants to recite the *Surpu* incantations, for example, or practice divination so that the offended deity would reveal the sin which caused the pain. As I have shown in the studies above, all are assumed to be ignorant sufferers, but not innocent.

This is quite different from ancient Israel, where sin was defined in the Torah and the process of acquiring forgiveness was mapped out by a

³ See the discussion of J. Bottero, "The Problem of Evil in Mesopotamian Mythology and Theology," in *Mythologies*, ed. Y. Bonnefoy, rev. W. Doniger, 2 vols. (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1991), 1.163-164.

⁴ Bottero, "Problem of Evil," 163. The gods created people as their "employees" to do the work they did not want to be bothered with, see chapter one above (ILA.).

series of offerings and sacrifices. Rather than having to wonder what deity had been offended the ancient Israelite was assured of knowing that all sin was ultimately against Yahweh (cf. Ps 51:5[4]). Thus there was no need to attempt divination to determine which deity was offended. Since sin was defined more definitely in Israel than in neighboring societies the OT contains accounts of individuals confessing or being confronted with specific actions or attitudes characterized as "sin."⁵

This is not the place to enter in to a detailed discussion of how suffering was interpreted in the Hebrew Bible, but we can note three main categories: (1) retributive, (2) educative and exemplary, and (3) vicarious and redemptive.⁶ The dominant interpretation of suffering was that it came as a result of human sin.⁷ However, there was no attempt to show that a person's suffering or prosperity was always directly related to their obedience to God. The authors of the Hebrew Bible recognized that life was much more complex than a simple cause-and-effect formula. Suffering may be brought about by sin and its victims may be deserving and the undeserving alike.

Suffering may also function in an educational manner, as in Deut 8:1-6. Here the wilderness wandering was presented as a time of humbling and testing (8:2), teaching Israel that people do not live by bread alone.

⁵ One of the more notable occurrences is Nathan's confrontation with David in 2 Sam 12.

⁶ R. B. Edwards, "Suffering," *ISBE*, vol. 4 (1988), 649-652.

⁷ D. J. Simundson, "Suffering," *ABD*, 6.219-225. For more detail on this see idem, *Faith Under Fire: Biblical Interpretations of Suffering* (Minneapolis: Augsburg, 1980).

God's role as a divine parent is brought out (8:5) to show that the disciplinary actions were carried out on the nation with motives similar to parental love. The concept of God using suffering to teach individuals is also found in Job.⁸

Efforts were also made to portray suffering as redemptive rather than punitive, either for others or for the sufferer. Isa 40-55 speaks of a servant who suffers for the benefit of others.

Israel also had a higher view of human dignity than the surrounding cultures, since individuals were allowed to relate directly to Yahweh, their "high God" and "great king," in a way that the Egyptians and Mesopotamians were rarely allowed. So, for example, suffering individuals in Israel had no need for a "personal god" to approach a "high god" on their behalf, as in Mesopotamia. For the Egyptian, instances of suffering were virtually always made the responsibility of the individual who had failed to live up to the standards of *ma'at*, thus allowing *isft*, or disorder, into his or her life.

The specific issue in this dissertation was that of the innocent sufferer in the book of Proverbs. To the best of my knowledge this is the first in-depth study of this topic. Past scholarship has simply promoted the belief that Proverbs contains conventional wisdom, spelling out actions which will help the average person live a successful life. An orderly world is assumed, along with a hard-and-fast doctrine of retribution which may be expressed either forensically or dynamistically. Job and Qoheleth are

⁸ Stated by Eliphaz, 5:17; and by Elihu, 33:12-15; 36:9-12, 15.

usually presented as reactions against the dogmatism of the superficial views of Proverbs.⁹ Typical of this position is the claim of superficiality made by Gottwald, that the book of Proverbs has very little to offer.¹⁰

Some of these assumptions needed to be reassessed and my study has brought out certain conclusions. First, we concluded that Proverbs does not present a world view that borders on deism. Nor does it espouse "order" as a principle of metaphysics to which God is also subject. Those who hold to a deistic world view in Proverbs and a mechanistic outworking of order through the principle of retribution have often looked to Egypt and its concept of *ma'at* for a parallel. However, the studies of Fox,¹¹ Bostrom,¹² Halbe,¹³ and Steiert,¹⁴ discussed above in chapter two (I.A.1.), have shown that *ma'at* should not be read into Israelite literature. It has been claimed that *ma'at* was an impersonal principle of retribution, but the study of Miriam Lichtheim shows it to be a standard to live by, not a

⁹ See the quote in chapter two (I.B.) and D. J. A. Clines, *Job 1-20*, WBC vol. 17 (Dallas: Word, 1989), lxi, for Job; and Donald K. Berry, *An Introduction to Wisdom and Poetry of the Old Testament* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1995), 21, 26, 141, 153.

¹⁰ N. K. Gottwald, *A Light to the Nations* (New York: Harper, 1959), 472, characterized the book of Proverbs as "generally mediocre as literature, tedious as ethics, banal as religion."

¹¹ M. V. Fox, "World Order and Ma'at: A Crooked Parallel," *JANES* 23 (1995): 37-48.

¹² L. Bostrom, *The God of the Sages* (Stockholm: Almqvist & Wiksell, 1990).

¹³ J. Halbe, "'Altorientalisches Weltordnungsdenken' und alttestamentliche Theologie. Zur Kritik eines Ideologems am Beispiel des israelitischen Rechts," *ZTK* 76 (1979): 381-418.

¹⁴ F.-J. Steiert, *Die Weisheit Israels--ein Fremdkörper im AT?* (Freiburg: Herder, 1990).

mechanism for retribution.¹⁵ As a result of these studies it is no longer accurate to see a parallel to *ma'at* in Proverbs expressed as an impersonal mechanism for retribution.

Secondly, Proverbs is not locked in to dogmatic assertions of the retribution formula. Given the results of this study regarding the presence of the innocent sufferer in Proverbs it is difficult to retain the generalizations made by Clines, Berry and others cited above.

The idea of retribution is tied closely to the concept of order. The "act-consequence relationship" was seen by some as a prime factor in this since one could assume that "the righteous will prosper, and the wicked will suffer." Individual acts held inherent power to bring about reward or punishment.¹⁶ This view should probably be seen as going too far, since it virtually excluded the possibility of Yahweh intervening in human history,¹⁷ a distinctive trait of Yahweh's relationship with Israel. The result of this part of the study (see chapter two) is that the book of Proverbs is not limited to the viewpoint of conventional wisdom. It would be fair to say that Proverbs contains this viewpoint as well as those which go different directions. The book itself cites no single source for wisdom and therefore draws from a broad range of wisdom sources, and includes many view points.

¹⁵ M. Lichtheim, *Maat in Egyptian Autobiographies and Related Studies*, OBO 120 (Gottingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1992).

¹⁶ E. g., K. Koch, "Gibt es ein Vergeltungsdogma im Alten Testament?" *ZTK* 52 (1955): 1-42.

¹⁷ See the comments of J. Barton, "Natural Law and Poetic Justice in the Old Testament," *JTS* 30 (1979): 1-14; Bostrom, *God of the Sages*, 109-113.

This study has shown that it is inaccurate to assume that the book of Proverbs has no awareness of an innocent sufferer. The righteous do not always prosper; the wicked do not always suffer. Hence, criticisms such as those cited above are inaccurate. The study conducted in chapters three, four, and five show that the sages had a depth of insight that went beyond what some modern scholars are willing to grant.¹⁸ The purpose of this study was to analyze specific areas where innocent suffering can be demonstrated: parental suffering, emotional suffering, and suffering due to the words or deeds of others, including the legal system.

The study of parental suffering shows that parents are often subject to the actions of a foolish child, who may behave in such a way that society attributes shame to the parents for what the child has done, even though the child is old enough to make personal choices and be responsible for those choices. Other actions include mocking, cursing, and even robbery, showing that the suffering of parents may be due to verbal or physical abuse. These actions are strongly condemned in the OT and the child who behaves this way is called shameful. If the retribution doctrine was as firm as some have asserted, one could look in the lives of the parents of the fool, the mocker, or the shameful child to find the sin in the life of the parent(s) which brought this pain on them. Proverbs is not this superficial. It recognizes that children may choose to go their own way in spite of the best upbringing. Proverbs nowhere implies or states that parents can be blamed for actions of children who have chosen to go against Yahweh's Torah.

¹⁸ Here again, the quote from n. 10 above from Gottwald, *Light to the Nations*, 472, should be noted.

We can also observe that from a practical viewpoint divine discipline though painful, is motivated by love. This makes interpreting painful circumstances less rigid. No longer was every situation of pain and suffering forced into the mold of divine anger and wrath, as in the Mesopotamian world view. The parental image of Yahweh, springing from the tender intimacy of family relationships, allowed Israel's theologians to place painful realities into a disciplinary setting, while affirming that the relationship between Yahweh and Israel was still intact.

Another result of examining the role of Yahweh as divine parent shows that Yahweh hurts over the misfortunes of his children. When people are abused it is often called an "abomination to Yahweh," the strong impact of which is not always understood by modern readers. The divine anger over the abuse of the innocent has been elucidated in this study.

In examining the proverbs which make reference to emotional suffering we saw a broad range of situations. One of the most common causes of emotional pain was the cares and concerns of everyday survival. Subsistence living had its own share of potential problems completely unrelated to a person's morals. The book of Proverbs can speak of agricultural setbacks without attributing them to sin in the life of the farmer or his family. Emotional pain due to the harsh realities of life is a normal reaction, not a result of sin.

Emotional pain is sometimes caused by the actions or words of others characterized as fools. But more often, emotional pain, which we might

define as depression, discouragement, or the like, is seen as a normal part of life, not the result of an offended deity or demon, as was the case in Mesopotamia regarding virtually any instance of suffering. The proverbs which refer to emotional suffering show an awareness of victimization. The sages knew people might be victims of harsh circumstances that worked against the achievement of goals. This sort of problem is portrayed as the lot of the ordinary person, with no negative reflection on moral character. The situations associated with emotional distress or pain are "facts of life." They are portrayed as ordinary but unfortunate circumstances that can happen to anyone.

The sayings addressing more general categories such as damaging words, harmful actions and the legal system, regard the suffering of the innocent or righteous as an unfortunate but all too frequent occurrence in life. In other words, the proverbs in these categories, along with the others addressed earlier, do not automatically ascribe blame to the one who is suffering.

Proverbs has a lot to say about the legal system and the fact of innocent suffering. The most common observation or prohibition is about or against the false witness or false accusation. There are also sayings which speak of bringing unnecessary lawsuits against others, reversals of justice where the innocent are condemned and the criminals acquitted, bribes and their effect on justice, fining the righteous, and so forth.

Antisocial and criminal behavior is also recognized by the sages. There are examples of ambushing unsuspecting travelers, plotting harm

against a neighbor, and those who are criminally violent. People like this are condemned in the strongest of terms. They often earn the label "abomination of Yahweh" (see above). This would have placed them outside the community as social and religious outcasts. They merited this scorn because of their actions against the innocent and the righteous. And just as Yahweh reacted in a parental way to defend the innocent and the defenseless, those who harm the innocent are also shown to be punished for offenses in the legal and social sphere. They are characterized as perverted (3:32), and in a case of exact retribution, Yahweh is said to "mock those who mock" (3:34). Yahweh also curses the wicked (3:33) and shames fools (3:35), showing a strong response to those who harm the innocent.

Those who were responsible for the origin of the various sayings in Proverbs were aware of situations in which certain people would act outside the law of the king and the law of Yahweh to inflict pain and suffering on the innocent.

One of the purposes in doing a study of this nature is to reclaim the book of Proverbs for practical use. All too often it seems the assumptions of past scholarship have asserted that the book is superficial and of little value. All people seem to be classified in one of two categories which occupy the extreme ends of the spectrum: righteous or wicked, wise or fool, the honored or the shamed, etc. There is no middle ground where the majority live, thus some have cast doubt on the advice offered in Proverbs, calling it trite, banal and superficial. Often overlooked in making these assertions is the role of poetry in formulating these sayings, especially those of an anti-

thetic nature. The classification of all people into one of two categories is due more to the structure of Hebrew poetry than a superficial world view on the part of the sages. It is my belief that the wisdom movement in ancient Israel was very much aware of the problem of the innocent sufferer, and the existence of proverbs and sayings such as those found in this study in chapters three, four, and five shows this beyond doubt.

An important advance made in this study is the delineation of poems or poetic pieces within the book of Proverbs, especially outside of chapters 1 through 9. These poetic pieces have often shown a theological basis. This conclusion is unusual in Proverbs studies since very few scholars in the past have allowed the book to function as a theological work. This current study has shown it to be aware of Yahweh at work in the world and in the lives of people. Rather than categorize the book of Proverbs as a loosely joined series of observations on "wordly wisdom" or "advice on how to live" it is a book founded upon the relationship with Yahweh. It was common among some scholars to refer to proverbs as "secular" if they lacked a divine reference, and a mechanical operation was seen to function in bringing about retribution if retribution was called for in the saying in question. It was claimed that this type of proverb antedated those which are theological.¹⁹ There remains no more reason to draw a distinction between "secular" and "religious" sayings, since these artificial designations did not exist in ancient Israel. Nor can one argue for an evolutionary development

¹⁹ See, e. g., R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs. Ecclesiastes*, AB vol. 18 (Garden City: Doubleday & Co., 1965), xxv-xl; G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (London: SCM, 1972), 53-73.

from one-line statements to couplets, and then to multi-line essays.²⁰ The conclusion I have reached is that it is no longer possible to read the individual proverbs in isolation and demand that they be viewed as developments along an evolutionary continuum which was originally secular, with the divine references being added later.

It is my hope that this dissertation will be a springboard for others to study these matters in further detail, and that it will be found useful for both scholarly and practical examinations of the book of Proverbs,

²⁰ As seen in O. Eissfeldt, *Der Maschal in Alten Testament*, BZAW 24 (Geissen: Topelmann, 1913); W. O. E. Oesterley, *The Book of Proverbs* (London: Methuen, 1929), xii-xvii; and more recently C. Westermann, *Roots of Wisdom: The Oldest Proverbs of Israel and Other Peoples*, tr. J. D. Charles (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1995).

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