

Dr. Knut Heim, Proverbs, Session 13, International Dimensions of Biblical Wisdom Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Briefing Document, 4) Study Guide Quiz, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Heim, Proverbs, Session 13, International Dimensions of Biblical Wisdom, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Knut Heim's lecture discusses the classification of certain Old Testament books—Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and Song of Solomon—as "wisdom literature." **He traces the historical development** of this categorization, noting its 20th-century origins and the scholarly debate surrounding it. **Heim explores the relationship** between these books and similar texts from the ancient Near East, particularly the Egyptian text of Amenemope, emphasizing the creative reuse of existing material rather than strict originality. **The lecture also challenges** the previously held notion that these books represent a "secular" perspective within the Old Testament, arguing for a more nuanced understanding of their religious and cultural context. Finally, **Heim suggests** re-evaluating the genre designation itself, proposing alternative ways to understand their unique contributions to the broader biblical narrative.

**2. 13 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of
Dr. Heim, Session 13 – Double click icon to play in Windows
media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and
click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Psalms &
Wisdom → Proverbs).**



**Heim_Prov_Session
13.mp3**

3. Briefing Document: Heim, Proverbs, Session 13, International Dimensions of Biblical Wisdom

Okay, here is a detailed briefing document summarizing the key themes and ideas from the provided lecture excerpts on the international dimensions of biblical wisdom literature, particularly the Book of Proverbs.

Briefing Document: International Dimensions of Biblical Wisdom Literature

Introduction:

This lecture focuses on the international context of the biblical wisdom literature (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and Song of Solomon) and challenges traditional views of their uniqueness and categorization. It examines the influence of ancient Near Eastern texts, particularly Egyptian wisdom, on these books and reevaluates their place within the broader Old Testament.

Key Themes and Ideas:

1. The Challenge to Old Testament Distinctiveness:

- The discovery of ancient Near Eastern texts with parallels to the Old Testament, especially from the 18th century onwards, raised questions about the uniqueness of the Old Testament as divine revelation.
- "This was a very exciting time of discovery that was beginning to put the Hebrew Bible, the Old Testament, into a larger cultural and historical context."
- The work of James Pritchard (ANET) and Hallow (The Context of Scripture) highlighted similarities between biblical and non-biblical texts.
- Specifically, the wisdom books seem to lack emphasis on key Israelite narratives and concepts like the patriarchs, the Exodus, and the temple.

1. The Case of Amenemope and Proverbs:

- The discovery of the Egyptian "Teachings of Amenemope" in 1922, and the subsequent research by Adolf Ehrman revealed striking similarities, with over 11 verses being almost identical to sections in Proverbs.
- "...there is in fact a section, or various sections, in the book of Amenemope and the book of Proverbs, where several verses, over 11 of them, are almost word for word the same."

- This led to the debate about who copied from whom. Consensus now leans towards Amenemope being earlier (by several hundred years), and thus Proverbs creatively reusing it.
- The initial impulse to defend Proverbs as the original source was primarily due to a need to defend the divine inspiration of the text.

1. **Inspiration and Influence:**

- The lecture argues that the Old Testament does not need to be *unique* to be inspired and valuable.
- "...we do not need to sustain the idea of a uniqueness of the Old Testament in order to appreciate that it can also be truly inspired."
- Biblical authors drew on the "best philosophical, theological, ethical, moral, political writings and traditions of their time" under divine guidance.
- This perspective aligns with a post-modern understanding that value doesn't require uniqueness.
- This also opens up the possibility of appreciating wisdom and truth in other religious and non-religious traditions, in addition to the bible.
- "And believing Christians and Jews can draw on the best of human experience, the best of human insight, including scientific discovery, in order to reach deeper insight into the nature of the universe..."

1. **The Emergence of "Wisdom Literature" as a Category:**

- The classification of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and Song of Songs as "wisdom literature" is a relatively recent development, mainly from the early 20th century.
- "...it was not until the 20th century, the early 1900s, that academics, scholars, professors, pastors, and rabbis have begun to call these four books of wisdom writings or wisdom literature."
- Before this, these books were categorized differently within Jewish and Christian traditions: as poetic (Christian) or within the "writings" (Jewish canon).
- The work of Hermann Gunkel on genre criticism helped scholars recognize the distinctiveness of these books in comparison to the rest of the Old Testament and their similarity to certain ancient Near Eastern writings.

- The term "wisdom" itself and its prominent appearance as a persona in these books also contributed to the designation.

1. **Impact and Engagement with Wisdom Literature:**

- The label "wisdom literature" led scholars to categorize comparable non-biblical texts as "wisdom texts" as well (e.g., Wilfred Lambert's work on Babylonian literature).
- Initially, the "wisdom literature" was largely ignored in Old Testament theologies.
- Gerhard von Rad's book, *The Wisdom of Israel* (1970), sparked a renewed interest in these books by showing their relevance to practical, philosophical, and theological issues.
- This interest led to extensive scholarly work on these books, like the two-volume commentaries on Proverbs by Bruce Waltke and Michael Fox.

1. **Re-evaluation of the "Wisdom Literature" Genre:**

- Recent scholarship, especially from Mark Sneed and William Kynes, is challenging the validity of the "wisdom literature" category, pointing out its recency and artificiality.
- Early explanations that the authors were secular intellectuals or court officials, detached from religious traditions, are viewed as anachronistic. Secularism was not a phenomenon present at the time the writings were created.
- "...the very notion of ancient people being secular is simply anachronistic."
- This reflects a tendency for Western scholars to project their own intellectual and secular frameworks onto the texts.
- The authors were more likely deeply interested in religion and part of their own culture.

1. **A Different Focus, Not a Different Genre:**

- The uniqueness of these writings may stem from their focus on practical life, human relationships, observation of the world, and scientific engagement (as much as it was possible at that time).
- These texts broaden the scope of theological engagement in the Old Testament, extending to all aspects of human life.

- The recent approach is to view these books not as a separate genre but as a special and integral contribution to the broader picture of the Old Testament, emphasizing a particular perspective (e.g. poetic literature that focuses on practical wisdom).
- "... the proposal now is really to engage the biblical texts under consideration, including the Book of Proverbs in particular, not so much as so different from everything else, but to be a genuinely special contribution to the broader picture."

Conclusion:

The lecture argues for a more nuanced understanding of the wisdom literature, acknowledging its international context and its engagement with other cultural and intellectual traditions. It challenges the assumption that divine inspiration requires uniqueness and suggests that these books offer a valuable and practical perspective on life, broadening the scope of the Old Testament's engagement with all aspects of human experience. The lecture also highlights the ever-evolving nature of biblical scholarship, as new perspectives and interpretations continue to emerge.

4. Study Guide: Heim, Proverbs, Session 13, International Dimensions of Biblical Wisdom

International Wisdom in Proverbs: A Study Guide

Quiz

Instructions: Answer each question in 2-3 sentences.

1. Why did scholars begin to question the distinctiveness of the Old Testament in the 18th and 19th centuries?
2. What two major collections of texts document the parallels, similarities, and differences between the Old Testament and ancient Near Eastern texts?
3. What is the significance of the discovery of the teachings of Amenemope in relation to the Book of Proverbs?
4. How has post-modernism helped scholars appreciate the value of non-unique elements within the Old Testament?
5. When did the designation of "wisdom literature" for Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and Song of Songs emerge, and why?
6. How did Hermann Gunkel's work on genre criticism contribute to the understanding of wisdom literature?
7. What was the general attitude of early 20th century Old Testament theologians towards wisdom literature?
8. What key factors contributed to the renewed interest in wisdom literature in the late 20th century?
9. What is the current debate about the validity of designating certain Old Testament texts as "wisdom literature?"
10. How have recent scholars challenged the idea that the authors of wisdom literature were secular intellectuals?

Quiz Answer Key

1. The questioning arose due to the discovery of ancient Near Eastern texts that showed similarities to some portions of the Old Testament, causing scholars to wonder if it was truly unique and divinely inspired.

2. The two major collections are *Ancient Near Eastern Texts* (ANET) by James Pritchard and *The Context of Scripture*, a multi-volume work edited by Hallow.
3. The discovery revealed almost word-for-word similarities between sections of Amenemope and Proverbs, prompting debate about who copied whom and challenging the idea of the Bible's sole originality.
4. Post-modernism has helped scholars understand that something does not have to be unique to be valuable, thus allowing appreciation for the influences on the Bible from other cultures.
5. The designation emerged in the early 20th century as scholars became more aware that these books were distinct in form and orientation from the rest of the Old Testament.
6. Gunkel's work on genre criticism made people more aware that these books were different from other Old Testament texts and similar to ancient Near Eastern texts.
7. Early 20th century theologians largely neglected wisdom literature as it did not fit into the distinctives they emphasized in Old Testament theologies.
8. The renewed interest was due in part to the international dimension of these books, as well as von Raat's work that showed its practical and philosophical relevance in daily life.
9. Some scholars are now arguing that "wisdom literature" is an artificial and recent genre designation, questioning whether these texts should be seen as distinct from the rest of the Old Testament.
10. Recent scholars argue that there was no secularism in the ancient Near East and that the authors of the texts were deeply religious people who simply focused on different aspects of the human experience.

Essay Questions

1. Discuss the impact of ancient Near Eastern discoveries on the understanding of the Old Testament. How has the discovery of texts like the teachings of Amenemope changed the way scholars interpret the book of Proverbs?
2. Analyze the historical development of the classification "wisdom literature," focusing on the factors that led to its emergence and the debates surrounding its validity.
3. How has the scholarly understanding of the authors of wisdom literature changed over the past century? Discuss the evolving views on their backgrounds and motivations in relation to their works.
4. Explore the various ways in which the so-called "wisdom literature" integrates practical, ethical, and philosophical dimensions of life. How might this focus make it relevant for the modern reader?
5. Assess the significance of the recent move towards integrating, rather than separating, the "wisdom literature" with the rest of the Old Testament. What are the potential implications of this shift in perspective?

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Ancient Near East (ANE):** A historical and geographical region including parts of North Africa and Southwest Asia, where many of the cultures that influenced the Bible originated.
- **Amenemope:** An ancient Egyptian text containing wisdom teachings that bear striking similarities to sections of the biblical Book of Proverbs.
- **Anachronistic:** Something that is out of its proper time period, especially something that belongs to a different historical era.
- **Form Criticism (or Genre Criticism):** A method of biblical analysis that studies the literary forms or genres of biblical texts to better understand their historical, cultural, and theological contexts.
- **Hermeneutics:** The theory and methodology of interpretation, especially of biblical texts.
- **Monotheism:** The belief in only one God.
- **Post-Modernism:** A philosophical and cultural movement that questions traditional concepts of truth and objectivity and emphasizes the value of diverse perspectives.
- **Secularism:** A worldview that does not incorporate religious or spiritual beliefs or viewpoints. It is the principle of separation of the government and its institutions from religious institutions.
- **The Wisdom of Israel:** A key book by Gerhard von Rad that helped spark new interest and scholarly analysis of biblical wisdom literature.
- **Wisdom Literature:** A category of Old Testament books (Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and sometimes Song of Songs) characterized by their focus on practical, ethical, and philosophical reflections on human life.

5. FAQs on Heim, Proverbs, Session 13, International Dimensions of Biblical Wisdom, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about Biblical Wisdom Literature

1. **What is meant by "wisdom literature" in the Bible, and which books are typically included?**
2. "Wisdom literature" is a term used to describe a collection of biblical books that focus on practical, philosophical, and theological themes related to the human experience. These books emphasize the pursuit of wisdom, moral living, and understanding the complexities of life. The books commonly categorized as wisdom literature include Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and, to a degree, the Song of Solomon. While these books explore theological ideas, they differ from other Old Testament texts that focus on the law, history, or prophecy.
3. **Why did the idea of "wisdom literature" as a distinct category emerge relatively late in biblical studies?**
4. The categorization of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Job, and Song of Solomon as "wisdom literature" is a relatively recent development, primarily emerging in the early 20th century. Before that, they were often grouped with poetic texts (like Psalms) or with the general "writings" category in the Jewish canon. The emergence of "wisdom literature" as a distinct category was driven by a growing awareness of these books' unique form, style, and focus on practical wisdom, ethics, and reflection on the human condition, which set them apart from other Old Testament texts. Scholars also recognized parallels between these books and similar texts found in the ancient Near East.
5. **How do the wisdom books relate to the broader cultural and intellectual context of the ancient Near East?**
6. The wisdom books are deeply connected to the broader cultural and intellectual landscape of the ancient Near East. Archaeological discoveries have revealed texts from Egypt and Mesopotamia that share similarities with the biblical wisdom literature. For example, the Egyptian "Teachings of Amenemope" has striking parallels with portions of the Book of Proverbs, indicating a shared intellectual and literary tradition. These connections highlight that the authors of the wisdom books were not operating in a vacuum but were engaged with the prevailing wisdom traditions of their time.

7. **Did the authors of Proverbs directly copy from sources like "The Teachings of Amenemope"?**
8. While it was initially debated whether Proverbs copied "The Teachings of Amenemope" or vice versa, there is now a scholarly consensus that the "Teachings of Amenemope" predate Proverbs. It's widely agreed that the author(s) of Proverbs creatively reused or adapted existing wisdom material from texts like Amenemope, integrating it into a new context within the Judeo-Christian tradition. Rather than seeing this as plagiarism, it is viewed as an example of the biblical authors drawing upon the best available insights of their time under divine guidance.
9. **How does the recognition of shared wisdom traditions affect our understanding of the divine inspiration of scripture?**
10. The fact that biblical wisdom literature shares similarities with texts from other cultures doesn't diminish its status as inspired scripture. Rather, it enriches our understanding by demonstrating that divine revelation can occur through various means, including the creative use of existing cultural and intellectual resources. The authors of these texts were guided by the Holy Spirit as they incorporated and reinterpreted ideas from their surroundings, crafting a uniquely Judeo-Christian perspective that is truthful and valuable. Divine inspiration is not tied to uniqueness but can be found in the transformation and application of common human experience and wisdom.
11. **Were the authors of the wisdom literature secular or separated from the main religious traditions of Israel?**
12. The idea that the authors of wisdom literature were secular, or entirely separate from the priests, prophets, and theological traditions of Israel, is now considered anachronistic and unlikely. Secularism, as a concept, is a relatively recent development, not applicable to the ancient world. Recent scholarship suggests that the authors were deeply engaged with their faith and their culture and were seeking to understand and express truth about God through observations of everyday life. Instead of being secular intellectuals, they were likely religious thinkers embedded in their communities, exploring universal themes in a manner that resonated with their audience.

13. Why do the wisdom books focus so much on practical aspects of life and earthly experiences, seemingly less on specific religious practices or stories?

14. The focus of the wisdom books on practical life, ethical conduct, relationships, economics, and observations of the natural world reflects a desire to explore the breadth of human experience in relation to the divine. These books demonstrate that spiritual understanding and God's presence aren't limited to explicitly religious contexts but are woven into the fabric of daily life. They use ordinary experiences and observations to impart wisdom about living well in God's created world. This emphasis broadens the theological lens of the Old Testament to include all aspects of human life as a theater for encountering God.

15. What is the current scholarly perspective on the "wisdom literature" designation, and how should we approach these texts today?

16. While the term "wisdom literature" remains a useful designation, some scholars are now questioning its usefulness as a strict genre classification. They suggest that it can unintentionally create an artificial separation between these books and the rest of the Old Testament. Instead, there's an emphasis on recognizing these texts as poetic works that focus on specific aspects of human life while being an integrated and important part of the broader theological tradition. This approach encourages us to read these texts not in isolation but in conjunction with the wider narrative of the Bible, recognizing them as distinct contributions that enrich our understanding of faith, life, and the relationship between God and humanity.