

## BOOK REVIEW

*An Introduction to Israel's Wisdom Traditions*, 217 pp, John L. McLasughlin, eds. (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2018). Reviewed by Simcha Rosenberg.

The wisdom literature of the Bible, Proverbs, Job and Kohelet, is rarely studied in depth in traditional settings, particularly as a distinct unit and genre. This book, presented as an introductory level, very readable, textbook, fills this gap and examines them in depth. In addition to chapters devoted to each of the wisdom books, chapter 8 explores wisdom elements and possible influence in the other parts of Tanakh, even the narrative sections, and particularly in the so-called “wisdom psalms” (pp. 151-155).

Since wisdom literature deals with more universal themes rather than ritual and religious commandments, fruitful comparisons can be made with the similar literature of the surrounding nations at the time these works were composed. For example, very close similarities, even to the level of phrasing and the order of items listed in a verse, are found when comparing the segments of *The Epic of Gilgamesh* which offer advice and the advice given in Kohelet (p. 19). Significant contrasts also emerge. Two Egyptian works deal with the theme of injustice, with certain similarities to the Book of Job. However, in the Egyptian *Tale of the Eloquent Peasant* a human causes the problems rather than God (p. 16), and in *The Dispute Over Suicide* suicide is proposed as a response to injustice, an idea never entertained in Job.

Beyond exploring the Biblical wisdom literature, the book devotes significant space to a study of the deuterocanonical Jewish wisdom books, *The Wisdom of Ben Sira*, described as a “better organized” Book of Proverbs (p. 115) and *The Wisdom of Solomon*, which begins with an extensive treatment of the suffering of the righteous in its first six chapters (p. 133).

Also worth mention is this Christian author's use of the term First Testament rather than the pejorative Old Testament and the inaccurate Hebrew Bible (as some parts of Ezra and Daniel are in Aramaic) as an “uneasy compromise” (p. 1). All in all this is a very worthwhile introduction and overview of parts of the Bible that are often neglected.

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