

## POVERTY IN THE SOCIAL WORLD OF THE WISE

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Significant progress has been made in clarifying the social milieu of the biblical wisdom literature. Although scholars are certainly not in complete agreement on this issue, nevertheless many have convincingly argued for an urban elite educational background as the well-spring of wisdom thought. This paper explores this thesis through a consideration of wisdom teaching on poverty. The study begins with a brief sketch of the royal tendencies and influences present in the book of Proverbs. The view defended here is that the values and interests of the wisdom writers are the same as those of the urban elite whom they serve. There follows a detailed consideration of the distinctive use of the Hebrew terms for poor in the book of Proverbs. An examination of this vocabulary sets in sharp relief the view of poverty held by the wise. In the course of this essay it will be seen that, in their understanding of the causes and theological dimensions of poverty, the wise differed significantly from other strains of the biblical tradition, in particular the Hebrew prophets. The evidence of the wisdom vocabulary on poverty confirms the view that the wise are the purveyors of urban values.

### *1. Social Background of the Wisdom Literature*

Many argue that the materials in Proverbs have their origins in the life and needs of the royal court. Several scholars see evidence for this view in the fact that the Egyptian and Mesopotamian wisdom writings were produced by the court schools (cf. Gordis 1971: 163; Malchow 1982: 121; Mettinger 1971: 143-144; Olivier 1975). The Egyptian wisdom instructions, in particular, are often connected with kings or state officials and thus have their place in the scribal

schools of the royal court.<sup>1</sup> Israel, likewise, would have needed centers of learning to educate its officials (Lemaire 1984: 277; Crenshaw 1985: 607; cf. Mettinger 1971: 143-44; Hermisson 1968: 97-136; Olivier 1975: 56-59); and it is quite plausible that material such as that found in Proverbs served as instructional texts for aspiring court officials or their children (Heaton 1974: 103-14; cf. Mettinger 1971: 140-43).<sup>2</sup> The possibility of direct influence of Egyptian wisdom on the Israelite tradition and the importance of the instructional literary form to the Israelite scribal tradition (Prov. 1-9; 31.1-9; Mettinger 1971: 145) strengthen this consideration.<sup>3</sup>

The royal associations of Israelite wisdom literature are clear. Kings, such as Solomon and Hezekiah, are expressly connected with the text (Prov. 1.1; 25.1). The royal background of the wisdom literature helps to explain why the office of the king plays an important role in Proverbs.<sup>4</sup> The text's concern for the king and for attitudes toward the king are emphases quite proper to an education in royal society.

Some have argued that the biblical text of Proverbs is a document which reflects the traditions and attitudes of popular culture, namely the non-royal village society of the premonarchic period (cf. e.g. Murphy 1978: 37; 1983: 17-19; Nel 1982: 14-15; Clements 1975: 73-74, 81). We concur with Lemaire, however, that written collections such as the book of Proverbs would not have had their setting in popular culture: 'The *written* transmission of *collections* of proverbs presupposes a cultural milieu different from that of the oral transmission of isolated proverbs used occasionally in everyday life or in traditional palavers' (Lemaire 1984: 272).<sup>5</sup> While it is possible that some of the proverbial material comes from the popular culture, its transferral into writing indicates its urban educational function. On this basis it can be argued that the Proverbs collection would have served the needs of those who knew how to read and write and who were employed for scribal purposes.<sup>6</sup>

One of the implications of the royal background of wisdom writing in Israel is that this literature is a product of the ruling elite, a sector of the society that 'had little in common with the poorer peasants clinging desperately to their holdings, or with the petty tradesmen and the artisans in the cities, who suffered their own discontents and were evolving new values in their religious tradition' (Gordis 1971: 162). It is to be expected, then, that the values and practices advocated in the wisdom tradition are in accord with the political

and economic leanings of the ruling classes (cf. Gordis 1971: 169). If this view is correct then the wisdom teaching on poverty should bear the marks of values and attitudes adhered to by the educated elite.

## 2. *The Terms for Poor: Distribution Patterns*

The vocabulary used for 'poor' in Proverbs reveals patterns markedly different from those found in other blocks of biblical literature. The prophetic literature, for example, uses four terms when speaking of the poor: *'ebyôn* ('poor'; 17 times), *dal* ('weak, haggard, poor'; 12 times), *'ānī* ('poor, oppressed'; 25 times), and *'ānāw* ('humble'; 7 times). Similarly the Psalms prefer *'ebyôn* (23 times) and *'ānī* (31 times) when discussing poverty, but also make use of *dal* (5 times) and *'ānāw* (13 times). A glance at the statistics for Proverbs reveals a startling contrast. In the book of Proverbs the terms *'ebyôn* (4 times) and *'ānī* (8 times) occur rarely and in restricted contexts (see below). Of the terms for 'poor' used by the prophets and the Psalms, the adjective *dal* is the one used and preferred by the wisdom writers (15 times). Furthermore, when speaking about poverty, the writers of Proverbs add the adjective/participle *rāš* ('poor, indigent'; 15 times) and the noun *maḥsôr* ('need, lack, poverty'; 8 times), terms which rarely appear in the Psalms (*rāš* in Ps. 82.3; *maḥsôr* in Ps. 34.10 [Eng. 34.9]), and which are not found at all in the prophetic materials. This divergence in word choice between the prophets and the wise should be considered the sign that a different jargon is present, in this case the specialized language of the wisdom teachers.<sup>7</sup> The use of *dal*, *rāš*, and *maḥsôr* characterizes the value system adhered to by the wise, one which differed substantially from that of the prophets.<sup>8</sup>

## 3. *The terms 'ebyôn and 'ānī/'ānāw*

The traditional paralleling of *'ebyôn* and *'ānī* found in the Psalms and the prophets also occurs in Proverbs, but in restricted contexts. Curiously this pairing appears only in chs. 30–31, sections of the book of Proverbs assigned to the sage Agur, the son of Yakeh (Prov. 30.1), and to Lemuel's mother (Prov. 31.1), although the exact authorship of the entire material remains uncertain (cf. McKane 1970: 643). The peculiarity of these texts is further heightened by the fact that *'ebyôn* and *'ānī* are used only rarely outside of chs. 30–31

(*'ebyôn*, 14.31; *'ānî*, 3.34; 14.21; 15.15; 16.19; see discussion below). Moreover, the terms *dal*, *rāš*, and *maḥsôr*, common to Proverbs 10–29, are not found at all in chs. 30–31. This state of affairs suggests a differing editorial history and authorship for chs. 30–31, and perhaps even a differing social background for this material.

In Prov. 30.14 the *'ebyôn* and *'ānî* are placed in the context of exploitation. The writer observes that 'There are those whose teeth are swords, whose teeth are knives, to devour the poor [*'ānî*] from off the earth, the needy [*'ebyôn*] from among men (Prov. 30.14). Here the wisdom writer approximates the social criticism of the prophets using traditional phrasing shared with the prophets. If the prophets offer any clue to the interpretation of this material, the agents of the devouring of the *'ānî* and *'ebyôn* are the ruling elite (cf. e.g. Amos 4.1; 5.11; 6.1–6; Isa. 3.13–14; Jer. 5.4–5, 27–28). Next, the pair *'ebyôn* and *'ānî* is found in ch. 31, where King Lemuel passes on the words of his mother. He was exhorted to 'Open your mouth, judge righteously, maintain the rights of the poor [*'ānî*] and needy [*'ebyôn*]' (Prov. 31.9). A concern for justice surrounds these terms for poor, and it is a concern connected with the king who is treated as the protector of the poor. To this one might compare Jeremiah's exhortations to king Jehoiakim, who was reminded that Jehoiakim's father, King Josiah, 'judged the cause of the poor [*'ānî*] and needy [*'ebyôn*]; then it was well' (Jer. 22.16). Finally, in the acrostic poem concerning the wise and capable wife, this woman's just character is demonstrated by the fact that, 'She opens her hand to the poor [*'ānî*], and reaches out her hands to the needy [*'ebyôn*]' (Prov. 31.20).

The term *'ānî*/*'ānāw* also occurs apart from *'ebyôn* and *dal* in Proverbs.<sup>9</sup> The term *'ānî* is found once in the instructions in wisdom collected in Proverbs 1–9. This in itself is unusual since neither *'ebyôn* nor *dal* appears at all in Proverbs 1–9; only *maḥsôr* is also found in the section in question (see below). The passage (Prov. 3.34) relates the response of Yahweh toward the wicked and the upright. In a series of antithetic pairs, vv. 32–34 reveal the divergent response Yahweh makes to these two groups: the devious man is loathed, the wicked man's house is cursed, and the scoffer receives scorn. By contrast the upright are taken into Yahweh's confidence, and the righteous man's house is blessed. The *'ānî*/*'ānāw* are grouped among the upright and righteous as people who are favored by God. The link between *'ānāw* and piety has been argued by some in relation to the Psalms (cf. e.g. Rahlfs 1892; Baudissin 1912; van der Ploeg 1950;

van den Berghe 1962) and may find a counterpart in this text. Here the writer uses the link to good effect, contrasting Yahweh's attitude toward the upright/righteous/humble and the devious/wicked/scoffer. Altering the parallelism the writer concludes in Prov. 3.35, 'The wise will inherit honor, but fools get disgrace'. It is difficult to know if the writer intends this statement to be treated simply as another example of Yahweh's just ways or if through parallelism the writer seeks to identify the holders of wisdom with the humble and just, that is, those who are in Yahweh's confidence, and thus blessed and favored. In so doing the wise would be numbered among the ranks of the *'ānī/ānāw*; however, this is not a typical posture for the wise according to the rest of the book of Proverbs.

The term *'ānī* occurs three times in the sentence literature of Proverbs 10–22. In the first instance, Prov. 14.21, those who show kindness to the *'ānī/ānāw* are considered 'happy', while those who despise friends are treated as 'sinners'. Kindness to the poor is, as will be seen, a common exhortation in the wisdom literature, with charity being a mark of the truly wise. Next, the lot of the *'ānī* is presented as a continual struggle in Prov. 15.15. Their plight is the opposite of a 'continual feast', although the exact circumstances are not specified. McKane suggests that the 'good morale' which produces this feast is 'an inner resilience which is invulnerable to the whims of fortune' (McKane 1970: 481). He adds that 'whoever has it will not allow himself to be broken by the assaults of poverty. He will withstand them with unconquerable courage, with dignity and composure, and will not permit poverty to contaminate him. He will endure poverty without suffering degradation' (McKane 1970: 481). Finally, in 16.19 the text of Proverbs states, 'It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor [*'ānī/ānāw*] than to divide the spoil with the proud [better: ruthless/arrogant]'. In the wisdom literature wealth is seen as something good; however, the wise often temper and limit the conditions under which it is to be enjoyed.<sup>10</sup> Here the sage seeks to distance the student from associations with the proud, arguing that a place among the *'ānī* would be preferable (see further below).<sup>11</sup> The understanding of poverty which attends *'ānī* in Proverbs (outside of chs. 30–31) closely resembles the view which the wise develop elsewhere in Proverbs using other terms for poor (see further below). Unlike the prophetic materials, Proverbs 1–22 does not link the term *'ānī* to the socio-economic oppression of the poor by the ruling elite.<sup>12</sup>

4. *The Vocabulary of the Wise: dal, rāš, and maḥsôr*

These few references to *'ebyôn* and *'ānī* are overshadowed by the frequent use of *dal*, *rāš*, and *maḥsôr* in the text of Proverbs.<sup>13</sup> As noted above, it is these terms which constitute a special vocabulary of the wise for discussing poverty. Thus, even though the term *dal* is shared with the prophets and Psalms it is clear from the distribution patterns that *dal* is a term preferred by the wise, whereas neither the prophets nor the Psalms show a preference for this term. A study of the wisdom usage reveals that this divergence in distribution is accompanied by a divergence in value concerns between the prophets and the wise.

The wisdom literature is concerned with schooling the student in how to respond to life's many circumstances and demands. These sentences offer practical guidelines for meeting the challenges of the world, and reveal what principles were thought by the wise to govern the world order. The wisdom material in this section cultivates the virtues of wealth by warning of the hard realities of poverty. Many of the verses present the stark contrast between wealth and poverty in an effort to steer the student away from a lifestyle which would lead to indigence. The terms *dal*, *rāš*, and *maḥsôr* occur several times in the sentence literature of Proverbs 10–22, and it is with this material that we begin a survey of these words.

Poverty by its very nature consigns the poor to a miserable fate, one not to be sought or cherished. In Prov. 18.23 the *rāš* is presented as one who begs. The response the poor person receives from the rich, however, is harshness. Such an observation does not condone this attitude of the rich toward the poor. In fact, there are many exhortations from the wise that the poor are not to be mocked (see below). What this passage does indicate, however, is that poverty is an ugly situation, leaving one at the mercy of the often unsympathetic whims of the rich. The wise also know that the rich rule the *rāš* and that the borrower is a slave to the lender (Prov. 22.7). This too serves as a solemn warning to the student to avoid falling into poverty. Wealth and poverty are contrasted in Prov. 10; 15. 'A rich man's wealth is his strong city; the poverty of the poor is their ruin'. McKane comments that 'Wealth is an insurance against the chanciness of existence, and whoever has it is not naked and defenceless before its vicissitudes' (McKane 1970: 417). There is no virtue or refuge in poverty from the perspective of the wise.

The terrible condition of poverty is stressed by reference to its friendless character. Prov. 14.20 states, 'The poor [*rāš*] is disliked even by his neighbor, but the rich has many friends'. The friendless character of poverty is highlighted in Prov. 19.7: 'All a poor man's [*rāš*] brothers hate him; how much more do his friends go far from him!'. Friendship is also the concern of Prov. 19.4. There it is observed that 'Wealth brings many new friends, but a poor man [*dal*] is deserted by his friend'. The friendless character of poverty is stressed even more forcibly in a sentence which suggests that the very worst situation to be found among the poor is when one poor person [*rāš*] oppresses another [*dal*] (Prov. 28.3).<sup>14</sup> Gordis comments,

But what an irony to see a poor man making life miserable for his fellows and gaining nothing thereby! The observation comes with especial aptness from a perspicacious son of the upper classes, who was tired perhaps of the perpetual accusations levelled against wealthy malefactors by prophets, lawgivers and sages (Gordis 1971: 172).

There is no community among the poor according to the wise. It is a condition which lacks the camaraderie known by the wealthy, i.e. in 'civilized' society.

As aware as the wise appear to be of the brutal condition of the poor, it is clear that the writers of Proverbs do not look beyond the hard realities of this life in anticipation of a new order in which the poor will be vindicated — a transformation such as that proclaimed by the prophets (cf. e.g. Isa. 14.30; 26.6; 29.19; 32.7; Zeph. 3.12). Nor does the wisdom writer seem to see any terrible injustice in the existing world order (cf. Gordis 1971: 177-78). For the wise, poverty is a reality to be avoided, but not protested against. Unlike the prophetic social critique, the wisdom writer draws no connection between the poverty of the poor and the wealth of the rich. The sole exception to this may be Prov. 28.15, which states, 'Like a roaring lion or a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor [*dal*] people'. However, in general the writers of Proverbs betray no awareness that the poor as a group are poor because they have been wronged by the ruling elite, as the prophets consistently proclaimed. Instead the wise merely observe that taking from the *dal* is as pointless as giving to the rich. In the end one ends up with nothing (Prov. 22.16). How different the prophetic view which contends that much gain is made by those who take from the poor! For the wise, poverty, like wealth, was accepted as one of the givens of existence with which the student

must learn to cope. One presumes that the student, who comes from an elite background, would be able to avoid a lapse into poverty if only the advice of the wise were followed.

The terms *rāš* and *maḥsôr* are often connected with laziness in Proverbs. The wisdom teachers show a great concern for diligence and offer strong warnings against laziness. In the poems on wisdom in Proverbs 1–9 *maḥsôr* results from too much sleep and not enough attentiveness to one's labors (Prov. 6.11). The wise hold up the ant as the model of success:

Go to the ant, O sluggard; consider her ways, and be wise. Without having any chief, officer or ruler, she prepares her food in summer, and gathers her sustenance in harvest. How long will you lie there, O sluggard? When will you arise from your sleep? A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest, and poverty [*rē'š*] will come upon you like a vagabond, and want [*maḥsôr*] like an armed man (Prov. 6.6–11).

Diligence and laziness are also the concern of 10.4: 'A slack hand causes poverty [*rāš*], but the hand of the diligent makes rich'. The wise cultivate a work ethic. It is work (*'ešeb*) that brings profit (*môtār*), but mere talk that breeds want (*maḥsôr*; Prov. 14.23). Similar sentiments are expressed elsewhere (for *maḥsôr* see Prov. 21.5, 24.34; cf. Prov. 19.15, 24).<sup>15</sup>

The attempt to locate the roots of poverty in laziness is entirely absent from the prophetic literature. As van Leeuwen observes, the perspective in Proverbs is that of one who has not known poverty. Van Leeuwen writes, 'Poverty can thus only be judged by someone who has never become its victim personally, and who consequently has never experienced it as a pressing problem' (van Leeuwen 1955: 153). For the wise poverty was 'a chastisement that one brings upon oneself' (Van Leeuwen 1955: 153). It is the deserved result of drunkenness and lack of industry (Prov. 10.4; 12.11; 19.15; 20.4; 20.13; 21.17; 23.20; cf. Davies 1981: 106). Such an understanding of the cause of poverty might have been congenial to the well-to-do, but the prophets argued that it was the socio-economic structures of the society that produced poverty. Herein lies a major point of contention between the prophets and the wise—theirs is a disagreement over the causes of poverty (Van Leeuwen 1955: 153). On the prophetic analysis the plight of the poor was not something for which the poor were themselves responsible. Indeed the poor were 'victims



of poor social conditions, dupes of oppression and of the possessiveness of the great' (van Leeuwen 1955: 153).

Even though the poor are considered a despised and lazy lot in the proverbial literature, the mistreatment of the poor is discouraged as behavior inappropriate to the truly wise person. The student must learn what the proper posture toward the poor should be. In the first place the text states that one should not despise or mock the *rāš*, for this is an insult to the Creator (Prov. 17.5). Likewise, in Prov. 14.31 the oppression (*'šq*) of the *dal* is condemned as an affront to God, but kindness to the *'ebyôn* is lauded. The basis for this posture toward the poor rests on the belief that the Lord makes both the rich and the poor; both poverty and wealth are thought of as given by God or fate (cf. Prov. 22.2; 29.13; Donald 1964: 29).<sup>16</sup>

Opposition to the mistreatment of the poor is expressed rather more strongly in the 'Sayings of the Wise' (Prov. 22.17–24.34), a text which has clear connections to the Egyptian instruction of Amenemope (Bryce 1979: chs. 1–3; see references in footnote 3).<sup>17</sup> The writer states, 'Do not rob the poor [*dal*], because he is poor [*dal*], or crush the afflicted [*'ānī*] at the gate' (Prov. 22.22). The close paralleling of *dal* and *'ānī* is unusual in the text of Proverbs. The subject of the gate is also striking since this is the only instance in Proverbs of a concern for justice at the gate (cf. Prov. 24.7). The motivation against oppression is likewise unparalleled in Proverbs: one must not rob the poor because 'the LORD will plead their cause and despoil of life those who despoil them' (Prov. 22.22; cf. Exod. 22.20–22 [Eng. 22.21–23]). McKane (1970: 377) draws attention to the parallel in Amenemope ch. 2: 'Beware of robbing a wretch, of attacking a cripple' (Lichtheim 1976: 150). This text reveals how ancient the teaching against robbing the poor was in wisdom circles.<sup>18</sup> McKane points out that the Egyptian text of Amenemope differs from the Hebrew injunction in that the Egyptian text lacks a religious motivation to encourage the support of the poor. In the Hebrew text Yahweh is presented as a God who defends the poor, and for that reason one should not mistreat the poor. Yet it must be observed that this passage is not typical for the wisdom of Proverbs. If this text could be dated more securely one might have evidence for an important development in the biblical wisdom tradition. The writers of Proverbs are generally unconcerned with the notion of Yahweh as the bringer of justice. It was the prophets who felt compelled to elevate the ancient values ignored by the wise, or to which the urban

elite's educators only paid lip service.

Assisting the poor through giving—charity—was an important concern to the wise. The student is warned against neglecting the poor (*dal*, Prov. 21.13). It may be that one day the student might be in distress and the neglect of others would rebound to leave the student naked before disaster, with no one to assist. The wise person shares food with the poor (*dal*, Prov. 22.9). The defining feature of just rulers is their treatment of the poor (*dal*) in legal contexts (Prov. 29.14). Similarly in chs. 28–29 of Proverbs—a section which is concerned with contrasting the wicked and the righteous, and subsets of these two groups—the character of righteousness is defined in Prov. 29.7 as showing concern for justice to the poor (*dal*).<sup>19</sup> It is not the case, as McKane claims, that this verse is 'another . . . of the few examples of a wisdom sentence which is an instrument of prophetic teaching' (McKane 1970: 641). Such an attitude is not foreign to wisdom thought, but the type of social justice envisioned here differs from that found in the prophetic literature (see discussion below). Nevertheless, to the wise the just treatment of the poor is a mark of righteousness.

Malchow attempts to show that the wisdom literature's approach to the poor extends beyond charity. He believes the writings advocate an active posture toward the poor—a posture which deserves the label of 'social justice' (Malchow 1982: 122). Against this I would argue, first, that Malchow has failed to separate the attitudes found in the book of Proverbs from those in Job. The understanding of poverty and the usage of the terms for poor in Job differ markedly from Proverbs. Job overlaps much more with the prophetic materials than it does with Proverbs both in its selection of terms for poor (Job uses *'ebyôn*, *dal*, and *'ānī*, but never *rāš* or *maḥsôr*) and in its understanding of poverty as a condition which results from injustice (cf. e.g. Job 24.4, 9, 14; 29.12; 30.25; 31.16; 34.28; 36.6, 15). Thus the understanding of poverty found in Job might be termed social justice. However, the book of Proverbs never moves beyond charity. The concern found in Proverbs over false weights and measures (Prov. 11.1; 16.11; 20.10; 20.23), and its call for the respect for property lines (Prov. 23.10–11) is ancient in the wisdom tradition, but this hardly qualifies as a comprehensive concern for social justice such as that found in the prophetic literature.<sup>20</sup> Next, the text of Proverbs exhibits no consciousness that the wealth of the cities was obtained at the expense of the peasant

population, as the prophets so tellingly indicate was the case. There is no awareness on the part of the wise that there are institutional evils which need to be addressed. Such an awareness constitutes the prerequisite for labeling a perspective one of 'social justice' rather than one of simple charity. By contrast, the wise focus on the charitable care of individuals, and seem oblivious to the plight of the poor as a group. In general the wise treated poverty as one of life's inevitable, unpredictable misfortunes brought about by the mysterious ways of Yahweh.<sup>21</sup> All that the wise person could do was work diligently in the hope of avoiding such a fate. One showed concern for the poor only to avoid mistreatment should one also happen to fall into poverty.

The motivation for charity is perhaps not for the noblest reasons. Negatively it is said that, 'He who oppresses the poor [*dal*] to increase his own wealth, or gives to the rich, will only come to want [*maḥsôr*]' (Prov. 22.16), and elsewhere, 'He who closes his ear to the cry of the poor [*dal*] will himself cry out and not be heard' (Prov. 21.13). The practice of usury is condemned for similar reasons. The student is warned that wealth gained in such a manner will pass on to one who is generous to the poor (*dal*, Prov. 28.8; cf. Lev. 25.36; Exod. 22.23 [Eng. 22.24]; Deut. 23.21 [Eng. 23.20]; McKane 1970: 626). Thus the wise warn that both the failure to help the poor and the attempt to make gains at their expense can bring poverty on the evildoer.

The inducement offered by the wise for assisting the poor is that blessings and rewards from God are promised in return for charitable giving. Prov. 11.24 states, 'One man gives freely, yet grows all the richer; another withholds what he should give, and only suffers want [*maḥsôr*]'. In Prov. 19.17 kindness to the *dal* is treated as lending to Yahweh (cf. Prov. 14.21). Note that one is not exhorted to aid the poor in order to right injustice, following the prophetic call; rather, one aids the *dal* with material reward in mind. When one lends to Yahweh, 'he [i.e. Yahweh] will repay him [i.e. the lender] for his deed' (Prov. 19.17). Similarly Prov. 28.27 states, 'He who gives to the poor [*rāš*] will not want [*maḥsôr*], but he who hides his eyes will get many a curse'. The way one overcomes society's inequities according to the wise is through a reliance on the generosity of the rich who will in turn benefit from their own giving.

The wisdom teachers use the notion of poverty to remind their audience that there are worse things in the world than poverty.<sup>22</sup>

One would be better off poor (*rās*) than a liar (Prov. 19.1, 22). Similarly, one would be better off poor (*rās*) than 'perverse' in one's deeds (Prov. 28.6).<sup>23</sup> Wealth too has its dangers according to the wise. Wealth is transitory (cf. e.g. Prov. 11.28; 20.17, 21; 23.4-5, 23-27; 28.22; 29.3).<sup>24</sup> Since wealth can cloud one's self-esteem, the wise state that it is better to have the perspective of the poor person: 'A rich man is wise in his own eyes, but a poor man who has understanding will find him out' (28.11). The wise warn that excessive concern for wealth can lead to poverty (*maḥsôr*, Prov. 21.17). Finally, the sages maintain that wealth can enslave (Prov. 13.8). McKane suggests that the intent of this verse is to warn that the wealthy can be the subject of threats and blackmail (McKane 1970: 458). The poor, by contrast, have little or no property that can be extorted.

### 5. Conclusion

The patterning of terms in Proverbs appears to reflect the divergent understanding of poverty cultivated by the wise—an understanding which forms a contrast to the position developed by the prophets. The teachings of the wise support their concerns for social status, class distinction, and the proper use of wealth—concerns which are rooted in the values cultivated by the ruling elite from which the wisdom literature arises. To the wise the poor are insignificant elements in the social order from whom nothing can be taken. In its instructional use of poverty, however, Proverbs seems to display an ambivalence in its attitude toward the poor, at times elevating the poor and at times disdaining them. But in this, the wisdom teacher is only concerned to make the student aware of the need to limit one's enjoyment of wealth, and for this purpose, reference to poverty was a useful teaching device. Nevertheless, this does not mean that the wise took vows of poverty! Poverty is called upon for its heuristic value, enabling the student to grasp the proper attitude toward wealth and wisdom. There is no attempt to elevate the condition of the poor or to treat poverty as a desirable existence. Nor is there any awareness that, in fact, the urban population was making great gains from its exploitation of the poor—a fact which was foremost in the denunciations of the prophets.<sup>25</sup>

## NOTES

1. Examples include: crown prince Harjedef to his son (Lichtheim 1973: 58-59); an unknown vizier to his son, Kagemni, who was eventually elevated to a governing post (Lichtheim 1973: 59-60); Ptahhotep, a crown prince and governing official (Lichtheim 1973: 61-80); the *Instruction to Merikare*, an elder king to his son, the heir apparent (Lichtheim 1973: 97-109); *The Instruction of King Amenemhet I for his Son Sesostri I* (Lichtheim 1973: 135-45); the text of Any, the writing of a scribe to his son (Lichtheim 1976: 135-46); and the instruction of Amenemope, an agricultural overseer and scribe (Lichtheim 1976: 146-63).

2. The Egyptian wisdom texts seldom refer to an educational setting in the course of the material (cf. *Satire of the Trades* [Lichtheim 1973: 185]; Any [Lichtheim 1976: 140]). A similar silence in Proverbs does not, therefore, allow one to conclude that the biblical wisdom material originates outside royal society.

3. For a review of the arguments concerning the Egyptian influence on Israel's wisdom tradition, cf. Bryce 1979: 15-56; Emerton 1979: 214-15; Heaton 1974: 121-22; Ruffle 1975.

4. The king is important to the maintenance of order and justice in society (cf. Prov. 16.12; 20.8, 26; 22.11; 29.4, 14; 30.22; cf. Bryce 1979: 189-210). In particular, he is the protector of the weak (Prov. 29.14; cf. Fensham 1962: 138). The king has special access to the divine, and therefore has extraordinary knowledge and powers of judgment (Prov. 16.10; 21.1; 25.2-3; Bryce 1979: 201; cf. 1 Kgs 3.4-14). Bryce indicates that the king 'is to be feared as God' (Bryce 1979: 201; Prov. 14.35; 16.10, 14; 19.12; 20.2, 8; 24.21). The text repeatedly urges loyalty and respect for the king (Prov. 16.12, 15; 20.28; 24.21-22; 25.2-6; 30.31; cf. Bryce 1979: 141ff.).

5. I believe Nel (1982) does not take into account the full significance of his own view in this regard. He argues that while the court is associated with wisdom literature in Israel, one cannot ascribe all the material to a single ethos. He offers a variety of settings for the material: family, school, court, priestly, prophetic, and individual (Nel 1982: 79-81). He contends that the city encompasses all these categories. It seems, however, that he is simply substituting the city for the court. There is no reason why the various materials would not be appropriate subject matter in a well-rounded elite education.

6. Those who convey these traditions—the wise—are to be regarded as professionals in the monarchic establishment (against Clements 1975: 81). The prophetic writings provide evidence that the wise were a distinct group of no small importance to the administrative bureaucracy. The prophets group the wise among the other members of the ruling elite, namely the priests, diviners, prophets, governing officials, and warriors (Isa. 19.11-12; 44.25; Jer. 8.8-9; 9.22 [Eng. 9.23]; 10.7; 18.8; 50.35; 51.57; Ezek. 27.8; Obad.

1.8; cf. Bryce 1979: 150-51). On the basis of this evidence Bryce terms the wise a 'professional class' (Bryce 1979: 151). Similar views are propounded by McKane who contends that the wise were high political advisors in the employ of the state (McKane 1965: 17-18, 38-47; cf. Bryce 1979: 196).

7. Clements says there is no technical vocabulary in Proverbs (Clements 1975: 78, 82), and Donald claims that in comparison to Proverbs the difference in emphasis of the terms for poor which is attested in Psalms is simply the result of 'sociological sympathies and obsessions of the Psalmists rather than as an extension of the meaning area of the words' (Donald 1964: 29). However, I would suggest that both writers miss the significance of the distribution patterns of the terms for poor. The special wisdom associations of *rāš* and *maḥsôr* are indicated by their relative infrequency in the rest of the Hebrew Bible. The term *rāš* occurs outside of Proverbs only in 1 Sam. 18.23 (a royal context); 2 Sam. 12.1, 3, 4 (a wisdom tale); Ps. 82.3; Qoh. 4.14; 5.8 [Eng. 5.7]. Likewise, *maḥsôr* appears only in Deut. 15.8; Judg. 18.10; 19.19-20; Ps. 34.10 [Eng. 34.9].

8. Kuschke argued that the terms for poor could be separated into two groups. On the one side he placed 'ebyôn, *dal*, and 'ānī, and on the other he grouped together *rūš* (and its derivatives), *ḥsr*, and *miskēn* (Kuschke 1939: 53; cf. Donald 1964: 30). He claimed that the two groupings reflected differing mentalities concerning poverty—possibly the mentalities of two opposing social classes (Kuschke 1939: 53). He suggests that *rūš*, *ḥsr*, and *miskēn* are used in the wisdom literature when poverty is subjected to scorn, but that 'ebyôn, *dal*, and 'ānī are used 'when an inner sympathy (on religious grounds) with the fate of the poor is to be expressed and a call is made for just and brotherly deeds on their behalf' (Kuschke 1939: 45). Kuschke is correct to assert that differing mentalities concerning poverty are present in the biblical literature. However, I believe his division is over-simplified and misses the fact that the prophets and the wise infused radically differing estimations of poverty into terms that they shared, such as *dal*.

9. Some uncertainty in this regard is introduced by *kētīb-qērē* variations in these verses. In three cases in which 'ānī is preserved as the reading in the MT text, the *qērē* is given as 'ānāw (Prov. 3.34; 14.21; 16.19). In this study no distinction is made between 'ānī and 'ānāw in Proverbs.

10. Cf. Prov. 1.19; 10.2; 11.28; 16.8; 17.1; 20.17, 21; 23.20; 28.20. The Egyptian wisdom literature counsels that one show restraint in one's use of wealth (Ankhsheshonq 6.10; 7.7; 9.11, 24-25; 12.3; 25.6; P. Insinger 6.17, 24; 15.7; 26.16). Gluttony is to be avoided (Kagemni [Lichtheim 1973: 60]; Satire of the Trades [Lichtheim 1973: 191]; Ankhsheshonq 15.20; 24.12; P. Insinger 5.12). Greed brings strife and want, and is often condemned (Ptahhotep §19; Merikare [Lichtheim 1973: 100]; Amenemope 6.14-15; 10.10; Ankhsheshonq 9.22; 12.18; 14.7, 20; 15.7; 21.15; P. Insinger 4.7, 8; 15.7).

11. A further use of 'ānī (Prov. 22.22) is made in connection with the *dal* in

the 'Sayings of the Wise' (Prov. 22.17-24.34) discussed below.

12. For references to the prophetic social critique of the urban establishment's oppression of the poor see the following: Isa. 3.13-14; 5.8; Jer. 2.34; 5.28; 22.13-14; Ezek. 18.12, 17; 22.29; Amos 2.6; 5.11; 8.4.

13. For discussions of *rās* and *maḥsôr* see: Fabry 1986; George 1966: 388; 1971: 17; 1977: 6; Kuschke 1939: 45; *THAT* II: 347-48; van der Ploeg 1950: 254-58; van Leeuwen 1955: 17.

14. Van Leeuwen notes that some emend *rās* in Prov. 28.3 to read *raša'*, *rôš*, or even *'ašîr*. The only one of these suggestions that has any possible textual support at all is *raša'*, but this requires a contorted derivation from the LXX's *en asebeiais*, 'with impieties', an analysis disputed by McKane (McKane 1970: 629). McKane contends that the MT reading be accepted, but that the translation be rendered by 'powerful' or the like on the basis of cognate evidence. However, this rendering seems forced especially in light of the frequent use of *rās* in Proverbs. None of the proposed emendations improves upon the Hebrew text as it stands, and the meaning 'poor' figures sensibly in the text.

15. Drunkenness is associated with *rîš*, 'poverty', in Prov. 31.7.

16. Poverty can come by fate and the hand of god according to the Egyptian wisdom literature (Ptahhotep §10; Amenemope 7.1-6; 21.15-16; Ankhsheshonq 12.3; 22.25; 26.8, 14; P. Insinger 7.18; 17.2; 28.4; 30.15).

17. This text differs from the other wisdom literature in not using *rās*; nor is *'ebyôn* found. The term *maḥsôr* appears in Prov. 24.34.

18. The wisdom writings often counsel against mistreating the weak (Ptahhotep §4; Merikare [Lichtheim 1973: 100]; Amenemope 4.4-7; 14.5-8; 15.6-7; 26.9; P. Insinger 33.16). People are to aid the poor (Amenemhet [Lichtheim 1973: 136]; Any [Lichtheim 1976: 141-42] Amenemope 16.5-10; 26:13-14; 27.4-5; Ankhsheshonq 15.6; P. Insinger 15.22; 16.12, 13, 14; 25.6).

19. Bryce thinks chs. 28 and 29 are more favorable to the poor than to the rich, and takes this as an indication of late date (Bryce 1978: 118). The contrast between rich and poor is frequent in ch. 28 (vv. 6, 8, 11, 19, 20, 22, 25, 27; cf. McKane 1970: 621).

20. The Egyptian wisdom material exhibits a concern, though rare, over measures and property lines. For weights and measures see Amenemope 17.18-19; 18.4; 18.15-19.7. For property lines see Merikare (Lichtheim 1973: 100); Amenemope 7.11-8.4; 8.11-12.

21. See n. 16 above for the Egyptian references to god making people poor.

22. It is doubtful that this material was used to console the poor in their poverty as van Leeuwen maintains (van Leeuwen 1955: 161, 164). Awareness of wealth's unstable nature is meant to refine the attitude of the student toward fate and the use of wealth. One is warned not to waste wealth (cf. Prov. 22.22).

23. The Egyptian wisdom writings indicate that there are things worse

than poverty, stressing the importance of a life of happiness and integrity (Amenemope 8.19-20; 9.5-6, 7-8; Ankhsheshonq 21.22; 23.8, 9; P. Insinger 27.9).

24. The Egyptian wisdom writings show an acute awareness of the transitory nature of wealth (Ptahhotep §6; §30; Any [Lichtheim 1976: 142]; Amenemope 9.10-10.5; 18.12-13; 19.11-15; 24.15-17; Ankhsheshonq 9.11; 18.17; P. Insinger 18.5).

25. Unfortunately the useful lexical analysis of Wittenberg (1986) arrived too late to be included in this study.

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*Forthcoming*

ZION, THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING  
 A Theological Symbol of the Jerusalem Cult

Ben C. Ollenburger

While previous research has illuminated the origins and development of the Zion tradition, this book is the first to make a thorough study of Zion as a theological symbol within the larger Jerusalem cult tradition. Drawing primarily on the Psalms and Isaiah of Jerusalem, the author shows that Zion serves pre-eminently to symbolize the kingship of Yahweh on Zion as creator and defender of world order. As such, Zion serves also to symbolize security and refuge, particularly for the poor.

This study constitutes a powerful argument against the tendency of Old Testament theologians to devalue the cosmic Zion symbolism in favour of the historical theology of the exodus, especially when assessing the contemporary import of Old Testament theology. Zion symbolism is anything but an ideological tool legitimating a self-sufficient and self-serving monarchy. Instead it serves as the basis for a radical critique of the projects and pretensions of Judah's royal court.

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