

# ASSIGNMENT 6

## NOTES

### *The Greek Period, 332-168 B.C.*

In 332 B.C., Alexander the Great conquered the Persian Empire (which had twice unsuccessfully challenged the Greeks on their own ground and in their own Aegean Sea). As a result, the Middle East changed greatly. Hellenistic culture pervaded the "world" with influences quite novel to the Jews. In brief, the Greeks brought a man-centered view of life and varieties of new, very human interests — a new world language, athletics and stadia, theatre and drama, civic life (a typical Greek city in every area), and the great new city of Alexandria in Egypt, which became a world center of culture and learning. In Alexandria, a significant development began at about 285 B.C., with the translation of the Old Testament into Greek for the use of Greek-reading Jews and for others living in that area; this translation is known as the Septuagint; it includes fifteen books not in the Old Testament as we have it; these "extra" books are called the Old Testament Apocrypha.

Wisdom literature may represent a response of the Jews to Hellenistic culture and learning. Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes in the canonical writings and The Wisdom of Solomon and Ecclesiasticus or The Wisdom of Jesus, Son of Sirach in the Apocrypha are wisdom books of the Jews.

Wisdom literature treats of "wisdom" on three levels or in three categories: (1) as Creative Mind or Principle (see Job 28:20-27; 38; 39 and Proverbs 8:22-31, where Wisdom is the speaker): (2) as the right way of living (human goodness, morality, understanding, religion — see Job 28:28 and MUCH of Proverbs); (3) as the expedient way to conduct one's life, for diligence is not only a good quality in itself but it brings *money* (there is always a material gain to be received for virtuous living). Wisdom literature deals with values, virtues, and vices. Actually, wisdom literature is a universal, not a national, manifestation, appearing, for example in Egypt, China, and the United States (as with *Poor Richard's Almanac!*) (A section of Egyptian wisdom is in Proverbs 22:17 to 24:22.)

1. *Job* is regarded as a wisdom book; it was written sometime between 500 and 100 B.C., using the framework of an ancient patriarchal story. Inserted into the discussion which forms the core of it is a typical wisdom passage, chapter 28. Job is a kind of protest. The hero struggles to rise above the static, orthodox beliefs of the Persian period. This orthodoxy is presented by the three friends who come to "comfort" him. They are convinced of the moral order of the universe — that God rewards goodness and punishes wickedness. Job, who has lived (we understand from God, Himself) a "perfect and an upright" life, protests because of the suffering he is enduring. He does not "curse God and die" as his wife has recommended. Nor does he compromise and admit to sins he has not committed just in order to free himself of the suffering. No! He persists in asking hard questions, probing beyond his former beliefs, struggling for higher ground.

2. *Proverbs* is an anthology of collections of wisdom literature. Eight different collections of wisdom material appear, as follows:

- a. chapters 1-9
- b. 10:1 to 22:16
- c. 22:17 to 24:22 The material here is almost identical with that of the Wisdom of Amenemhope, an Egyptian wisdom book of 1000-600 B.C.
- d. 24:23-34 Appendix to 3.
- e. chapters 25-29 Appendix to 2. (More delightful observations of human nature!)
- f. 30:1-33 Words of Agur
- g. 31:1-9 Words of King Lemuel
- h. 31:10-31 The Virtuous Woman, an acrostic poem (each line began with a different letter of the Hebrew alphabet.)

3. *Ecclesiastes*

Some scholars feel that there is definite Hellenistic influence in this book, for the

general tone of it is not typically Jewish. Its theme is in line with the third level of wisdom — what is expedient? It asks, "What is worth while — anything? After all, death is the only thing you can really count on."

4. *Psalms* is an anthology of collections of songs and hymns, most of them probably used in the worship at the Second Temple. The final collecting was probably done during the Persian Period or, later, by the beginning of the second century B.C.

The psalms come from different periods, certainly not all from David. The distinct collection within the book are these: Book I, 1-41; II, 42-72; III, 73-89; IV, 90-106; V, 107-150. In I, the name for God is Yahweh; in II, it is generally Elohim. Authorship and musical terms and directions are moot points of scholarship. Recent scholarship makes much of these main types: Hymn (110, 145-150); Communal Lament (44; 74; 79; 80); Royal Psalms (pre-exilic) (2; 18, which compares with II Samuel 22; 20; 21; 45; 72; 89; 101; 110; 132; 144:1-11); Individual Lament (3; 5; 6; 7; 42-43; 51); Pilgrim Song (120-134).

### Reading

#### 1. Job, a philosophical drama

*Prologue:* Chapters 1, 2.

#### *Act I*

Job 3  
Eliphaz 4; 5  
Job 6; 7  
Bildad 8  
Job 9; 10  
Zophar 11

#### *Act III*

Eliphaz 22  
Job 23-24  
Bildad 25: 26:7-14  
Job 26:1-3; 27:1-6  
Zophar 27:7 to 28:28  
Job The Past 29  
The Present 30  
Oath of Clearance 31

#### *Act II*

Eliphaz 15  
Job 16; 17  
Bildad 18  
Job 19  
Zophar 20  
Job 21

#### *Act IV*

Transition 32:1-5  
Elihu 32:6 to 37-24

#### *Act V*

Voice out of the Whirlwind 38; 39; 40:1, 2  
Job 40:3-5  
Voice 40:6-14  
Job 42:1-6

### *Epilogue*

42:7-17

#### 2. *Proverbs:* selections

chapters 1; 3; 6:6-11; 7; 8; any two chapters between 10 and 22; 31.

#### 3. *Ecclesiastes:* selections (or the whole book)

chapters 1-2; 3:1 to 4:4; 5:18; 11:9 to 12:7

#### 4. *Psalms*

By way of *review* of history, you might read these: 136 (Exodus); 78 (national hymn of Judah); 46 (Isaiah's time, when the Assyrians failed to conquer Jerusalem); 137 (Babylonian Captivity); 126 (the joy of return from captivity). For other kinds of review, note that 29 is almost identical with a hymn to Baal in Canaanite literature; 104 has a parallel in Ikhnaton's (Egyptian) Hymn to the Sun; 37 is a wisdom psalm; 105-106 trace Israel's apostasy toward God. Great variety and GREAT POETRY exist among the psalms. Outside reading may help point up the great qualities of the people and of the poetry which the psalms exhibit. Individuals might work on the psalms as special projects.

### *Questions and topics for discussion*

#### • Job

What are the beliefs of the friends?

What are some of Job's questions? How vividly does the great poet present pictures of the fate of the wicked, the sufferings of Job, the retrospective view of Job's life, the wonders of the Universe especially as the Voice out of the Whirlwind displays a panorama



of them to Job? If Job does not get a direct answer to his question, "WHY has all this happened to me?", just what does he gain from the Voice? from the way the drama ends?

• *Proverbs*

Find the three different categories or levels of wisdom illustrated. Is this material largely man-centered? How well do the sages know human nature? How is wisdom personified? What are the values of these people? What virtues especially interest them? How does the form of the poetry reflect the sharp black-and-white contrast between virtue and vice? Note the "similitudes" — comparisons.

• *Ecclesiastes*

Where do you see the typical theme of *Ecclesiastes*?

Do you notice that in the last verses of the book some editor has apparently brought it into line with representative precepts of wisdom literature? Where else do you see an editor's hand at work in the book?

***The Maccabean Period, 168-63 B.C.***

Daniel is a book written like Revelation in the New Testament to encourage people who were suffering from religious persecution. To set the scene, we need to realize that Alexander the Great, after conquering the Persian Empire and building Greek cities throughout the Middle East, died, leaving to his generals various parts of the empire to rule. Palestine and Syria were included in the area ruled by Seleucus, first of the Seleucid dynasty; Egypt went to Ptolemy. The Seleucids and Ptolemies eventually feuded against each other, fighting over Palestine which came into the Seleucid (Syrian) orbit in 198 B.C. About 169 B.C. the Seleucid king, Antiochus IV, determined to stamp out Judaism after his intervention in Jewish affairs had caused great resentment. He marched into and profaned the temple, commanded that any Jew possessing a book of the law or circumcising his child be killed. This touched off a revolt, about which you can read a vivid, historical account in the Apocryphal book of I Maccabees.

Although the Maccabean Revolt succeeded and the Jews won political independence, the period, especially from 143 to 63 B.C. (Rome entered the picture in 63 B.C.), was filled with complex events and political intrigue; king and high priest were sometimes the same person, and different "parties" and attitudes developed among the Jews — Pharisees, Sadducees, and Essenes being on the scene by the first century A.D.

Daniel was written at about 168 B.C. to encourage the Jews to stand fast against tyranny and not give in to Hellenism. Daniel looks back to the period of Babylonian captivity for inspiration for the suffering Jews of 168 B.C. It is *NOT* a book of "prophecy" looking forward from that Babylonian period to 168 B.C. In chapters 2 and 7-12, it makes use of what we call "apocalyptic" writing. This is literature revealing God's purpose in the end-time, the coming of the kingdom of God. This literature is typically "vision" or "dream" literature, using symbols on several levels of meaning.

***Reading:***

The book of Daniel (and, if possible, also I Maccabees 1-4)

***Questions and topics for discussion***

- See how Daniel 1 shows the appeal or temptation of *Hellenism*, the invitation to enjoy the physical and intellectual advantages of the Greek way of life.
- How does Daniel resist? What is his success? Is it recognized?
- How does each king in Daniel represent or reflect the figure of Antiochus IV, the tyrant in 168 B.C.? What commands or laws does he decree? How do these suggest the edicts of Antiochus IV?
- The apocalyptic passages show a panorama of world empire — Babylonian, Median, Persian, Greek. What KINGDOM supersedes all earthly powers?
- When Jewish people were being massacred right and left — even those who stood up and fought against the Greek power of Antiochus IV — it seemed that death just should not be the end. God would surely help His people, somehow. How? The first glimmerings of belief in a resurrection of the righteous emerge at this time. Do you find them in Daniel 12?