

## Literature in the Old Testament (V)

Hiromi Yamamoto

The Greek Period 333-168 B. C.

After Alexander the Great defeats the Persian Army at the issue in Asia Minor in 333 B. C., he introduced the Greek culture into his vast empire including Syria and Palestine. The desperate struggle began between the two influences of the New Hellenism and the Old Hebraism. The former gradually but steadily gained the minds of the people. Some of the Psalms are revealing the strong contrast between the suffering righteous and the successful wicked of this period. Judaism as a faith is now in great danger.

At the death of Alexander the Great in 323 B. C., his empire is partitioned among his generals and Palestine was put under the rule of the Ptolemies, and in 321 B. C. Jerusalem fell into their hands. But in 198 B. C. Antiochus III (the great) defeats Ptolemy V at Paneas, at the foot of Mt. Hermon. Palestine is now under the rule of the Syrians. Under the rule of Seleucus IV, Onias II who was a pro-Egyptian, is now one of the high priests. Jason, his pro-Syrian brother got himself appointed as a high priest by Antiochus IV who usurped the Syrian throne in 175 B. C. In 168 B. C., Antiochus IV attempted to suppress the Jewish religion which caused the crisis of the history of the Jewish religion.<sup>1)</sup>

Between 300 B. C. and 250 B. C., the Book

of Proverbs was compiled. The teachings of wise men were compiled as the Book of Proverbs but they are not "proverbs" in the sense of popular bywords or folk maxims.<sup>2)</sup> The teachings in book group themselves in various classes according their number date and author.

1. 1-9 "The Proverbs of Solomon" the son of David, king of "Israel", a series of connected addresses containing warnings against wickedness and especially against carnal lust, and exhortations to wisdom, the most wonderful of all possessions.
2. 10-22:16 "The Proverbs of Solomon", consisting of wise maxims usually in couplet form, entirely different from the first collection.
3. 22:17-24:22 "Words of the Wise", beginning with the exhortation, "Incline thine ear, and hear the words of the wise", mostly in quatrains.
4. 24:23-34 "These also are (sayings) of the Wise", an appendix to the third collection, also in quatrains and longer groups.
5. 25-29 "These also are Proverbs of Solomon, which the men of Hezekiah, king of Judah copied". They are mostly in couplets, but also in tristichs, quatrains,

1) Leslie: Syllubas.

2) Pfeiffer: IOT, p. 645

or in larger units.

6. 30 "The words of Agur, the son of Yakeh of Massa". The first part is tinged by a mild scepticism, and the second part contains a number of numerical proverbs.
7. 31:1-9 "The words of King Lemuel of Massa, which his mother taught him", consisting of warnings against women and wine, of exhortations to righteous administration of justice.
8. 31:10-31 An alphabetical poem in praise of a worthy wife.<sup>3)</sup>

In these varieties of topics as well as in radical differences in the viewpoints, of different writers, irreconcilable notions on the aims of human life and means to their attainment, on the norms of human conduct and motivation of human actions are presented.<sup>4)</sup> We can find two kinds of writings, namely secular and sacred always intermixed in varying degrees and fashion. In the secular proverbs akin to those of Job, Psalm 104 and Ecclesiastes, God is held as the Creator of the world and originator and director of all phenomena including the human mind. Man can do nothing against God. He must attain his aims through his own efforts. The wealth which is considered as the acquirement of intelligence and persistent work is one of the most precious things. The pleasures of life are not to be shunned. Wisdom for them is either professional skill or middleclass, utilitarian morality, by means of which desirable objectives are attained.<sup>5)</sup> We can find in certain

cases the influence of Deuteronomy. Prophecy and law are mentioned together in 29:18, the inwardness and spirituality of religion in 16:2, appeals for kindness toward widow and orphan (15:25; 23:10f.) and the poor (14:21 etc.), to feed an enemy in need (25:21f.) are all in the spirit of the prophets and Deuteronomy.<sup>6)</sup>

In general, the secular proverbs are realistic, practical, and sometimes sceptical and cynical; the religious ones are idealistic, replete with wishful thinking, pious hopes, and Blind faith. Prof. Pfeiffer classified the contents of the book as follows.<sup>7)</sup>

1. Secular collections with a few moralizing and religious interpolations:
  - a. distichs (Nos. 5)
  - b. distichs and longer section (Nos. 4)
  - c. attributed to non-Israelitic authors (Nos. 4—part 7)
  - d. numerical proverbs (Nos. 4—part)
  - e. an alphabetic acrostic poem (8)
2. A collection originally joining secular and religious maxims: (Nos. 3—part) whose Egyptian prototype combined practical and religious advice.
3. Collections essentially ethical and religious but reproducing from Nos. 5 and other sources secular maxims and descriptions:
  - a. collections of distichs (Nos. 2—part) (Nos. 5)
  - b. exhortations addressed to "my son"

---

3) Bewer. LOT, p. 309.

4) Pfeiffer: IOT, p. 646.

5) *Ibid.*, p. 645.

6) *Ibid.*, p. 655.

7) Pfeiffer: IOT, p. 658.

(1 and 2-Part)

4. The title of the book as a whole, describing briefly its religious, ethical, and secular contents (Nos. 1-part)

There are no clues to determine the exact date of these writings, but it cannot be later than 200 B. C. because of their Hebrew or Greek form.

The song of songs, titled as "The Song of Songs which is Solomon's" was written between 300 B. C. and 200 B. C. It is the collection of 1,005 songs which, as a legend tells us of Solomon composed (I Kings 4:32). The author, regardless of its title, is not Solomon by any means; like the case of Proverbs, they are Ecclesiastes, Wisdom, Psalms and Odes of Solomon.

This book is a short anthology of love poems of various length, sung by the bride, the bridegroom, and their friends. We can group the book.<sup>8)</sup>

1. Songs of the bride (1:2-8)
2. A duet between bride and groom (1:9-2:7)
3. Reminiscences of the bride (2:8-3:5)
4. The palanquin of Solomon (3:6-11)
5. The songs of the youth (4:1-5:1)
6. The search for the lost bridegroom (5:2-6:3)
7. The charming beauty of the bride (6:4-7:9)
8. Songs of the bride (7:10-8:4)
9. Miscellaneous songs and fragments (8:5-14) Because of the nature of the book is an anthology, it is rather impossible to

determine

the authorship and date in a definite way. But the author or authors who composed these lyrics unquestionably drew inspiration from the rustic songs of shepherds and peasants at their wedding celebration, which we can see from the pastoral atmosphere. From the language used in the book, the book was supposed to have been written in the first half of the third century B. C.. At any rate, the book depicts the thrills, delights, torments, and dreams of love between man and woman against the background of the charming Palestinian countryside in the springtime with his or their brilliant imagination and consummate art.<sup>9)</sup>

The works of the chroniclers (I and II Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah) appeared around 300 B. C.. The contents of Chronicles can be summarized as:

- I. From Adam to David (I:1-9; genealogical lists)
  - a. From Adam to Jacob; the sons of Esau and kings of Edom (1:1-34)
  - b. The sons of Jacob (2:1f.)
  - c. The descendants of Judah (2:3-4 23)
  - d. Simeon (4:24-43)
  - e. Reuben (5:1-10)
  - f. Gad (5:11-17); war with the Hagrites (5:18, 22).
  - g. East Manasseh: (5:23-26)
  - h. Levi (6:1-18)
  - i. Issachar (7:1-5)
  - j. Benjamin, or rather Zebulun (7:6-11)
  - k. Dan

8) Ibid:p. 706, 709.

9) Pfeiffer: IOT, p. 713.

- l. Naphtoli (7:13)
  - m. West Manasseh (7:14-19) Ephraim (7:20-27); and their territory (7:28f.)
  - n. Asher (7:30-40)
  - h. Benjamin (8)
- II. David (I:10-29)
- A. His reign (10-20)
- a. Saul's death (10)
  - b. David anointed King of Israel
  - c. David captures Jerusalem (11:4-9)
  - d. David's heroes and soldiers; their military exploits (11:10-12:40)
  - e. The ark brought from Kirjath-jearim to the house of Obedom
  - f. David's temporal affairs in Jerusalem (14)
  - g. The ark brought to Jerusalem (15-16)
  - h. Nathan's oracle to David (17)
  - i. David's conquests (18:1-13) and leading officials (18:14-17)
  - j. David's war with the Ammonites and Arameans (19:1-20:3)
  - k. The slaying of Philistine champions (20:4-8)
- B. David's provisions for the building of the Temple and its administration (I:21-29)
- a. The site of the Temple is revealed to David after Satan induces him to take a census (21:1-22:1)
  - b. David provides the materials and workers for building the Temple, and appoints Solomon in charge (22:2-19)
  - c. Organization of the clergy (23-26)
  - d. Organization of government (27)
  - e. David's last assembly (28-29)
  - f. Concluding remarks on the reign of David (29:26-30)
- III. Solomon (II:1-9)
- a. Introduction: Jehovah's revelation to Solomon at Gibeon and Solomon's riches (1)
  - b. The building of the Temple (2:1-7:22)
  - c. Miscellaneous activities of Solomon (8:1-9:28)
  - d. Concluding remarks (9:29-31)
- IV. From Rehoboam to Cyrus (II:10-36)
- a. Rehobonm and the division of the kingdom (10-12)
  - b. Abijah (13:1-22; 14:1)
  - c. Asa (14:2-16:14)
  - b. Jehoshaphat (17-20)
  - e. Jehoram (21) Crimes threatening letter from Elijah
  - f. Ahaziah (22:1-9)
  - g. Athaliah (22:10-23:21)
  - h. Joash (24) Idolatry of Joash after the death of the high priest, Jehoiada
  - i. Amaziah (25)
  - j. Uzziah (26)
  - k. Jotham (27)
  - l. Ahaz, the most detestable of the kings of Judah according to Chronicles
  - m. Hezekiah (29-32) Purification of the Temple, celebration of the passover and provisions for the support of the Temple and its clergy.
  - n. Manasseh (33:1-20)
  - o. Amon (33:21-25)
  - p. Josiah (34-35) His religious reforms in

---

9) Pfeiffer: IOT, p. 713.

Judah did not follow but preceded the discovery of the book of the law; the removal of abominations in North Israel follows

- q. Jehoahaz (36:1-4)
- r. Jehoiakim (36:5-8)
- s. Jehoiachin (36:9f.)
- t. Zedekiah (36:11-21)
- u. Cyrus (36:22f.) (repeated in Ezra 1:1-3a; Ezra-Nehemiah conclude Chronicles, being written by the same author<sup>10</sup>)

Thus, the Chronicler wrote these records of the history like deuteronomists in Deuteronomy. Though he had given history from the view point of the deuteronomic law, he viewed, arranged and modified history from the view of the priest Code in which was his primary interest. He wrote the history centering around Jerusalem and the Temple, which was his tool, the illustration and proof of his doctrines.

The book of Nehemiah was already mentioned and discussed, and I like to discuss briefly about another work of the Chronicler, the book of Ezra.

In contrast with the writings of Nehemiah which include his own autobiography (Neh, 1:1-7:73a) regarded as genuine beyond shadow of doubt, the "memoirs of Ezra" as we now have failed to give a consistent historical report of actual events. Even though Ezra might have been a historical character, the information about him is on a par with that offered by the Chronicler on David when not

quoting from ancient sources.<sup>11</sup> The contents of the book may be summarized as follows, though we have to be careful because of its close connection with the book of Nehemiah:

1. The return of the Exiles and the rebuilding of the Temple (1-6)
  - a. The decree of Cyrus (538 B. C.) allowing the Jewish Exiles to return from Babylonia to Jerusalem (1:1-4) and their return under the leadership of Sheshbazzar (1:5-11)
  - b. List of the Exiles who returned with Sheshbazzar and Joshua (2:1-67)
  - c. The rebuilding of the altar on Zion (3:1-3) and celebration
  - d. Inception of the building of the Temple (3:7-8Bs, 10a) and appointment of the Levites, laying of the cornerstone.
  - e. Opposition of the Samaritans to the rebuilding of the Temple
  - f. Accusations against the inhabitants of Jerusalem in the time of Xerxes I or Ahasuerus and of Rehum and Shimshai (4:8-16)
  - g. The rebuilding of the Temple in the reign of Darius I, from 520 to 516 (5:1-6:18)
  - h. The celebration of the Passover (6:19-22)
2. The Activity of Ezra (7-10)—concluded in Neh. (7:73B-10:39)
  - a. Ezra's ancestry (7:1-5) and journey from Babylonia to Jerusalem in 458 (7:6-10)
  - b. A letter of Artaxerxes I authorizing Ezra to draw on the treasury of Syria

10) Pfeiffer: IOT, p. 782-785.

11) Ibid., IOT, p. 828.

to defray the Temple's expenses and to appoint judges, Ezra's doxology (7: 11-27)

- c. List of the Exiles who returned with Ezra (8: 1-20)
- b. Without a royal guard, but under divine protection reached Jerusalem safely.
- e. Shocked by the toleration of mixed marriages in Jerusalem, and accused this national sin in prayer (9: 1-10: 44)<sup>12)</sup>

These stories told by Ezra then are connected to the account of Nehemiah. To look back to his career we find he was a man of religion in contrast with Nehemiah who was a man of affairs, which might be seen in the story of his journey to Jerusalem without military escort, depending solely on the protection of Almighty God.

Around 250 B. C., the translation of the Old Testament to Greek began by the Septuagint. The Greek text is important chiefly as preserving in many instances a better and more primitive reading than the Masoretic recension.<sup>13)</sup> However, this Greek translation became quite different from the Hebrew text by the time of Origen, the first half of the third century. Strictly speaking, Septuagint is an unknown entity in the present time.<sup>14)</sup>

About 200 B. C., a wise man left us a book, records of his thoughts on the sufferings of the righteous, the life and its signi-

ficance, and all the questions that came to his mind. The book is now called Ecclesiastes or "The Preacher". It has a number of his discourses which are not arranged in order nor connected with the one another, as well as his observations, reflections, and wise sayings. The author was a common old man of much experience and common sense, not a profound and systematic philosopher.<sup>15)</sup>

In the beginning, he gives us his thesis that all is vanity and that human life in particular is futile in the never-ending continuation and repetition of occurrences in nature and in human life. It is not the young man's pessimism but the result of long thought and investigation of a much experienced man. He tested all the pleasures and sources of man's happiness, but found "all was vanity and a chasing after wind, and there was no profit under the sun." (2: 11). However, he was not thoroughly pessimistic; he gives us such word: a living dog is better than a dead lion, or light is sweet and it is pleasant for the the eyes to see the sun (9: 4 and 11: 7). But neither wisdom nor work nor wealth has real end; we can't find the meaning of life in them. Men are not rewarded according to their deserts; morality does not control the course of the world. There are no just governments nor just kings, but the righteous perished and the wicked prospered. God's rule is of mystery which man can never understand. Life is bound by the grave, according to him. The vision of the world regeneration never came to him, and his outlook

---

12) Pfeiffer: IOT, pp. 813-815.

13) Ibid., p. 104.

14) Ibid., p. 107.

---

15) Bewer: LOT, p. 330.

was individualistic and self-centered, without any warm personal faith in God. However, he did not deny His moral character though no man could understand Him. He has pre-determined all events, and no man can change it. So, a man should take life as it is and make the most of it as long as he lives; the young men should rejoice. He regarded the value of work not in work itself, but in joy working.

He seems to believe that his advice is in accord with God's plan for man. He did not deny God's reality and control of the world, nor religious practice though he had little warm personal religion.

His heterodoxy and pessimism were, however, modified and edited in a sceptical way which could be accepted by orthodox religion. A disciple inserted at those points where proverbs and maxims seemed appropriate a number of wise additions, which were common with the ordinary wisdom of the time, and facilitated its eventual recognition as a sacred text.<sup>16)</sup>

His style was polished most carefully and the content was truth. The poem in the beginning of the book (1:2-9), poetic description of old age and death (12:1-8), etc. give evidence of his ability in writing. His contributions to thought are: the truth of the moral government of the world, the certainty of righteous judgement, and the supreme duty to God and of obedience to His law which might be the result of the revision of His writings by his friends. He is one of the most

original thinkers in the Old Testament as the most radical. All through the book, the author pretended to be Solomon, though it is obvious that he was not.

#### Bibliographies

- Bewer, Julius A.: The Literature of The Old Testament In Its Historical Development N. Y. Columbia Univ. Press 1947. LOT
- Buttrick, George A: The Interpreter's Bible Vol. N. Y. Abington-Cokesbury Press. 1952 IB
- Driver, Samuel R.: Introduction to the Literature of The OT Revised ed. N. Y. Scriber's 1913
- Eiselen, Lewis & Downey: The Abingdon Bible Commentary N. Y. Abingdon Press 1929 ABC
- Leslie, Elmer A: Psalms N. Y. Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1949
- Leslie, Elmer A. Syllabus
- James Fleming: Personalities of the O. T. N. Y. Charles Scribner's 1951 POT
- Pfeffer, Robert H.: Introduction to the Old Testament N. Y. Harper's & Sons 1941 IOT
- Holy Bible, Revised standard Version N. Y. Thomas Nelson and Sons 1953
- Oesterley, W. O E & Robinson, Theodore H. An Introduction to The Book of the O. T. N. Y. Macmillan. 1935
- Allman, Herbert C. & Flack, E. E. OLD TESTAMENT COMMENTARY..... The Muhlenberg Press, Phil, Penn.

16) Bewer: LOT. p. 338