

CHAPTER XXIV

PARALLELS TO PROVERBS AND ECCLESIASTES

THE NATURE OF THE BOOK OF PROVERBS. SOME BABYLONIAN PROVERBS. FROM THE LIBRARY OF ASHURBANIPAL. COMPARISON WITH THE BIBLE EGYPTIAN PRECEPTS OF PTAHOPTER. COMPARISON WITH THE BIBLE. THE WISDOM OF AMN-EM-OPE AND ITS SUPPOSED RELATION TO PROVERBS. PARALLEL TO ECCLESIASTES FROM THE GILGAMESH EPIC.

Both Egypt and Babylon furnish parallels to the book of Proverbs. The Biblical book of Proverbs contains a long connected discourse of advice (Prov. 1-9) and various collections of disconnected proverbs (Prov. 10-29). Parallels to both are found in Egypt and in Babylonia. The library of Ashurbanipal contained a collection of proverbs in two languages, arranged as reading lessons for students. A few examples are here given.

1. Some Babylonian Proverbs from the Library of Ashurbanipal.

1. A hostile act thou shalt not perform, that fear of vengeance (?) shall not consume thee.
2. Thou shalt not do evil, that life (?) eternal thou mayest obtain.
3. Does a woman conceive when a virgin, or grow great without eating?
4. If I put anything down it is snatched away; if I do more than is expected, who will repay me?
5. He has dug a well where no water is; he has raised a husk without kernel.
6. Does a marsh receive the price of its reeds, or fields the price of their vegetation?
7. The strong live by their own wages; the weak by the wages of their children.
8. He is altogether good, but he is clothed with darkness.
9. The face of a toiling ox thou shalt not strike with a goad.
10. My knees go, my feet are unwearied; but a fool has cut in to my course.
11. His ass I am; I am harnessed to a mule; a wagon I draw; to seek reeds and fodder I go forth.
12. The life of day before yesterday has departed today.
13. If a husk is not right, the kernel is not right; it will not produce seed.
14. The tall grain thrives, but what do we understand of it? The meager grain thrives, but what do we understand of it?

First 20 lines culled from a tablet at the British Museum, published by Langdon, *American Journal of Semitic Languages*, Vol. XXVIII

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15. The city whose weapons are not strong – the enemy before its gates shall not be thrust through.
 16. If thou goest and takest the field of an enemy, the enemy will come and take thy field.
 17. Upon a glad heart oil is poured out of which no one knows.
 18. Friendship is for the day of trouble; posterity for the future.
 19. An ass in another city becomes its head.

The idea is similar to Matthew 13:57: “A prophet is not without honor, save in his own country, and in his own house.”

20. Writing is the mother of eloquence and the father of artists.
21. Be gentle to thy enemy as to an old oven.
22. The gift of the king is the nobility of the exalted; the gift of the king is the favor of governors.
23. Friendship in days of prosperity is servitude forever.
24. There is strife where servants are; slander where anointers anoint.
25. When thou seest the gain of the fear of god, exalt and bless the king.

2. Precepts from the Library of Ashurbanipal.

Thou shalt not slander, (but) speak kindly;
 Thou shalt not speak evil, (but) show mercy.
 Him who slanders (and) speaks evil,
 With it recompense will Shamash visit (?) his head.
 Thou shalt not make large thy mouth, but guard thy lip;
 In the time of anger thou shalt not speak at once.
 If thou speakest quickly, thou shalt repent (?) afterward,
 And in silence wilt thou sadden thy mind.

Daily present to thy god
 Offering and prayer, appropriate to incense.
 Before thy god mayest thou have a pure heart,
 For that is appropriate to deity.

Prayer petition, and prostration
 Early in the morning shalt thou render him; he will judge thy burdens (?),
 And with the help of god thou wilt be abundantly prosperous.

In thy wisdom learn of the tablet;
 The fear (of god) begets favor,
 Offering enriches life,
 And prayer brings forgiveness of sins.

(The text of the rest is too broken for connected translation.)

3. Comparison with the Bible.---None of the sentiments expressed in these proverbs is identical with any in the Bible. No 21 is on the same subject as Proverbs 24:17; No. 22 reminds one

Delitzsch's Assyrische Lesestuke, 4th ed.
 Meissner, *Beitrage zum Altbabylonischen Privatrecht*
 Macmillan, *Beitrage zur Assyriologie*, V

slightly of the first clause of Proverbs 14:35; No. 23 has the same sentiment as Proverbs 18:24: "He that maketh many friends doeth it to his own destruction"; while No. 6 is somewhat to Proverbs 24:21.

Among the “precepts,” that on guarding the lips recalls to one’s mind Proverbs 10:19; 13:3; 14:3; 17:28. Reference is made to the “gain of the fear of God” and it is declared to “beget favor.” Job 28:28 declares “the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom.”

4. The Precepts of Ptahhotep.---These precepts are attributed to a man who lived in the time of the fifth Egyptian dynasty, about 2650 B.C., and are at least as old as 2000 B.C. The text is very difficult. The examples given below are taken from Breasted’s condensation of the moral precepts which the treatise contains.

1. If thou findest a wise man in his time, a leader of understanding more excellent than thou, bend thy arms and bow thy back.

2. If thou findest, a wise man in his time, a poor man and not thy equal, be not silent when he speaks evil. Great is the approval by those who hear, and thy name will be good in the knowledge of the princes.

3. If thou findest a wise man in his time, a poor man and not thy equal, be not overbearing against him when he is unfortunate.

4. If thou art a leader (or administrator) issuing ordinances for the multitude, seek for thee very excellent matter, that thy ordinance may endure without evil therein. Great is righteousness (truth, right, justice), enduring; it has not been disturbed since the time of Osiris.

5. Put no fear (or thee?) among the people.....What the god commands is that which happens. Therefore live in the midst of quiet. What they (the gods?) give comes of itself.

6. If thou art a man of those who sit by the seat of a man greater than thou, take what (food) he gives.....look at what is before thee, and bombard him not with many glances (don’t stare at him)----- Speak not to him until he calls. One knows not what is unpleasant to (his) heart.

7. If thou art a man of those who enter, whom (one) prince sends to (another) prince.....execute for him the commission according as he saith. Beware of altering a word which (one) prince speaks to (another) prince, by displaying the truth with the like of it.

8. If thou plowest and there is growth in the field, the god gives it (as) increase in thy hand. Satisfy not thy own mouth beside thy kin.

9. If thou art insignificant, follow an able man and all thy proceedings shall be good before the god.

10. Follow thy desire as long as thou livest. Do not more than is told (thee). Shorten not the time of following desire. It is an abomination to encroach upon the tie thereof. Take no care daily beyond the maintenance of thy house. When possessions come, follow desire, (for) possessions are not complete when he (the owner) is harassed.

11. If thou art an able man, (give attention to the conduct of thy son).

Development of Religion and Thought in Ancient Egypt, Breasted

16. If thou art a leader (or administrator), hear quietly the speech of the petitioner. He who is suffering wrong desires that his heart be cheered to do that on account of which he hath come.....It is an ornament of the heart to hear kindly.

17. If thou desirest to establish friendship in a house, into which thou enterest as lord, as brother, or a friend, wheresoever thou enterest in, beware of approaching the women.....A thousand men are undone for the enjoyment of a brief moment like a dream. Men gain (only) death for knowing them.

[Compare Prov. 5:3, f.]

18. If thou desirest that thy procedure be good, withhold thee from all evil, beware of occasion of avarice.....He who enters therein does not get on. It corrupts fathers, mothers and mother's brothers. It divides wife and man; it is plunder (made up) of everything evil; its a bundle of everything base. Established is the man whose standard is righteousness, who walks in its way. He is used to make his fortune thereby, (but) the avaricious is houseless.

1. If thou findest a wise man in his time, a leader of understanding more excellent than thou, bend thy arms and bow thy back.

2. If thou findest, a wise man in his time, thy equal,.....be not silent when he speaks evil. Great is the approval by those who hear, and thy name will be good in the knowledge of the princess.

3. If thou findest a wise man in his time, a poor man and not thy equal, be not overbearing against him when he is unfortunate.

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6. If thou art a man of those who sit by the seat of a man greater than thou, take what (food) he gives....look at what is before thee, and bombard him not with many glances (don't stare at him)-..... Speak not to him until he calls. One knows not what is unpleasant to his heart. Speak thou when he greets thee, and what thou sayest will be agreeable to (his) heart.

7. If thou art a man of those who enter, whom (one) prince sends to (another) prince,.....execute for him the commission according as he saith. Beware of altering a word which (one) prince to (another) prince, by displaying the truth with the like of it.

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[Compare with this precept Eccles. 11:9 and 7:15-17.]

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mothers' brothers. It divides wife and man; it is plunder (made up) of everything evil; it is a bundle of everything base. Established is the man whose standard is righteousness, who walks in its way. He is used to make his fortune thereby, (but) the avaricious is houseless.

19. Be not avaricious in dividing.....Be not avaricious towards thy kin. Greater is the fame of the gentle than (that of) the harsh.

20. If thou art successful, establish thy hose. Love thy wife in husbandly embrace, fill the body, clothe her back. The recipe of her limbs is ointment. Gladden her heart as long as thou livest. She is a profitable field for her lord.

[Compare Eccles. 9:9].

21. Satisfy those who enter to thee (come into thy office) with that which thou hast.

22. Repeat not a word of hearsay.

23. If thou art an able man who sits in the council of his lord, summon thy understanding to excellent things. Be silent.

24. If thou art a strong man, establish the respect of thee by wisdom and by quietness of speech.

25. Approach not a prince in his time. [Apparently an idiom for some particular mood.]

26. Instruct a prince (or official) in that which is profitable for him.

27. If thou art the son of a man of the council, commissioned to content the multitude,.....be not partial. Beware lest he (the man of the multitude?) say "His plan is that of the princes. He utters the words in partiality."

.....

29. If thou becomest great after thou wert little, and gettest possessions after thou wert formerly poor in the city.....be not proud-hearted because of thy wealth. It has come to thee as a gift of the god.

30. Bend thy back to thy superior, thy overseer of the king's house, and thy house shall endure because of his (or its) possessions and thy reward shall be in the place thereof. It is evil to show disobedience to a superior. One lives as long as he is gentle.

31. Do not practice corruption of children.

32. If thou searchest the character of a friend,.....transact the matter with him when he is alone.

33. Let thy face be bright as long as thou livest. As for what goes out of the storehouse, it comes not in again; and as for loaves (already) distributed, he who is concerned therefore has still an empty stomach. ["There is no use in crying over spilt milk."]

34. Know thy merchants when thy fortunes are evil.

.....

37. If thou hearkenest to these things which I have said to thee, all thy plans will progress. As for the matter of the righteousness thereof, it is their worth. The memory thereof shall circulate in the mouths of men, because of the beauty of their utterances. Every word will be carried on and not perish

in this land forever.....He who understands discretion is profitable in establishing that through which he succeeds on earth. A wise man is satisfied by reason of that which he knows. As for a prince of good qualities, they are in his heart and tongue. His lips are right when he speaks, his eyes see, and his ears together hear what is profitable for his son. Do right (righteousness, justice, truth), free from lying.

38. Profitable is hearkening for a son that hearkens.....How good is it when a son receives that which his father says. He shall reach advanced age thereby. A hearkener is one whom the

god loves. Who hearkens not is one whom god hates. It is the heart (= understanding) which makes its possessor a hearer or one not hearkening. The life, health, and prosperity of a man is his heart. The hearer is one who hears and speaks. He who does what is said is one who loves to hear. How good it is when a son hearkens to his father! How happy is he to whom these things are said! His memory is in the mouth of the living who are on the earth and those who shall be.

39. If the son of a man receives what his father says, none of his plans will miscarry. Instruct as thy son one who hearkens, who shall be successful in the judgment of the princes, who directs his mouth according to that which is said to him.....How many mishaps befall him who hearkens not! The wise man rises early to establish himself, while the fool is scourged.

[With the first of this section compare Exod. 20:12; Deut. 5:16. With the end of it, Prov. 6:9-11; 10:26; 13:4.]

40. As for the fool who hearkens not, he accomplishes nothing. He regards wisdom as ignorance, and what is profitable as diseased.....His life is death thereby,.....he dies, living every day. Men pass by (avoid?) his qualities, because of the multitude of evils upon him every day.

41. A son who hearkens is a follower of Horus. He prospers after he hearkens. He reaches old age, he attains reverence. He speaks likewise to his (own) children, renewing the instruction of his father. Every man who instructs is like his sire. He speaks with his children; then they speak to their children. Attain character,.....make righteousness to flourish and thy children shall live.

42.Let thy attention be steadfast as long as thou speakest, whither thou directest thy speech. May the princess who shall hear say, "How good is that which comes out of his mouth!"

43. So do that thy lord say to thee. "How good is the instruction of his father from whose limbs he came forth! He has spoken to him; it is in (his) said to him." Behold, a good son, whom the god gives, renders more than his lord says to him. He does right (righteousness, etc.), his heart acts according to his way. According as thou attainest me ("what I have attained"), thy limbs shall be healthy, the king shall be satisfied with all that occurs, and thou shalt attain years of life not less than I have passed on the earth. I have attained one hundred and ten years of life [compare Gen. 50:26], while the king gave to me praise above (that of) the ancestors (in the vizierial office) because I did righteousness for the king even unto place of reverence (the grave).

5. Comparison with the Bible.---These precepts, which were written before 1800 B.C., like most in the book of Proverbs, embody much worldly wisdom. They are based on experience, and while, like Proverbs, they sometimes urge a religious motive as a reason for right conduct, they frankly advocate it, as Proverbs

often does on the ground of expediency. The points where the text is closely parallel to that of Proverbs are few, and these have been sufficiently pointed out. Some of the passages, as already noted, are closely parallel to parts of the book Ecclesiastes. The religious appeal of the precepts is to Egyptian polytheism, while that of Proverbs is to Hebrew monotheism.

6. The Wisdom of Amen-em-ope.---The work from which extracts are here presented was published by Dr. E. A. Wallis Budge in 1923. These proverbs and precepts are in hieroglyphic Egyptian, but the papyrus comes from a comparatively late time. Amen-em-ope appears to have lived between 1500 and 1300 B.C. Omitting the long list of Amen-em-ope's titles, the text begins:

30. Amen-em-ope, son of Ka-nakht

 46. Says (Chapter One)
 47. Incline thy ears; listen to the words spoken!
 48. Apply thy heart to understanding!
 49. Profitable it is to set these in thy heart;
 50. A calamity to him who passes them by!
 51. Take, deposit [them] in the repositories of thy body.
 52. They will effect a change in thy heart.
 53. In the strife, when gales of words fly
 54. They will form the support of thy tongue.
 55. If thou wilt go on thy daily way with these things in thy heart.
 56. Thou wilt find them [a help] in case of calamities;
 57. Thou wilt find my words a treasure-house of life—
 58. The health of thy body while upon the earth.

The words of this First Chapter remind one of many verses in the early chapters of the Book of Proverbs. Thus in Proverbs 2:1 ff.; 4:20-22 we find expressions strikingly resembling those translated here.

59. Chapter Two;
 60. Guard thyself from robbing the poor,
 61. From treating harshly the desititute,
 62. From turning away thy hand at the approach of an old man,

The Teaching of Amen-em-apt, son of Kanekht, Sir E.A.Wallis Budge
 F.L. Griffith, "The Teaching of Amenophis the Son of Kanakht. Papyrus B.M. 10474" JEA, XII, 1926
 Numerous other books, articles, and journals listed by Barton not listed here.

63. From assuming for thyself the tone of a great man,
 64. From ever thyself sending one on a dangerous mission
 65. When thou carest for him who is to execute it,
 66. From doing an evil deed to him who has harmed thee
 67. When able to answer him in thy own behalf.
 68. The worker of evil—cast him on the river-bank;
 69. His own water-floods he will bring on himself
 70. Him—the north wind blowing upon him will end his day;
 71. It will bring him into rough weather;
 72. The storm-fiend will rise and the crocodiles.
 73. The hot-tempered man—to thee what is he like?
 74. He shrieks, he cries to heaven;
 75. The moon-god stands still; he is an abomination to him.
 76. Work the rudder! We must sail around this bad man!
 77. Might we not have acted as he himself does?
 78. Set him on his feet; give to him thy hand;
 79. Commit him to the hands of the god;
 80. Fill his body with bread of they providing:

81. Satisfy him in all his desire (?).
82. Another good time is in the heart of the god;
83. Inactivity is the best of retorts!

Consideration for the poor, which is taught at the beginning of this chapter, finds expression also in such passages as Proverbs describe the utterances of the evil man and counsel the avoidance of contention with an angry man; see Proverbs 15:1, 18, 28; 16:32; while the treatment which the Egyptian sage recommended for the evil man strongly reminds us of Proverbs 25:21 ff.

Omitting material not so interesting to the Biblical student, we come to line

108. Chapter Five:
109. Do not make encroachments on the dykes of the house of the god;
110. Do not act avariciously that thou mayest get gain;
111. Do not make a servant of a god stumble.
112. To advance the interest of another;
113. Do not say the word "today is like tomorrow";
114. The attainment of these is like what
115. Tomorrow is to come; today is still in progress.
116. The inundation is going to be at the crest of the wave;
117. The crocodiles will appear; the hippopotami will rise up;
118. The fishes will migrate;
119. The wolves will be sated; the birds will be at festival;
120. The protecting amulets will be left behind;
121. All the silent ones of the house of the god—
122. They will say "Great is the praise of Re."
123. O thou who art full of silence, thou shalt find life;
124. Thy body shall be healthy on the earth.

Omitting some material which has not Palestine parallel, we find in Chapter Seven the following:

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148. Do not plough the lot of another.
 149. Does it befit thee to gain prosperity from their mouths?
 150. Plough in the fields which thou findest allotted to thee;
 151. Receive thy sustenance from thy own personal threshing-floor.
 152. Better is one lot of land given thee by the god
 153. Than five thousand by violence.
 154. Do not practice passing the day in eating-houses.
 155. Do not practice passing [it] in sipping pots of beer!
 156. To those who pass their whole time in Larders
 157. The brightness of the world becomes [simply] eatables.
 158. Better is the poor man in the hand of the god
 159. Than the rich in a comfortable house.
 160. Better unleavened cakes with kindness of heart
 161. Than riches with contentiousness.

The admonition not to remove land-marks (for that is what “encroaching on the dykes” and “ploughing in the fields of another” mean) reminds us Proverbs 22:28 and 23:10 and also of the prohibitions of Deuteronomy 19:14 and 27:17. The admonitions as to eating and drinking are strikingly similar to Proverbs 23:21. Lines 160, 161 recall Proverbs 15:17.

- 206. Chapter Nine
- 207. Do not make the hot-headed man thy intimate friend
- 208. Even should he come frequently to entreat thee.
- 209. Watch thy tongue in making answer to thy superior
- 210. So that thou mayest guard thyself against his revelings.
- 211. Do not let them throw his speech to lasso thee
- 212. So that thou must throw it off by thy entreaty.
- 213. So that thou asketh questions, entreating like a servant in they utterance.
- 214. But be thou careful not to run from him.

From subsequent chapters we select the following:

- 254. God hates him who transgresses in talking;
- 255. Those are most hateful to him who cherish hatred within (?).
.....
- 303. Better is praise with the love of men
- 304. Than riches in a treasure-house.
- 305. Better are unleavened cakes with kindness of heart
- 306. Than riches with contentiousness.
.....
- 332. Do not carry balances to falsify weights to thy profit,
- 333. Or to they advantage to diminish the quantity of measures.
- 334. Do not wish to measure the fields.
- 335. To discard for thy own advantage those [measurements] of the Government-House;
- 336. Thoth [the god of justice] sits beside is in the balance-pan.
- 337. These are his possessions; his heart is in the balance-pan.
- 338. The god, like the great Thoth, throws into the canal
- 339. Him who habitually devises such practices.
- 340. Do not make for thyself weights too small;
- 341. These multiply the tears of the sainted-souls with the god.

- 342. If thou seest another straying,
- 343. Thou shalt cause him to go in the right way.
.....
- 370. Do not habitually sleep while morn is breaking,
- 371. What is there like dawn illumining the earth?
- 372. The man ignorant of the dawn---what is he like?
- 373. While the god is in his beneficent works.
- 374. The man is in his affairs a failure.
- 375. On the one side are the words men utter;
- 376. On the other side are the deeds the god does.
.....

409. Now truth is the great exalter of the god.
 410. He gives it to the one who loves him.
 411. Now one has great power who is in his likeness!
 412. He removes the hurtful one who opposes his works.

 440. Better for a man is it to speak with his own belly
 441. That he speak in lying.
 472. Cleanse thy heart of evil qualities,
 473. For the hearts of men are the nose of the god.

 525. The love of the god is more heartily to be praised
 526. Than the honor of the notables of the land.

A comparison shows that lines 305, 306 are a repetition of lines 160, 161. This fact goes to show that The Teaching of Amen-em-ope, as is also the case with the Book of Proverbs, was compiled from different sources, in which the same saying had sometimes been included.

The many admonitions to speak the truth and to be careful in what one says find many parallels in the Book of Proverbs, as anyone may prove by looking up with the aid of a concordance the many references to “lips” and “tongue” in the Biblical book. The utterances about false weights and measures remind one of Proverbs 11:1; 16:11; 20:10,23. Just weights are said to belong to Jehovah, just as just measuring implements or weights are said to belong to Jehovah, just as just measuring weights belong to Thoth; Thoth’s heart is with them, Jehovah takes delight in them. The words on early rising in the Egyptian work (lines 370 ff.) recall three different passages in Proverbs: Proverbs 6: 9,10; 20:13; and 24:33. In all of them the motive urged by the Biblical writer is prudential: early rising, coupled with industry, tends to prosperity; sluggishness and late rising, to poverty. While this motive is not absent from the Egyptian work (line 374), its author touches a higher note in the appreciation of the beauty of dawn which he expresses, and the imitation of the god which he suggests. The connection between truth and God set forth in suggests. The connection between truth and God set forth in Lines 409-412 reminds one of Proverbs 12:17-22. Line 473

of the Egyptian document brings to mind Proverbs 20:27: “The spirit of man is the lamp of Jehovah,” though the figure employed by the Egyptian is by no means as beautiful. Finally, lines 525, 526, though different, recall Job 28:28 “The Fear of Jehova is the beginning of wisdom.” The Egyptian writer, like those of the Bible, commended religion. The Egyptian document, though polytheistic, rises at times to seemingly monotheistic expression.

Most scholars who have studied the Wisdom of Amen-em-ope believe that the compilers of the book of Proverbs borrowed from it, sometimes misunderstanding its Hebrew. If this were really so, the Egyptian work would have been composed later than the majority of scholars have thought.

Breasted, in his *Dawn of Conscience*, pp. 364-366, finds in the Wisdom of Amen-em-ope a close parallel to Jeremiah 17:5-8 and also to the First Psalm.

7. A Parallel to Ecclesiastes.---The following striking parallel to a passage to Ecclesiastes is taken from a tablet of the Gilgamesh Epic, written in the script of the time of Hammurabi, about 2000 B.C.

Since the gods created man,
Death they ordained for man,
Life in their hands they hold.
Thou, O Gilgamesh, fill indeed thy belly,
Day and night be thou joyful,
Daily ordain gladness,
Day and night rage and make merry,
Let thy garments be bright,
Desire thy children which thy hand possesses,
A wife enjoy in thy bosom,
Peaceably thy work (?)

This is not only in sentiment strikingly like Ecclesiastes 9:6-9, but in part closely approaches its language.

Note: The Gilgamesh Epic is an early Babylonian poem in twelve tablets or cantos. It is a collection of early legends and myths. The Babylonian account of the flood, translated in Chapter VI (Part II), forms the eleventh canto of it.

Mitteilungen der vorderasiatischen Gesellschaft, 1902, Heft