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the
Wisdom Literature

A Private Translation

by

Herman A. Hartmann

FOREWORD

The thought of translating the Wisdom Literature from Ancient Hebrew into 'my English' came more than 50 years after I had last attended a class in Ancient Hebrew. Having translated the New Testament from Greek into 'my English' I was ready to discover whether any of the Hebrew I had learned so long ago had remained.

Translation after all those years was not easy. I had used my Hebrew very little while serving as a parish pastor. Perhaps the word 'wrestling' would better describe the translation effort. But the venture turned into an unexpected reward. Over more than fifty years, forty four of which serving as a parish pastor, I had not had the opportunity to examine the Wisdom Literature as carefully as has been done in the preparation of these pages. New insights were gained, new directions and messages were discovered that had either been ignored or missed.

I am deeply grateful that I had this opportunity to 'wrestle' with the Wisdom Literature and learn from it as people have learned over the centuries.

Christmas 2004
Herman A. Hartmann

I dedicate this translation of
The Wisdom Literature
(*Job, Psalms, Proverbs,*
Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon)
to the memory of
Dr. Lester Kuyper
who tried valiantly to have his students
feel comfortable as they attempted to learn
to read ancient Hebrew.

Wisdom Literature

The age old question "Where is wisdom to be found" has not only perplexed people in the twenty first century but certainly was a very real question during the time period in which the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon were written.

Then, as now, there was an exploration of faith and attempts were made to provide a satisfactory recognition of faith and praise to the Creator who is the source of being and understanding. Reflections about these explorations into wisdom and additions to the wisdom that was commonly circulated in the conversations of the people helped to round out portions of this class of writing called 'Wisdom Literature'. There were musings about the mystery of life, about praise and how best to praise, the meaning and purpose of life, morality, sexuality, love, hate and all those accompanying feelings that are so deeply imbedded in humanity.

These were people, like us in the twenty-first century, who wrestled with understanding and reflected on what had been learned, questioned what had been assumed and sought to develop a new and deeper understanding of life and eternity, of interpersonal relationships and personal relationship with God.

Much literature of a similar nature had already been written. Egypt had 'Wisdom' writings and in recent years we have learned much more about Middle Eastern cultures and their writings: Ugaritic, Canaanite, Phoenician, Babylonian and others.

To what extent these writings influenced those who wrote in Hebrew can not be finally determined. Scholars differ about the extent of the influences.

Here are examples of Hebrew 'Wisdom Literature' that deal with the thinking, pondering, musing and reflections on life and its mysteries. These examples were deemed to be of sufficient value to be included within the Canon of the Hebrew Scriptures and over the centuries have been a source of guidance, strength and hope for those who turned to them for help and solace.