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The Influence of the Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom Literature upon the Gospels

Robert Allen Byerly

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THE INFLUENCE OF THE HEBREW-JEWISH
WISDOM LITERATURE UPON THE GOSPELS

by

Robert Allen Byerly

A thesis submitted in partial
fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Master of Arts

Division of Graduate Instruction
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PREFACE

A combination of interests has produced the subject of this dissertation. The first was the intriguing call of the Wisdom Literature to investigate its spirit and message and apply it to the work of the Christian preacher. The second interest was that of seeking a better understanding of the sayings of Jesus as given in the rich maxims which present the wisdom of God in striking and usable phrases.

It is my deep conviction that the Gospel takes on new meaning as we see its message in the light of its historical background. In this instance we are interested in the influence which the Wisdom Literature exerted upon the Gospel records.

I am grateful to Dr. T. W. Nakarai of the Semitics Department for helpful instruction in Old Testament Wisdom and also to David C. Pellett for guidance in some special studies in the field of canonical and extra-canonical Wisdom. A special word of recognition and gratitude is extended to Professor S. Marion Smith for helpful instruction and guidance in New Testament literature and specifically in the preparation of this manuscript.

The title of this dissertation could have been "The Relationship of The Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom Literature To The

Gospels" or "The Elements of The Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom Literature In The Gospels." The word "influence" may reveal a bias which implies that the Gospels were influenced by the writings of the Wise Men of Israel. I believe this to be so. There emanated from the historical background and setting of our Lord many "influences" among which was the Wisdom movement with its peculiar field of thought and expression. That this influence was often indirect and indistinct is recognized, but the basic premise of my proposition is that the influence was there in the record of the Gospels. Jesus reflected, unconsciously, the Wisdom type of thinking which was in the tradition of Judaism. It is this "reflection" which we term "influence" in this dissertation.

All quotations from Apocryphal books are taken from the Complete Bible, An American Translation unless otherwise indicated. Other Biblical quotations, unless otherwise noted, are from the Holy Bible, edited by the American Revision Committee, A.D. 1901, Standard Edition, New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons.

Robert Allen Byerly

Kokomo, Indiana
April 1950

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

Cor. - Corinthians

Dt. - Deuteronomy

Eccles. - Ecclesiastes

Eccclus. - Ecclesiasticus

Exo. - Exodus

Gal. - Galatians

Heb. - Hebrews

Isa. - Isaiah

Jer. - Jeremiah

Kgs. - Kings

Lu. - Luke

Matt. - Matthew

Mk. - Mark

Prov. - Proverbs

Wisdom - Wisdom of Solomon

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CHAPTER I

INTRODUCTION

To endeavor to go behind the scenes of the Gospel records and there seek to find the religious background and historical sources that influenced our Lord in his earthly ministry is not a new field of study, for scholars have in recent decades devoted much time in relating the New Testament to its heritage of the Old Testament. This is now a recognized area of study and an extensive bibliography can be easily accumulated showing scholarly works which have endeavored to delineate the direct or indirect carry-over of religious thought from the Hebrew Torah, the Writings and the Prophets into the content and message of the New Testament. Because of this general field of study the New Testament, especially the Gospels, have been found to have deeper significance as the Christian student reads them in their historical setting.

The chosen subject of this thesis brings into light a field that has not yet been extensively covered. Although many scholars have delved into the influence which the Hebrew and Jewish religious beliefs had upon the life and teachings of our Lord, little has been done to show specifically the influence which the Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom literature has played upon the Gospel records. Rylaarsdam¹ of a recent time has contended that

¹J. Coert Rylaarsdam, Revelation In Jewish Wisdom Literature, (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1946), p. viii.

Wisdom and spirit have a close relationship in the Biblical record and that both were equated with the glorified Jesus.

This identification of wisdom and spirit seemed to intimate that the roots for Christian ideas about revelation go thru the New Testament back into the Old Testament, and perhaps especially into the Wisdom Literature.¹

A few volumes have been written to show this general relationship and others have been written to investigate the moral patterns of the Jews preceding and at the time of Jesus. Burch points up the significance of this field of study.

Fortunately, much research has been made within the realm of Jewish moral teaching, thus offering the student a very abundant and well certified mass of material with which to reconstruct the moral environment into which Jesus came. This relatively recent interest in the Jewish background of the Lord's teaching has done much to stimulate the historical study of the teaching of Jesus as found in the Gospels, with the result that the essentials of Jesus' own teachings are better certified than ever before.²

With the ever scrutinizing march of critical scholarship in the study of the Gospel records, we find that it is not enough to study the teachings of Jesus, but it is also important to study the situations and backgrounds of the evangelists themselves. A relationship between the Gospels and the Wisdom writing technique is observed by many scholars, and I think rightly so. One view of the Gospels is that they were intended for the practical guidance of the Christian brotherhood. The Synoptic Gospels include a composite collection of Jesus' sayings on man's duty to God and to

¹Ibid.

²Ernest Ward Burch, The Ethical Teachings of the Gospels,
(New York: The Abingdon Press, 1925), p. 216.

his fellow-men and various related subjects dealing with the inward disposition that belongs to the true servant of God.

Scott sums up this thought by saying:

Christianity was not only a form of belief but a mode of living which had to be practiced within the bonds of a society, and one of the main purposes of the Gospels is to make clear to Christians the nature of the life to which they were committed. Each of the writings, considered in one of its aspects, is a handbook for the practical guidance of believers.¹

This aspect of the Gospels causes us to consider the premise that the Gospel authors were influenced to some extent by the Wisdom pattern of writing, and because of this it is difficult to determine where the picture of Jesus is colored in their presentation of the story.

In discussing the subject before us, we must always keep at least three basic questions uppermost in our search. How prevalent was the Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom literature in Jesus' day? How much did Jesus use the Wisdom concepts that prevailed in his day? How much were the Gospel writers influenced by the Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom concepts? To answer these and related questions is to find a new understanding of a large segment of Jesus' teaching.

To determine and to limit the scope of our subject we shall proceed in the following order of study. First, the prevailing Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom literature and teachings existing in the time of our Lord must be understood. This will call for at least a brief survey of the canonical wisdom of the Hebrews and a similar coverage of the non-canonical Wisdom, which we shall call Jewish

¹Ernest Findlay Scott, The Validity of The Gospel Record, (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1938), p. 10.

Wisdom to differentiate from the older Hebrew or canonical Wisdom. Once we see this picture we can go directly to the Gospel records and find the direct and indirect influence which the Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom literature had upon the teachings of Jesus. A further step will of necessity lead us to examine this influence as it plays upon the four evangelists and their accounts, taking into consideration the historical setting of each of the Gospels.

Let us not deceive ourselves in thinking we can expect to find the object of our search in a clear, concise, single stream of reference. The Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom movement was a composite thing, being influenced by both the priest and the prophet. The wise men of Israel exerted an unconscious influence upon their nation. In turn, we know also that the Gospel reflects much of the religious ideology that emanated from the prophets, the apocalyptic movement and the strong messianic spirit of Judaism.¹ Entwined within all these various streams of influence is the spirit and tone of Wisdom with its strong ethical emphasis, its outlook of universality and its practical application of religious teaching. The Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom at its best was re-echoed in the Gospel of our Lord. The task at hand is to determine how loud and clear are these echoes and how the spiritual insight of Jesus enhanced the tone quality of this religious thought.

¹S. H. Hooke, "Christianity And the Mystery Religions," The Age of Transition, Vol. I, Judaism And Christianity, ed. W. O. E. Oesterley, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1937), pp. 276, 277.

CHAPTER II

THE HEBREW-JEWISH WISDOM IN THE TIME OF JESUS

Jesus was born into a world which was saturated with religion. Although Israel had let the mantle of the prophet lie idle, the priests had made much of the temple ritual and the scribes and lawyers had exalted and expanded the Torah to gigantic proportions. The oral Torah and the accumulation of rabbinic comment were voluminous in quantity. The Pharisees with their literate legalism had kept the barriers up to stop the inroads of paganism which the invading Gentile cultures thrust upon Judaism in the inter-testament period.

Our Lord was schooled in the synagogal pattern of his day. The religious current was fed not only by the Law and the Prophets, but by the Writings as well. The role of the prophet had faded from the religious life of the Jews but another spiritual voice was heard in the gates of Jerusalem, that was the voice of Wisdom. There is good reason to believe that the counsel of the Wise played an important but not always conspicuous or sensational part in creating the religious atmosphere in which Jesus lived and in which the Gospel was formulated. The Hebrew sages had seasoned the religious thought of Israel and when the prophet's office ceased to be active, the wise men carried on and left their mark on Judaism.

A brief survey of Hebrew Wisdom and its influential movement in the life of Israel will enable us to set the stage for our major presentation.

There were Sages or Wise Men (חכמים) in the history of Israel. These men expounded the nature and application of their practical wisdom. The result of this activity was the Wisdom Literature which gives their considered findings on questions of moral and religious philosophy.

The Canonical Wisdom Writings include Proverbs, certain Psalms, Job, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes. The Psalms designated as Wisdom Literature include 1, 8, 18, 29, 119 and others, numbering seventeen in all.

Two major classes of Wisdom Literature appear to be evident. The first class, dealing with practical philosophy and morals, includes Proverbs, parts of Ecclesiastes and a few of the Psalms. These writings consist mainly of maxims relating to conduct and expound the popular wisdom of experience. Job, other parts of Ecclesiastes and some of the Psalms fall into the second class of Wisdom Literature which treats the problems of moral and religious life on a more speculative approach. The problems arising from reason and the experience of life, with respect to such concepts as divine control of the world, compose the main theme for the second class of writings.

The authors of the Wisdom Books take their rightful place in the channels of Old Testament revelation. The Wise Men stand along with the priests and the prophets as transmitters of divine revelation. "For the law shall not perish from the priest, nor the word from the prophet."¹

When the prophetic voices began to become indistinct, they (the Wise Men) continued to

¹Jer. 18:18.

break the bread of truth to the masses who came to them for advice. They were the pastors and familiar advisers of the community.¹

The Wise Men and their recorded writings of Wisdom represent a certain definite attitude of the Hebrew mind.

An understanding of the word "wisdom" as found in the Old Testament canon is helpful. In several instances the word in the Old Testament for Wisdom is used rather loosely to signify various skills or abilities. (In Isa. 10:13 "wisdom" (חָכְמָה) is referred to as the skill of the soldier; in Exo. 28:3 and 35:25 as the skill of the technical worker; in Exo. 7:11 as the magician; and in Gen. 41:33, 39 and Dt. 1:13 as the administrator.) The word "wisdom" came to be specially used of ethical and moral principles, that higher and finer prudence in the religious affairs of man striving to harmonize his life with the law of God.²

The influence of the Wise upon Hebrew life and thought may be measured in various ways and from contrasting viewpoints, and therefore with varying results. If one looks for an added impetus to the nationalism of the Jews in the Wisdom Literature he looks in vain, for the Sages gave little attention to the future of their nation. All that was narrowly nationalistic is conspicuously lacking in their teaching. The note of universality in Hebrew Wisdom is an important characteristic and is one that corrected the religious thinking of Israel. These writers turn the thoughts of their fellow-men into channels of thought which superceded nationalism.

¹Charles Foster Kent, A History of the Jewish People During the Babylonian, Persian and Greek Periods (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1924), p. 313.

²Harry Ranston, The Old Testament Wisdom Books And Their Teaching (London: The Epworth Press, 1930), p. 14.

The Wise directed their influence to the individual, the inner man, and thus their teaching became universal in its scope. The Wise performed a great service to the world in challenging Hebrew people to fulfill their mission to the world. The post-exilic priesthood of Judaism had fostered a narrow Jewish spirit. The breaking of this nationalistic chrysalis was necessary if Judaism was ever to develop into Christianity.¹

There may be glimpses at times into instances where the voices of the Wise were heard in the counsels of the state, but this was not their true field. They exerted an internal influence, not external. "By molding the character of the individual they determined the character and consequently the history of the commonwealth."² Eccles. 9:17 points this out clearly: "The words of the wise spoken in quiet are heard more than the cry of him that ruleth among fools."

The Wise Men were certainly influenced by the prophets and the priests, but they had a realm of teaching peculiarly their own. They came to the masses with teachings which all could understand and absorb. They interpreted in the language of the common man the great truths thus confided to the nation.

The role of Solomon in the Wisdom movement of Israel is an indirect one and is often misunderstood when naively considered. Few scholars attribute many of the Wisdom Writings to the illustrious King of Israel. Most scholars would say he wrote none of the proverbs. His name was associated with the Wise Men at an

¹Charles Foster Kent, The Wise Men of Israel And Their Proverbs (New York: Silver, Burdett & Company, 1895), p. 30.

²Ibid., p.28.

early date but to accredit him actual authorship is to be untrue to historical facts. Solomon's greatest contribution to the Wisdom movement was his influence upon later Wisdom Writers who attached his name to their collection of maxims and proverbs. The outstanding reputation of Solomon as a Sage (I Kgs. 4:29-34) accounts for his name being associated with such aphoristic collections as Proverbs, although we can be certain that the viewpoint of the Proverbs is not that of the king who exalted everything but monogamy and the deprecation of wealth.

A cursory view of the major emphases of the Old Testament Wisdom finds a multitude of subjects. We can list only the more general fields of thought which the Wise Men treated. The Sages of Israel exalted Wisdom herself. Proverbs 2 is the superb example of this and the opening chapter of the later non-canonical Ben Sira is also good. Wisdom is personified. She is antagonistic to evil, indispensable for counsel, very approachable, able to richly reward, and just in rewarding her followers.

The basic source of Hebrew Wisdom was God, and all the writers in this field of thought readily admit it. It never occurred to the Hebrew Sage to ask the question, "Who is God?"

Rather, he started with an axiom - given a God knowable, just and wise, then Wisdom is to know Him, so far as possible, through observation of His works and ways, and to turn that knowledge to practical account in our relations with Him, and with our fellow men.¹

The God and man relationship is very evident in the teaching of Wisdom. The basis or source of Wisdom is centered in God.

¹Edwin Chauncey Baldwin, Types of Literature In The Old Testament (New York: Thomas Nelson and Sons, 1929, p. 87.

"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding."¹ As Rankin points out, the general characteristic of the Wisdom Literature "is the recognition of man's moral responsibility, his religious individuality and of God's interest in the individual life."² Even when Wisdom becomes the subject of theological reflection and is personified as an intermediary being between God and the world, her function is to attract and appeal to men (Prov. 8:4f). A superb example is Proverbs 8:27, 29-31 (Moffatt):

When He (God) set the heavens up, I was there:...
 When He laid the foundations of the earth,
 I was with Him then:....
 Playing here and there over His world,
 Finding my delight in humankind.³

The Wisdom books are concerned with a multitude of ethical and religious teachings. The concept of God in some of the writings reaches a very high standard. The monotheism of Job is an advanced concept and every section of the book implies it.

It is taken for granted that even non-Israelites accept the uniqueness of God. Idolatry and heathen deities are practically ignored. The Satan acts only by His permission. He is the inscrutable, all-wise, benevolent, omnipotent Creator and Controller of all animate and inanimate nature.⁴

¹Prov. 9:10.

²O. S. Rankin, Israel's Wisdom Literature (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1936, p.3.

³Ibid., (quoted).

⁴Ranston, op. cit., p. 181.

It is possible to detect the influence of other cultures upon the Wisdom writings. This may account for the universal characteristic of the canonical Wisdom Literature. Israel's Wisdom Literature "....bore the fewest national characteristics of all Hebrew literature."¹ Rylaarsdam observes that "Israel's Wisdom Literature well illustrates her use of the literary forms and subject matter current among the older cultures among which she grew up."²

The Hebrew Wise Man believed, along with his fellow Wise Men of Egypt and Babylon, in a moral order of life and he proceeded on the assumption that that moral order is discoverable by, or given to, men. Running through the Wisdom writings is the deep undercurrent of conviction that man is a finite creature, but there is a divine way, which will triumph even though the Wise Man may not fully succeed in understanding it.

We find little trace of Hebrew nationalism in the canonical Wisdom Literature. There is no evidence of a zealous patriotism. In contrast to other Biblical writers, the Wisdom writers made "few allusions and no explicit references to the long history of the Hebrew people, to which the prophetic, historical and devotional writers went so constantly for illustrative material."³ The reference in Eccles. 1:1 to "Solomon, son of David, who ruled at Jerusalem" stands as the only reference to personalities or incidents of the national story in the canonical Wisdom literature.

¹Rylaarsdam, op. cit., p. 2.

²Ibid., p. 4.

³Ibid., p. 19.

It is essential to see that, although the canonical Wisdom writers make no reliance upon the national religious tradition, they reveal some influence from it. Here and there in the Book of Proverbs one finds allusions that betray a cultural acquaintance with the Hebrew Torah and Prophets. Proverbs 21:27 decries the sacrifice of wicked men and reminds one of Amos and Isaiah. There is a close resemblance between Proverbs 3:9f and the thought of Malachi 3:9f. The Deuteronomic flavor of the Book of Proverbs is found in Proverbs 6:20-22, 7:3 and also in 6:4-9.

Admitting the great influence which Egyptian and Babylonian thought played upon earlier Hebrew Wisdom Literature, we must not hesitate to affirm that there was an individuality in the writing of the Hebrew Wise Men. The Hebrew distinctiveness settled in the religious connotation of Wisdom. This religious element, while present in some Egyptian and Babylonian Wisdom writings, is the predominate element in Hebrew Wisdom.¹

With the exception of the few verses in the First Book of Esdras, all the wisdom-books both within and outside the Old Testament enforce their moral instruction by reference to God as the Creator not only of heaven and earth but particularly as the Creator of man.²

In the above paragraphs we have endeavored to catch the important contributions which the Hebrew Wise Men have made to the religious world. The Wise were not Israel's lesser men.

With the decline of prophecy and the rise of the Apocalyptic, the wisdom-schools preserved the sound sense and soul of Judaism. They deepened

¹W.O.E. Oesterley and Theodore H. Robinson, Hebrew Religion, Its Origin and Development (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1930), p. 326.

²Rankin, op. cit., p. 10.

its thought upon man and God. For the prophets, apart from the implications of their social message, it was the community which counted, and counted only in so far as it obeyed Jahve's will. For the Lawgivers, even when the personal "thou shalt" or "thou shalt not" is subject of the divine commandment, it is primarily the community which is exhorted to obedience. But "the wise" took into account the individual's peace, welfare and happiness in the family and in the community. They study particularly all the great human motives of conduct - gratitude, friendship, love, hate, wealth, reputation. Wisdom is the ability to assess truly the values of life.¹

The words of Professor J. M. P. Smith sum up our thought:

Upon the whole, the "Wisdom" element must be considered the noblest expression of the Hebrew spirit It demonstrated irrefutably the vitality of the Hebrew religion. When the forms and institutions in which Hebrew idealism had clothed itself were shattered beyond restoration, "Wisdom" furnished new channels for the expression of the ideal, and kept the passion for righteousness and truth burning. . . . Nationalistic, particularistic, transitory elements were discarded, and emphasis was laid upon the great fundamental concepts of religion adapted to the needs of all men everywhere.²

The term Jewish Wisdom is used to designate the post-canonical writing of the Sages. We may admit that some of the canonical Wisdom books may have undergone treatment from the pen of the redactor at a late date, and we must also admit the importance and inestimable value of the Wisdom writings of the apocryphal period.

Following in the spiritual footsteps of the earlier Wise Men, the Sages of Judaism continued to exalt the Wisdom of God and we can easily observe their influence in the non-canonical writings. When the Judaism of the inter-testament times closed the door on

¹Ibid., pp. 3,4.

²Quoted in Ranston, op. cit., pp. 29,30.

prophecy, the door of the Wisdom writing and thinking remained open. Thus this avenue of revelation continued to be a channel of expression for the spiritual Sages of the nation.

One must be honest in his appraisal of the non-canonical writings that bear on Wisdom. We cannot say that all the Wisdom Literature of the Apocrypha is inferior to that of the Old Testament canon. In some instances the Apocryphal Wisdom stands at a high level and may compare favorably with the best found in the accepted canon. It may be said that of all the Apocryphal books, those bearing on Wisdom may have the greatest value in the realm of instruction and guidance from the Christian's viewpoint.

Accepting the major premise and style of the Hebrew Wisdom Literature the later writers of Judaism turned their spiritual interests into some new and pattern-changing channels. We need to see the contrasting elements in the non-canonical writings of the Wise Men in light of the Hebrew Wisdom.

The later Jewish Wisdom materials were characterized by the identification of Yahweh with the universal God concept, which did not consciously happen in the canonical Wisdom Literature. Two main results came from this identification: It increased the universalization of the Jewish religious outlook, and it integrated the Hebrew Wisdom movement into the midstream of Jewish religious tradition.¹

The national bias becomes quite evident in the non-canonical Wisdom, and stands in great contrast with the lack of nationalistic bias in the older Wisdom writings.

¹Rylaarsdam, op. cit., p. 22.

.....In the earlier literature the Sage is a Wise man, irrespective of nationality, while in the later books the Sage is an Israelite, and the writers glory is in the fact that only among their own people are the true Wise men to be found.¹

Following Ben Sira,² the Wisdom of the Jews became identified more and more with their traditional religious belief. "It is only a part of the truth to say that wisdom was nationalized; it is equally necessary to say that Jewish religion (theology) was universalized."³ When this religious turn was made in the Wisdom movement, there followed a close relation between Wisdom and a diligent study of the Law of Moses.

It is possible to generalize a bit on the religious tone of the Wisdom writings, whether canonical or non-canonical. Gregg in his discussion of possible Greek influence on the Wisdom writers points out the supremacy of the God concept in these works.

....God is not banished from the writings of the wise: it is only that greater room is allowed for that power divinely planted in men and things, of obeying the laws written in their constitution. Experience is stated in terms of man. Far from being athiests, the Wise men represent a tendency altogether opposite to that of the Greek speculators. In fact, it might be said that the Jewish Wisdom (Hokmah) was no philosophy at all. The wise men of Israel never approached their enquiries without theological presuppositions. They had no desire to investigate final causes; they started with a fundamental axiom "In the beginning....." Their desire was not so much to understand the works of God, as to acquaint themselves with their harmonies,

¹Oesterley and Robinson, op. cit., P. 154.

²Sira is considered to be the better pronunciation and truest to the Hebrew. The X (chi) in Sirach is a scribal error in the translation from the Hebrew to the Greek. W. O. E. Oesterley, An Introduction to the Books of the Apocrypha (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1935) p. 223.

³Rylaarsdam, op. cit., p. 32.

beauties, adaptations, and all of this with the final object of knowing and doing the will of God.¹

There is the teaching in the older Wisdom (perhaps indirect) that man does what is right because of the consequent reward. In the later literature the stress is laid more on the need of doing good because God wills it.²

The canonical Wisdom centers primarily on the fact of God's righteousness and justice, therefore He rewards the righteous man for his well-doing and the wicked receives a retribution for his evil deeds, and all this takes place on this side of the grave. In the later Wisdom thought a greater stress is laid on divine grace and mercy lavished upon Israel, the people of God, and the doctrine of divine retribution is much modified in its severity. These later writers with the exception of Ben Sira teach that the punishment of the ungodly and the reward of the righteous take place in the life to come. This is in contrast to the "this life" theory of retribution in the canonical literature.³

The later writers of Israel's Wisdom literature stress a divine transcendence. There almost appears the full fledged intermediary concept in several places and the general tenor is for God to be far removed from the earth and that he works through his Wisdom in a personified sense.

We have many reasons to believe that the concepts of the Wise Men were generally accepted by the Judaism of Jesus' life

¹J.A.F. Gregg, The Wisdom of Solomon, The Cambridge Bible For Schools and Colleges ed. A. F. Kirkpatrick (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1922), pp. xxix, xxx.

²Oesterley and Robinson, op. cit., p. 155.

³Ibid., p. 155.

time. The reliance made by the rabbis upon the spiritual maxims of the Sages and the ready reference of Jesus to the Wisdom source and style (which we will illustrate later) point to the extent the Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom had permeated Jewish thought.

The Wise of Israel had interpreted great spiritual truths in the language of the common man. We are indebted to them for their spiritual insight and the wealth of material they contributed to our Biblical literature.

It is interesting to note that there came one called Christ, who said of himself, "A greater than Solomon is here"¹ and who adopted the method of teaching peculiar to the Wise. "All these things spake Jesus in parables unto the multitudes: and without a parable spake he nothing unto them."²

He, like the wise of ancient Israel, was speaking to all ages and peoples, and consequently broke away from the restrictions which trammelled priest and prophet. Though paradoxical and obscure and often unintelligible to the unthinking, this style of expression preserved the thought in imperishable form, so that it could be understood with equal facility by the truth-seekers of all times. Thus "the words of the wise spoken in quiet," by shaping and by degrees transforming the life of the Hebrew people, and counteracting the narrowing influence which threatened to crush the very soul of the nation, planted the seed-thoughts which later bore fruit in Christianity, and gave to the world that method of teaching which has been forever immortalized because employed by the wisest of the wise to convey his message of salvation to erring men.³

¹Mtt. 12:42.

²Ibid., 13:34.

³Kent, The Wise Men of Israel and Their Proverbs (New York, 1895), p. 31.

CHAPTER III

THE INFLUENCE OF HEBREW-JEWISH WISDOM IN JESUS' TEACHING

It is no easy task to determine the influence which the Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom had upon Jesus and his teaching. We shall never know how much the theological import of such Wisdom books as Job or Fourth Maccabees or Baruch influenced our Lord. Thus far we have paid little attention to this phase of the Hebrew Wisdom literature. This area of influence can not be treated extensively for several specific reasons. The speculative or theological emphasis of Wisdom is so deeply entwined with the prophetic and priestly that it is extremely difficult to measure the specific impression which the Sages made upon their time. Such an influence dealing with thought patterns is difficult to detect in transmission, especially when compared with the more obvious and objective influence of the proverbial form of Wisdom sayings and their religio-ethical connotations.

We probably see less influence or shall we say less "direct influence" between the problem of suffering in Job and in the teaching of Jesus. However, when our thinking turns to the God and man concepts we find the sayings of Jesus reflecting much of the best thought of those Hebrew-Jewish Sages who were specialists in this field of religious thinking.

In this chapter we will dare to search for the influence which the writings of the Wise had upon Jesus. This can be done

by an examination of specific sayings of our Lord as recorded in the Gospel records. We must also study the numerous other passages of the Gospel that may reflect Wisdom thought. Before doing this there are several observations we will find helpful in understanding the subject.

A caution is needed for this study, viz., that we do not read our subject into texts in which there is no relationship. In many instances the relationship between Gospel references and their possible Wisdom background is debatable. It shall be our purpose to choose for illustration those texts which are clear cut and generally accepted in this field of thought.

A further caution is needed to the point that we do not dissect the teachings of Jesus and then assemble the fruits of our labor and acclaim the resulting "collection" as a definite block of Jesus' teaching, or as the total thought of His teaching.

Montefiore in his treatment of the Gospels and Rabbinical literature gives this caution in an admirable way.

There is a certain spirit and glow about the teaching of Jesus which you either appreciate or fail to appreciate. You cannot recognize or do justice to it by saying, "The teaching of Jesus comprises the following maxims and injunctions. Of these some are borrowed from the Old Testament, some are paralleled by the Talmud, and a few are impracticable." The teaching of Jesus which has had such gigantic effects upon the world, is more and other than a dissected list of injunctions. It is not merely the sum of its parts; it is a whole, a spirit.

The spirit has the characteristics of genius. It is great, stimulating, heroic. One may not always agree with it, it may not always be "practical," but it is always, or nearly always big and grand. Even if you could find separate close parallels for 970 out of, say, the 1000 verses in the Gospel in which Jesus is the speaker, and even if you put them together and made a nice little book of them, you would not have produced a substitute of equal religious value. The unity, the

aroma, the spirit, the genius would all have fled.
Or, rather, you could not infuse them into your
elegant collection of fragments and tit-bits.¹

We readily recognize Montefiore's Jewish bias as revealed in the complete quotation above but he has a point that is directly related to our task. With this caution at the forefront of our intent let us turn to our subject and seek the possible influence which the Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom played upon Jesus and his teaching.

Levison makes a statement that will initiate our provocative subject: "The most precious thing that Christianity has taken over from Judaism is the belief in the universality of God, in whom ultimately all mankind will come to believe and worship."² The religious influence of the Wisdom movement upon this concept is of signal importance. The lack of legal Judaistic bias in the central stream of Hebrew Wisdom did much to keep alive the universality of God, and helped to transcend the nationalistic limitation of later Judaism.

Jesus went about his ministry with a spirit of universality that was in accord with the old Hebrew Sage, and which conflicted with the narrow nationalism which still existed in his day. The Gospel was the good seed planted in the field of the world. The Master went beyond national bounds as he thought of God as "Father" and sent his followers to all nations.

The Christian idea of God offering Himself to the sinner

¹C. G. Montefiore (ed.), The Synoptic Gospels (London: Macmillan and Company Limited, 1927) Vol. I, pp. cxli, cxlii.

²N. Levison, The Jewish Background of Christianity (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1932), p. 188.

presented the greatest contrast to Judaism. The gospel of Jesus was addressed to sinners and not to the "righteous" and placed the idea of the personal relationship to God on a broader foundation.

Let us consider a Wisdom quotation:

But you have mercy on all men, because you can
do all things,
And you overlook men's sins to lead them to repent,
For you love all things that exist,
And abhor none of the things that you have made;
For you would never have formed anything if you
hated it,
And how could anything have endured, if you had
not willed it,
Or what had not been called forth by you have
been preserved?
But you spare all, because they are yours,
Lord, lover of life,
For your imperishable spirit is in all things.¹

In this pre-Christian writing of Judaism we find for probably the first time where God is named the "Lover of souls" and is one who has compassion on all men, and overlooks the sins of men that they may repent. The author of this writing later comes far below this high ethic and returns to Jewish particularism, however he does express the idea which seems to be the root of Jesus teaching.² Jesus presented a new idea when he taught that God approached men and took the initiative to save men and not only the "righteous."

Hooke insists, and rightly so, that, "There is no trace in his recorded utterances of the spirit reflected in later skeptical Wisdom literature, nor of the philosophical speculations of

¹Wisdom of Sol., 11:23-12:1a.

²Rankin, op. cit., pp. 42, 43.

Philo".¹ Hooke makes this statement in setting forth the streams of religious tendencies which existed in Jesus' time.

The note of universality in the ethical teachings of Jesus reflects the best of the Old Testament Wisdom writings and many of his sayings have close parallels in the Rabbinical literature.

The ethic of the Gospels takes account only of the moral law as it is written in the hearts of all men. It centers on the conviction that God is the Father of all, and that his will is the same for the whole human race His message was for all men and will be valid always, under all the changing conditions of life. As we see him acting in his given environment we are never allowed to lose sight of his universality.²

With universalism goes individualism and we find this also a common factor in the Wisdom tradition and in Jesus' teaching. These factors have at least an indirect and possibly a direct relationship. The Wisdom literature provided a step, although faltering at times, toward individualism in the religion of Judaism. Jesus quickened this religious individualism to a pronounced reality. Fairweather points out, concerning the religious individualism of the Wisdom movement: "It needed only the magnetic touch of Jesus to call into active operation what was already dormant in the community."³ Rankin makes this observation:

From the religious-historical viewpoint this teaching of Jesus represents the development and

¹S. H. Hooke, "The Emergence Of Christianity From Judaism," The Age of the Transition, Vol. I, Judaism And Christianity, ed. W. O. E. Oesterley, (New York: Macmillan Company, 1937), p. 275.

²Ernest Findlay Scott, The Purpose Of The Gospels (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1949) p. 104.

³William Fairweather, The Background of the Gospels (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1908), P. 38.

fruition of the humanism of the wisdom-writers, the center of whose religious thought was the interest of God in the individual.¹

As to the use of proverbs and pithy statements of Wisdom which the Gospels portray Jesus as using, we need to look for some direct influence from the Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom. That there is some relation between the parable and the proverb is certain on the part of scholars. Oesterley speaks to this point when he says:

The most usual form of the parable or proverb is, however, that of a wise saying, containing the idea of comparison; this is the development of the earliest form of a proverb, and itself develops into the form of a miniature essay, such as occurs, e.g., in Prov. xxi.5, and often in Ecclesiasticus.²

It may well be that in the extended form of proverbs which we meet with in Ecclesiasticus we may discern a development which tended in the direction of the development of a proverb into the form which we should call a parable. Ben-Sira often takes a central theme and enlarges upon it; from this to a narrative illustrating a central theme is an easy transition; in that form we get the parable in our sense of the word.³

Jesus used the term parable (mashal) in much of its Old Testament connotation as in Luke 6:39, "And he spake also a parable unto them, Can the blind lead the blind? Shall they not both fall into a pit?" Another example would be Luke 4:23, "And he said unto them, Doubtless ye will say unto me this parable, Physician, heal thyself." Other such sayings of our Lord fall also in this category even though they are not specifically termed parables. Such an example could be cited as "Ye are the salt of

¹Rankin, op. cit., p. 44.

²W. O. E. Oesterley, The Gospel Parables In The Light of Their Jewish Background (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1936), p. 4.

³Ibid., p. 6.

the earth; but if the salt have lost its savour, where with shall it be salted?"¹ Similar utterances as in Matthew 5:14, "Ye are the light of the world," and Matthew 7:6, "Give not that which is holy unto the dogs, neither cast your pearls before swine." One more example may be Matthew 9:12, "They that are whole have no need of a physician but they that are sick." In these simple straightforward sayings which everyone easily grasped, we possibly have some current proverbs familiar to the people and which Jesus utilized in his teaching.

We have reason to believe that Jesus was acquainted with the form and style of the Wisdom Writings. We cannot be sure how much the form and style of Jesus' sayings reflect the ability or bias of the evangelist. Scott makes this statement: "The sayings of Jesus were reproduced in poetical modes of speech, resembling those of the prophets and the authors of the Wisdom literature."² Scott implies that Jesus spoke only at times like this and that "it is more than likely that his words as we have them bear the impress of the later church."³

Fairweather stresses the influence of the apocryphal Wisdom books upon Jewish life.

....The influence of Sira must be regarded as a powerful factor in producing among the Jewish people the conviction that piety is something to be learned, and that the learned are its peculiar representatives.⁴

¹Matt. 5:13.

²Scott, Validity of the Gospel Record, op. cit., p. 142.

³Ibid., p. 143

⁴Fairweather, op. cit., p. 148.

Jesus lived in a day when all Jewish boys learned the Law. The study of the Torah was the main curriculum of the synagogue school. Sira's Wisdom writing helped to direct the mind of the Hebrew people to this focalized emphasis upon the Law as the source of Wisdom. We should note that in Sira's proverbial sayings there is a wider range of thought on the Divine influence upon life, but there soon follows the narrower conception that "Wisdom is simply knowledge of the Law."¹ This emphasis led logically to the "banning of the Greek language and of all secular literature and in the limitation of every Jewish Boy's education to instruction in the Law."²

The basis of the Gospel narrative is that which served as the basis of Hebrew Wisdom. Unlike the Hellenic philosophers and writers

..... who seek to read the riddle of the universe by the investigation of natural phenomena; the Hebrew philosopher already holds in his hand the key of revelation, and with the help of this aims merely at a clear understanding of the ways of God and the duty of man.³

We can readily recognize that the Gospels are written with the existence and power of God taken as a settled fact.

It will now serve our purpose best to take a few pertinent examples of the sayings of Jesus and examine them in the light of Wisdom influence. The scrutiny cannot exclude the religious thought as well as the pattern or form of the utterance. This treatment does not claim to be exhaustive, but only to take representative and familiar passages from the Gospel records.

¹Ibid.

²Ibid.

³Ibid., p. 82.

Jesus went about doing good and the Gospels record his ministry of helping and healing. The Wise Man was to be the one who would hear and do his words.¹

"Everyone therefore that heareth these words of mine, and doeth them, shall be likened unto a wise man....." This theme, which runs through the Gospel sayings, has a strong Jewish background. The Wisdom writings laid much stress on the value of works. Almsgiving was an expression of piety that was referred to constantly. Ben Sira writes, "Water will quench a flaming fire, and almsgiving will make atonement for sins."²

Jesus put the true teaching of this theme in Matthew 6:1f:

Take heed that ye do not your righteousness before men, to be seen of them: else ye have no reward with your Father who is in heaven. When therefore thou doest alms, sound not a trumpet before thee, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and in the streets that they may have glory of men.

There was the practical spirituality of Wisdom in Jesus' instruction to "use not vain repetitions" in praying.³ Ben Sira exhorted one "to not repeat yourself when you pray."⁴

The Sage had preceded Jesus' utterance, "Give us this day our daily bread," as given in the Lord's prayer, by the similar saying,

....Provide me with food sufficient for my needs . . . Lest I be full, and disown thee, saying, "Who is the Lord? Or lest I be in want, and steal and profane the name of my God."⁵

The message of the Last Judgment parable contains much that reflects Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom concepts. The strong ethical content

¹Matt. 7:24f, Lu. 6:47-49.

²Ecclus. 3:30.

³Matt. 6:7.

⁴Ecclus. 7:14b

⁵Prov. 30:8b,9

of this parable would fit the practical spiritual emphasis of Wisdom. The righteous act of visiting and ministering to the needs of the sick and dispossessed (Matt. 25:36) may have been placed against the background of Eccles. 7:35: "Do not hesitate to visit a man who is sick, for you will be loved for such acts." Likewise the oft quoted statement of social concern, "Inasmuch as ye did it unto one of the least of these my brethren, even these least, ye did it unto me,"¹ may reflect the strong Jewish teaching which the old proverb stated, "He that hath pity upon the poor, lendeth unto Jehovah, and his good deed will he pay him again."²

Oesterley³ associates the reference to the seed upon the stony ground in the Parable of the Soils to the Wisdom influence in Eccles. xi.15 which in the Hebrew translation reads: "The root of the godless is upon a rocky crag." The picture of the rocky places existing in a cornfield is valid and there were many places in Palestine where there was only enough soil over the rock to give root but no depth for productive growth. The Wise had seen this analogy in an earlier day and had applied it to the fruitless and shallow man.

Jesus' picturesque language in the Parable of the Unjust Steward was true to several Jewish forms which were evidently current in Jesus' day. The striking words of the Matthaean text are: "...and he laid hold on him and took him by the throat, saying, pay what thou owest."⁴ The Proverbs contain several

¹Matt. 25:40b.

²Prov. 19:17.

³Oesterley, Gospel Parables In The Light of Their Jewish Background, op. cit., p. 44.

⁴Matt. 18:28d.

passages that give counsel on this thought.

My son, if thou art become surety for
thy neighbor,
If thou hast stricken thy hands for a stranger:
Thou art snared with the words of thy mouth.
Thou art taken with the words of thy mouth.
Do this now, my son, and deliver thyself.
Seeing thou art come into the hand of thy
neighbor:
Go, humble thyself, and importune thy neighbor:
Give not sleep to thine eyes;
Nor slumber to thine eyelids;
Deliver thyself as a roe from the hand of the
hunter,
And as a bird from the hand of the fowler.¹

The rich ruleth over the poor;
And the borrower is servant to the lender.²

Be thou not one of them that strike hands,
Or of them that are sureties for debts.
If thou hast not wherewith to pay,
Why should he take away the bed from under
thee?³

There is a strong resemblance to Jesus' teaching on the
"wedding garment" (Matt. 22:12) found in Eccles. 9:8: "Let thy
garment always be white; and let not thy head lack ointment."

In the case of the Covetous Brother who wanted Jesus to
act as judge of an estate, we find a reflection of Wisdom teaching.
The warning of Jesus is against all covetousness, which is applic-
able to all men, the rich, the near rich and the poor. "It is
likely enough that our Lord was acquainted with Ben Sira's words:
"He that runneth after gold will not be guiltless, and he that
loveth gain will go astray thereby!"⁴ In connection with this
same teaching we find the words of Eccles. 14:14: "Upon the portion
of a brother trespass not, and let not the portion of a good desire

¹Prov. 6:1-5.

²Prov. 22:7

³Prov. 22:26,27.

⁴Oesterly, Gospel Parables, op. cit., p. 169. See also
Eccles. 31:5-7.

pass thee by."

The emphatic words of Jesus on the sin of a godless life in relation to material goods as portrayed in the Parable of the Rich Fool may have been rooted in Jewish Wisdom. The words of Ben Sira deal with this kind of a man. "I have found rest, and now will I eat my goods; he knoweth not what the day will bring forth, he leaveth (his goods) to another."¹ The Wise did not approve of the Hedonistic view of life as reflected in Eccles. 8:15. The sense of a practical sobriety reflected in Jesus' teachings was much like that of the Wisdom writers.

Jesus resorted to a maxim of Wisdom when he gave the lesson on humility recorded in Luke 14:7f. His rebuke was to the haughty and selfish. "Sit not down in the chief seat when you are bidden to a marriage feast." (14:8) Those who received these words were probably reminded of the old saying of the Proverbs (25:6,7):

Put not thyself forward in the presence
of the king,
And stand not in the place of great men:
For better is it that it be said unto thee,
Come up hither,
Than that thou shouldest be put lower in
the presence of the prince,
Whom mine eyes have seen.

The teaching on forgiveness so forcibly given by Jesus can best be understood against the background of notable passages of Jewish Wisdom such as Eccles. 28:2-4.

Forgive your neighbor his wrongdoing;
Then your sins will be forgiven when you pray.
Shall one man cherish anger against another,
And yet ask healing from the Lord?
Does he have no mercy on a man like himself,
And yet pray for his own sins?

¹Eccles. 11:19.

This was written about two centuries before the time of our Lord.¹

The intriguing statements of our Lord relative to the "evil" eye² and its opposite the "single" or "good" eye³ may have relevance when the use of these concepts is examined in the writings of the Hebrew Wisdom. For the Wise Man the evil eye is associated with niggardliness or meanness. Thus Proverbs 23:6,7, which reads:

Eat thou not the bread of him that hath
an evil eye,
Neither desire thou his dainties:
For as he thinketh within himself, so is he:
Eat and drink, saith he to thee;
But his heart is not with thee.

Ben Sira also said: "An evil eye begrudges bread, and is in want of it at his own table."⁴ The "healthy" (kindly, bountiful) eye is acclaimed in Proverbs 22:9: "He that hath a bountiful eye shall be blessed; for he giveth his bread to the poor."

Jesus evidently had a wealth of pertinent sayings stored up within his memory and these maxims flowed forth in his teaching and found their most effective place in parables and pithy statements of spiritual truth. Probably no better example of our main thesis is provided in the Gospel records than that in Matthew 11:28: "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Tasker, in discussing the life and ministry of Jesus and the influence of the Old Testament, says:

....To those who came to Him conscious of the burdens of Jewish legalism and of their own sins, and who were prepared to learn from Him, He offered "rest unto their souls." The "comfortable words" in which He expressed

¹Oesterley, Gospel Parables, op. cit., p. 92.

²Matt. 6:23, 20:15, Mk. 7:22.

³Matt. 6:22-23.

⁴Ecclus. 14:10.

this gracious offer would seem to be influenced by the language of Ecclus. 51:23, in which the divine wisdom invites the unlearned to put their neck under her yoke and bear her burden.¹

Ben Sira's words sound familiar: "Come to me, you who are untaught, and pass the night in the house of instruction.... Put your neck under her yoke, and let your soul receive instruction."²

One easily notes the warmth and seemingly superior quality of Jesus' statements in contrast to the writings of Ben Sira which his teaching reflects. Box³ notes the great contrast intended between the oft used "yoke of law" as found in the Rabbinic "Pirke Aboth"⁴ and that of Christ's yoke.

As Jesus pointed out the conceit and self-centeredness of the Pharisees who claimed that "We see!" he gave them over to foolishness and sin. The Proverb "Seest thou a man wise in his own conceit? There is more hope of a fool than of him,"⁵ had made this same decree generations earlier.

Jesus' direct and repeated emphasis upon a pure heart⁶ corresponds to the Oriental conception of the heart which is really the inner person, the "self." Proverbs 4:33 says: "Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life," and thus expresses the thought which Jesus amplified so beautifully

¹R.V.G. Tasker, The Old Testament In The New Testament (Philadelphia: The Westminster Press, 1945), p. 31.

²Ecclus. 51:23, 26.

³G. H. Box, ed., The New Century Bible, St. Matthew (New York: Henry Frowde, 1922) p.

⁴Aboth, iii. - "Whoso receives upon him the yoke of the Law." Mishnah 5.

⁶Mk. 7:21, 22; Matt. 5:8

⁵Prov. 26:12

in his teaching on the pure inner life.

Numerous other sayings of Jesus could be examined. We find him on so many occasions employing the proverbial type of speech. His reference to the "blind leading the blind"¹ has a train of thought going back into the wisdom as well as the writings of the prophet.

"Whoso diggeth a pit shall fall therein;
And he that rolleth a stone, it shall return
upon him."²

We may now profitably look a bit closer to the more intangible influence which the religious concepts of the Wise Men had upon the thinking and teaching of Christ. Walker³ makes a strong case for Jesus' understanding of wisdom in relation to his concept of God. "He shows a very full appreciation of God as wisdom constantly operative in the soul."⁴ To buttress this point we turn to the beatitudes to find that "Blessed are they who hunger and thirst for righteousness for they shall be filled"⁵ is in the style in which the Wisdom of God makes her promises to the soul who desires her.

The value of the soul as expressed in Mark 8:36 "For what doth it profit a man, to gain the whole world, and forfeit his life?" should be thought of in the light of Eccles. 26:14: "And there is no exchange for a well instructed soul."

The emphasis of Jesus is upon the wisdom of God in the human soul and this impresses us as we read the Gospel records.

¹Matt. 15:14, Lu. 6:37.

²Prov. 26:27.

³Thomas Walker, The Teaching of Jesus and The Jewish Teaching of His Age (New York: George H. Doran Company, 1923), p. 75f.

⁵Matt. 5:6.

⁴Ibid., p. 75.

Walker concludes that

..."The word (logos) of God" in the following may be equivalent of, or have an oblique reference to, the wisdom of God: "The seed is the word of God" (Luke viii.11; Mark iv.14; Matt. xiii.19); "Blessed they who hear the word of God" (Luke xi.28; cf. viii.21); "the word . . . is not mine, but His who sent me, -- Father's" (Jno. xiv.24; cf. xii.48, xv.3). Jesus was, then, deeply impressed by the spirit, the wisdom of God, in the experience of men.¹

There is evidence that Jesus spoke with the consciousness of being the very Wisdom of God to men. Scott states that one concept of Jesus in the Gospel is "as the divine Wisdom who instructs men in the true way of life."² This quality of having the wisdom of God within him was a requirement of the Messiah.³ Jesus expresses this inner thought in the "yoke" text already mentioned above, which is a direct parallel to the teaching of Ben Sira.⁴

Walker suggests that:

The Pauline equation, "Christ. . . God's wisdom" (I Cor. i.24), and the Johnine phenomena given below may go back to a habit of Jesus in speaking of himself and his teaching in terms used in Sir., a book which A. Plummer (E. Dec. 1908, p.482) even is willing to admit he read, - may come, that is, "from the self-consciousness of Jesus, expressed in Wisdom language." (J. A. Findlay, p. 286).⁵

Jesus' demands for devotion to himself, such as men had not

¹Walker, op. cit., p. 77.

²Ernest Findlay Scott, The Varieties of New Testament Religion (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1943), p. 35.

³Ibid., p. 152.

⁴Ecclus. 51:23, 26f and 6:25f.

⁵Walker, op. cit., pp. 152, 153.

been accustomed to be required of them save to the divine Torah, re-enforces this identity of himself with the Divine Wisdom. When these startling words were used:

If any man cometh unto me, and hateth not his own father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea and his own life also, he cannot be my disciple.¹

and

He that loveth father and mother more than me is not worthy of me....²

Jesus asked from his followers that which only the Law as the revealed will of God had required.

"A greater than Solomon is here"³ is no idle statement. Jesus evidently was aware of his role as the supreme Wisdom of God, one who was greater than the prophets, one with new authority and power. In the Parables of the Wicked Husbandmen and the Vineyard⁴ the prophets are pictured as slaves but Jesus as the Son - the one who could speak directly in the Father's name and with his Father's authority. Walker comments upon this thought by saying:

It is not surprising then, that the plaint of wisdom, should be discernible in his lament, "Jerusalem, Jersuaalem! - the killer of prophets and stoner of (God's) delegates to her, - how many times did I (i.e. as Wisdom) want to gather your children exactly as a bird (cf. wisdom, feminine) gathers her young under her wings, and you didn't want" (Matt. xxiii.37).⁵

Some would hold that there is a reflection of Wisdom thinking in the Gospel pronouncement on the unforgivable sin, mentioned

¹Luke 14:26.

²Matt. 10:37a.

³Matt. 12:42.

⁴Mark 12: 1-6, Matt. 21:34-37.

⁵Walker, op. cit., p. 155

in Matthew 12:31. The Wise told of a blaspheming spirit. "For wisdom is a kindly spirit, and will not acquit a blasphemer of what he says...."¹ Jesus' use of this idea is seen as he speaks to

....the spirit of the slanderer with respect to unmistakably the purest matters: hence he tells his opponents that they reveal a spirit which is really very hard to forgive since it is a deliberate sin against the light which they have.²

It is evident from the above paragraphs that Jesus was not completely untouched by the theological implications of the speculative Wisdom writings. The suggestion, however, of the writer is that we cannot be as specific in detecting this influence as in the previously discussed relationship of the ethico-practical Wisdom to the teaching of Jesus.

No treatment of our subject would be complete if the significance of Rabbinical influence is overlooked. The influence of Wisdom upon Christ and upon the Jewish evangelists may have been via the Rabbinic channel which provided a literature that was powerfully influential in Jesus' day and in the early New Testament period.

Montefiore has some interesting references from the rabbinic literature relating to Matthew 13:12, "For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that which he hath."

The fundamental idea of this verse is not unfamiliar to the Rabbis, where it is more usually directed to the acquisition of knowledge. Thus Hillel said, "He who dares not

¹Wisdom 1:6.

²Walker, op. cit., pp. 344,345.

increase his knowledge decreases it" (Aboth i.13). More generally we have: "If a man hearkens to one commandment, they (-God) cause him to hearken to many commandments; if a man forgets one commandment, they cause him to forget many commandments." "If a man desires to hearken at once, they cause him to hearken even subsequently; if a man forgets at once, they cause him to forget subsequently. If a man hearkens with his free will, they cause him to hearken even against, i.e. without his will: if he forgets with his free will, they cause him to forget ever against his will" . . . "Not as with men is the method of God. With men a full vessel receives no more: an empty vessel gets filled. With God, the full is filled: the empty is not filled. If you have heard you will continue to hear; if you have not heard, you will not hear (subsequently). If you have heard the old, you will also hear the new; if you have turned your heart away, you will hear no more."¹

Interesting parables occur in the various Midrashic writings on Old Testament books. Two of these mentioned by Oesterley² is the Sifre (a Midrash on Numbers and Deuteronomy) and Mekilta (a Midrash on Exodus). Parables occur also in the Midrash Shir-ha-shurim (Song of Songs) and Midrash Koheleth (Ecclesiastes).

The parables contained in these writings are of various dates, and in their present form are all post-Christian, the earliest belonging to the end of the first century A.D.; but it is highly probable that many of them have been handed down from earlier times...³

The old rabbinic parables were originally handed down orally until finally put into writing. This process is similar to that in which the material of the Gospels was handed down.

Oesterley quotes Bugge as saying the Rabbis used the

¹Montefiore, op. cit., p. 252f.

²Oesterley, Parables, op. cit., p. 7.

³Ibid.

simile of a mustard seed in referring to the clean and unclean; "Spots as small as a mustard seed" and "Eating an unclean animal as small as a mustard seed."¹ Jesus was using a comparison which was familiar when he spoke of the mustard seed in Matthew 17:20.

Jesus reflects the current thinking of his day when he said, "For ye have the poor always with you; but me ye have not always."² Rabbinic literature witnesses to the ubiquity of the poor, and also to the religious significance of almsgiving. Montefiore³ gives abundant evidence of the commonplaceness of almsgivings in the rabbinic literature and accounts for the rebuke which Jesus placed upon those who made a show of their righteousness.

Our Lord's teaching was related to the current beliefs of his age and had within it something old and something new.

All his principles were rooted in the Old Testament. He found there the germ of all that he had to teach; but he found the essential divine truth there contained so overlaid with tradition, and with extravagant application and false interpretation, that he was compelled to reject much that had been added to the principles of his ancestral religion. These principles he then brought out into clear expression and enforced them with new and higher motives, and taught them in forms which could be apprehended by the people.⁴

It is our premise that one of those forms was that of Wisdom with its characteristic pithy statements of truth.

¹Ibid., p. 76.

²Matt. 26:11.

³Montefiore, op. cit., Vol. II, pp. 94-96.

⁴George Barker Stevens, The Teaching of Jesus (New York: The Macmillan Company, 1929), p. 6.

CHAPTER IV

THE EVANGELISTS AND THE INFLUENCE OF THE HEBREW-JEWISH WISDOM

The question which we pose just now is: "How much were the evangelists influenced by the Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom concepts as they undertook to record their Gospel records?" All scholars of repute recognize that the Gospels are more than just haphazard collections of stories concerning our Lord. It is an established fact that the Gospels were written with a definite purpose in mind and that all four of the canonical Gospels vary in this respect. The time of writing and the place of writing are points that need to be considered in finding the various sources of influence which played upon the records of the life of Christ.

This is not a treatise on the general field of the Gospel Records, but it is essential that we understand the role of the Gospel accounts in the New Testament. E. F. Scott¹ gives a good description of the Gospels which recognizes their composite nature in the realm of style and type of literature.

They belong to no definite type of literature for they had grown up without any set plan. Traditions of various kinds, drawn from miscellaneous sources, were finally brought together and in some measure harmonised, but their diversity is still apparent. The Gospels are not historical or ethical or devotional works but all of these combined, with the addition of much more.²

¹Scott, The Purpose of the Gospels, op. cit., p. 54.

²Ibid.

Our subject is closely related to the historical development of the Gospels. For a generation after Christ the tradition of his life and teaching circulated in oral form and was freely adapted to the evangelistic and missionary needs of the Christian society. There is little doubt among scholars that this tradition underwent modification due to changing historical circumstances of the time and also because of the church's need of giving fuller and more precise expression to its experience of Christ. In due time the religious tradition of Christ was put in writing. It has been the role of historical criticism, as applied to the Gospels, to recognize and study the modifications which the evangelists retained when they put the tradition into literary form.

Manson puts the caution of historical criticism in this way: "The reader must not assume that every episode or saying has come down to us just in its original form or context."¹ The evangelists at times included interpretative and symbolical elements arising from their personal religious background. At other times phrases were needed to assist the church in defining its conceptions more clearly to itself.²

Scott³ in his many books on the Gospel accounts has done a great service in setting forth the purpose and the validity of the Gospel records. Others have made their helpful contributions in clarifying the historic situations which gave rise to the Gospels, also accounting for the emphases of the various Gospel

¹William Manson, The Gospel of Luke, The Moffatt New Testament Commentary (New York: Richard R. Smith, Inc., 1930), p. vii.

²Ibid.

³The Purpose of the Gospels and The Validity of the Gospel Record.

authors. The evangelists reflected the religious thinking of their time. The later Wisdom movement of Israel looked to the Divine Spirit as the peculiar organ of revelation. Early Christianity was effectively tutored by the later stages of the Wisdom movement, "And it also seems to have fixed upon the Divine Spirit as the instrument for the interpretation of that peculiar historical event which it held definitive for a true understanding of God."¹

Our task is to confine the historical backgrounds of the Gospels to the field of thought related to the Wisdom movement which carried over into the first century A.D. There was a kinship between the purpose of the Wisdom writers and the Gospel writers. Both groups were men who were trying to meet the spiritual needs of their immediate society. The Gospel authors were men who were endeavoring to meet the needs of the church.

Christianity, as they taught it, was not only a new religion but a new way of living. Those who professed it were required to know how they must conduct themselves in their dealings with one another and with the world at large. It was doubtless with this practical purpose that the words of Jesus were first collected and put into writing.²

The proposition before us, simply stated, is: Was the form of Jesus' utterances (his "wise" sayings) modified any by the evangelists? Did some of the evangelists pay more attention to the sayings of Jesus than others? Dibelius³ in his stimulating effort to return to the original sources of the Gospel message omits most of

¹Rylaarsdam, op. cit., p. 120.

²Scott, The Purpose of the Gospels, op. cit., p. 66.

³Martin Dibelius, The Message of Jesus Christ, trans. Frederick C. Grant (New York: Charles Scribner's Sons, 1939), p. 162.

the sayings of Jesus which we would consider in the light of our subject. He does, however, admit the existence of the "wise" sayings.

There is a series of sayings in the Gospels which, either certainly or very probably, set forth bits of common wisdom in popular form - proverbs and figurative expressions, such as circulated commonly among the Jews.¹

Dibelius disclaims that Jesus originated these sayings and believes that they are absent "wherever the impression of the original, radical Message is to be conveyed, confronting men with the necessity for decision."²

In the early development of the Gospel records there was little emphasis upon the teaching of Jesus. The earliest stories were those of Jesus' death and resurrection. We note little reference to the teaching of Jesus in Paul's churches. Gentile Christians believed that they were saved by their acceptance of the stories of Jesus' death and triumph over death, however this was not so obvious in the Palestinian Jewish communities. The simple narrative of Jesus' life, at least its main features, seemed at first to suffice for the Christian groups.

Nevertheless, it was inevitable that rules for the guidance of the religious living of the people must be produced.³

The Christian movement was equal to this demand upon its creativity and did a remarkable work in producing this element in the Gospel literature. The early heralds of the faith began to use

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 163.

³Riddle, op. cit., p. 117.

more and more the epigrammatical sayings of Jesus in their preaching. "They were like the scribe made a disciple to the kingdom; they brought from their storehouse old things and new things."¹

Riddle speaks to this point by saying:

It was not accidental that the most primitive examples of Jesus' teaching are in the form of paradigms: narratives in which the central "kernel" is a saying. Pure didactic came into use later. It will be remembered, too, that the gospel sayings, whether parables or the briefer sententious sayings, were without definite location. Their place was not fixed. They might be in one or another place in a gospel source or in a gospel. But they were part of the primitive preaching, because they were useful.²

The Gospels were a new kind of literature. They included many things that were similar to other Judaistic writings, but they were unique in many ways. Riddle³ does not believe the parallels to the Gospel didactic found in the religious literature of Judaism are valid parallels. They are valid as to content and style but no parallel can be found in which such materials are attached to the story of a religious leader so that the ultimate result resembles a Gospel.

It is in the frame of reference expressed above that we now come to an examination of the Gospels.

The first of the Gospels in point of time was Mark. We can be fairly certain of several historical incidents surrounding the Markan account. Most scholars agree as to the identity of the author. This was the John Mark of which Acts speaks and of whom

¹Ibid.

²Ibid., p. 156.

³Ibid., pp. 152, 153.

we lose sight for a period of time in the history of the early church. Sound scholarship places Mark in Rome as an associate of Peter. It is probable that Mark wrote his account soon after the death of Peter and possibly at the request of the Roman Church.

Mark wrote with a definite purpose in mind. The inclusion of certain passages in his Gospel imply certain local problems at Rome. We can be fairly sure that the account was for the Roman Christians primarily. Thus the Gospel was to serve a very practical purpose in depicting the main points of Jesus' ministry.

Mark does not use much of the material we can recognize as the pithy sayings of Jesus. The reason for this may fall to several things. First of all, it probably did not fit his purpose. It is probable that the narrative was the most important part of the earliest Gospel tradition. It was the things that Jesus did that made the Gospel message stand out. The story of the crucifixion and the resurrection was the key-note of the Gospel message and it was the acceptance of this truth that saved people.

Thus Mark in his presentation of the Christ to meet the needs of the Roman Christians was careful in his choice of materials. It is evident that he did not want his treatise too long and he wanted to present the main narratives that would prove that Jesus was the Son of God. Most scholars would concur that Mark made a selection of material and that he evidently set aside some material which was later put into the records by the other evangelists.

There is no reason to doubt that the development of Jesus' "sayings" had begun before Mark was written. The author of Mark could have made great use of didactic stories and sayings if he had so chosen. The Gospels following Mark in time of writing

included an abundance of teaching. The conception of the task on the part of the later Gospel writers permitted them to use the didactic materials which existed, and they evidently had the problem of choosing from a quantity of such material.¹

The Markan account includes only the teaching passages that fit into the author's choice of incidents from the life of Jesus. There are no large blocks of sayings as we find in the other two synoptic Gospels. There is no Sermon on the Mount as given by Matthew and also given in condensed form by Luke. We therefore find little of the Wisdom phraseology in Mark. The texts of Mark 4:24 and 10:31 and a few others give us only a faint touch of the Wisdom flavor in the first Gospel.

Matthew probably stands at the top of the list when the four Gospels are examined for Wisdom influence. This evangelist drew heavily upon a source called the Logia. This was an aramaic or Hebraic collection of sayings which a follower of Jesus had evidently committed to writing. Papias reported that Matthew wrote the Logia.² It has been impossible for scholars to accept this since Matthew appears to have been written originally in the Greek.

It is certain that Matthew relied upon Mark, although the Matthaen account pays little heed to chronology. We note that when Matthew uses material from a common source with Luke, his order does not agree with Luke's.

The Matthaen Gospel is noted for its large amount of

¹Riddle, op. cit., p. 155.

²Warren W. Slabaugh, Writing The Christian Scriptures (Elgin: Elgin Press, 1937), p. 79.

discourse. There are more verses of teaching than there are of narrative. It is in this Gospel that we find the great sermons of Christ. Matthew gives us the Sermon on the Mount (5-7), the Commission of the Twelve (10), the Parables of the Kingdom (13), Teaching on Defilement (15), Human Values (18), Parables of Judgment and Woes (21-23), and the Little Apocalypse (24,25).

In addition to these there are many other shorter collections of sayings and teaching sections. It is because of the skillful arrangement of material for apologetic purpose that this Gospel has always held a place of primacy among the four.

The Lukan account of the Gospel story reveals considerable more influence from Wisdom sources than that of Mark but less than Matthew. It is the richest and most voluminous of our Gospels. This quality it owes primarily to the fact that highly varied material is incorporated into it known as the L source. It is most probable that Luke's special source was Judean. The evangelist was in Palestine in the company of Paul between the years of A.D. 57 and 59.¹ It was there that he gained the inspiration and information for the writing of his Gospel. It is from this background that the Gentile Luke produces the Gospel account which "in some respects reflects the spirit of Judaic Christianity more fully than any of his peers."²

It is reasonable to expect a greater influence upon the Lukan account, directly and indirectly, from the Wisdom writings than that of Mark. Luke's use of Q brings into play a source comprised of Jesus' teaching. Mark is deficient when it comes to the

¹Manson, op. cit., P. vii.

²Ibid., p. viii.

teaching of Jesus. In the Q source there is much more reference or allusion to the Old Testament scriptures which means that the Wisdom influence is observable also.

The Q source consisted mainly of memoranda of the Sayings of Jesus with a few strands of narrative. Few parables are found in Q. The pertinency of Q can be seen in the needs of the early church. After the scattering of the Christians which followed Stephen's death and persecution of the Church by Herod Agrippa I, (Acts 8:1,4; 11:19-21; 12:1,24) there was an acute need for guidance. The perplexing problems of daily existence caused believers to put new dependence upon the teachings of the Master. What did Jesus say about this or that? Questions arose on every hand and Q sought to provide the answers.

Not only from Q but from Luke's special source do we find the imprint of Wisdom sayings. The evangelist draws upon the information he derived from his sojourn in Judea. Since L is definitely Judaic, the Jewish concepts (Wisdom included) show forth in many instances. The inclusion of numerous parables in the Lukan account gives greater opportunity for the maxims and spirit of Wisdom to be reflected.

Luke's Gospel pictures Jesus as a friend of the oppressed and sinner. "It is a gospel which stresses the basic relations between man and God and man and men."¹ This Gospel covers all of life, thus the influence of the best in Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom could suitably be used in its message.

Any treatment of the Fourth Gospel is a sizeable task. Volumes have multiplied in recent years endeavoring to resolve

¹Slabaugh, op. cit., p. 87.

the problems which critical scholarship has found in the Johannine Gospel. Our purpose is not to discuss the technical aspects of authorship, but rather to restudy our main theme which we can state in the question: How much influence did the Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom concepts have upon the author of John? To cover this subject adequately we will need to inquire into the essential facts which most historical introductions include.

Recognizing the uniqueness of John as being unlike the synoptic Gospels in purpose and content, we can go farther and also recognize that the Fourth Gospel was written with a definite intent. This intent is seen within the narrative even as we can sense the purpose of the Synoptic writers in their accounts.

The John who is acclaimed as author of the Fourth Gospel was one who lived at Ephesus. The Gospel was written late in the first century. The author was setting forth the message of his Gospel to combat some subversive elements which the church of that day was encountering.

The Gnostics, who were making Jesus only a phantom-like character, had to be answered and John does so by exalting the fact of God dwelling on earth in the person (flesh) of Jesus Christ. Many scholars believe that the very choice of words and subject matter in this writing is seasoned by the intent of John to refute Gnosticism.¹

The Fourth Gospel is claimed to be in opposition to the Jews and also makes it a point to offset any claim of John the Baptist for pre-eminence. It is known that the followers of John the Baptist were in evidence at this time and may have been a

¹Smart, op. cit., p. 24.

disrupting influence in the life of the early Christian Church.

Colwell discusses the subordinate position which John the Baptist has in this Gospel and says:

This thorough and positive subordination of the Baptist to Jesus in the Fourth Gospel is carried a step further in negative fashion. All tributes to John and every word of praise for him are carefully omitted. We have already noted that everything that would suggest that he had significance aside from his association with Jesus has been ignored by the evangelist. If he knew of any compliments to John (as he assuredly did in the Synoptic Gospels he used as sources), he ignored them.¹

With these few thoughts concerning the historical setting of John in mind, we can venture some observations as to the influence which the Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom had upon the Johannine Gospel.

The very nature of this Gospel makes it less likely to include the "sayings of Jesus" which would reflect the Wisdom pattern of thought. John's emphasis is to portray the divine life of Jesus and he rests his case primarily upon numerous "signs" and the sermons that follow them. Colwell, however, cautions against making Jesus a "sign worker" or "magician" and contends that John did not intend to do so. Thus, claiming that the choice of miracles used in John's account are symbols that teach the same message as the allegories of the vine and the shepherd, this same author can say: "The Johannine teaching outshines the Johannine miracles."² We can admit this but qualify it by noting that John does not use the proverbial type of Jewish form in presenting the teaching of Jesus. Dibelius holds that the Fourth Gospel has little "of the 'message of Jesus Christ' as it was proclaimed in

¹Ernest Cadman Colwell, John Defends The Gospel (Chicago: Willett, Clark and Company, 1936), pp. 37,38.

²Ibid., p. 31.

the early Christian communities."¹

One of the major characteristics of John is the author's policy of putting the words of Jesus into his own words. This account, unlike the Synoptic accounts, does not include direct quotations or definite blocks of sayings from original sources. It is for this reason that we are likely to find little of the "Wisdom" thought which we found in the other Gospels.

Closely akin to this thought, is the Gentile setting in which this Gospel is produced. It is also helpful to remember that this Gospel was intended for a Gentile audience. Thus there was value in not relying upon the original Jewish forms in the sayings of Jesus.

The main point of influence in the Johannine record resulting from Jewish Wisdom was that of the "Logos" concept. Before we discuss the background and possible channels through which John received this concept, let us remind ourselves that John does not carry the Logos idea all the way through his book. The Logos is the main feature of the prologue to this Gospel. How and why this prologue is as it is, brings us to our subject.

The Logos concept reveals the influence of Jewish Wisdom as it had been transmitted through both Jewish and Greek minds. This was not a new idea which John used.² The hypostasis of Wisdom as found in Proverbs and Ecclesiasticus³ constituted the link between the Palestinian and the Hellenistic development of Judaism.

¹Dibelius, op. cit., p. 132.

²Ranston, op. cit., p. 81.

³Prov. 8:22f and Ecclus. 24.

This conception also influenced Christian theology as an overflow from the Christology of the Old Testament.¹ As Smart observes: "This word 'Logos' had had a history of more than six hundred years when John wrote."² The Logos idea goes back to and beyond the Hebrew Wisdom concept.

Very early in Hebrew history there developed the need or the idea for the need of an intermediary between God and man. The Hebrew Jehovah became transcendental after some of the more primitive accounts of Genesis. Even the tabernacle was fenced in (or the people fenced out) and only the chosen leaders could approach God's holy place.

Moses was allowed to see the back of God (Exo. 33:20-23) but that is all. He was not allowed to see his face. "And he said, Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live." (Ex. 33:20). The New Testament emphasis was stronger yet. "No man hath seen God at any time;" (John 1:18a).

The Hebrew mind had to fill the chasm which developed between man and God. It became necessary to find some intermediary who could act for God in dealing with men. The necessity for such an intermediary was placed upon the Biblical scholars of later Judaism in order to explain the many times God is said to have appeared to men in the Old Testament. This concept was also necessary for religion in general if God was to be kept in a vital contact with men. If God was spiritual (non-physical) then he certainly must have had somebody or something through which he acted.

An early step in this field of thought was the reliance

¹Fairweather, op. cit., p. 84.

²Smart, op. cit., p. 63.

upon the simplest intermediary between an exalted God and men, an angel. Gradually "the angel of Jehovah" became the synonym for Jehovah and began to take his place. As Smart in his critical approach says concerning "the angel of Jehovah" "...the scribes slipped him into many Old Testament passages where the appearance of Jehovah himself was beginning to be embarrassing."¹ Smart cites the influence of this thinking by noting that three different writers in the New Testament say that it was not Jehovah himself who gave the law on Mount Sinai, but an angel (Gal. 3:19; Acts 7:38,53; Heb. 2:2). This is an interesting fact because the impressive story of Mount Sinai as recorded in Exodus gives no implication that an angel was involved, "but the thinking of later times made it necessary."²

Later Judaism gave prominence to another intermediary. This was "Wisdom."

Not only was wisdom a characteristic of God who made the world, but it seemed to be in the world which he made, for the world behaved intelligently, or with wisdom. With the tendency to personification which was characteristic of that age, men then thought of wisdom as a separate substance which God used in making the world, and finally as a person who was his agent in creation.³

The superb example of this concept is seen in the canonical Proverbs, chapter eight. It is not until later, in the apocryphal Wisdom that we find a complete personification of Wisdom. The Wisdom of Solomon, written more than two centuries before the Johannine Gospel, is rich in the idea of Wisdom being an

¹Ibid., p. 67.

²Ibid.

³Ibid.

intermediary. Wisdom is active in all the accounts of the creation. She controlled the pillar of cloud and of fire during the wilderness wanderings. Wisdom sits beside God ordering all things.

In a passage which has influenced a description of Christ in the New Testament, she is "the brightness of the ever-lasting light, the unspotted mirror of the power of God, and the image of his goodness." cf. Heb. 1:3.¹

As the concept grew, Wisdom took over the functions of God, inspiring the lives of men. This use of "Wisdom" gives meaning to the New Testament passages where Jesus is called the "wisdom of God."

Closely akin to the intermediary of Wisdom was the Aramaic term "Memra." "Memra" or "word" was the word of God that acted. This word was the dynamic power of God used by Him in the creation of the world. God only needed to utter the Memra and things began to happen. "The word of the Lord" became the common usage. "In the Targums, or Aramaic paraphrases of the Old Testament, the development is carried still further. 'The Word of the Lord' is said to occur 150 times in a single Targum of the Pentateuch."²

This concept carried over into the role of the prophet. It was not God who appeared to the prophets but the Word of God that came to the prophet. This was the thinking of the later rabbis. God expressed himself through his Word. An outgrowth of this practice was to make God so transcendent and so remote that he had only indirect relations with the human scene.

At this point we must inject another thought which will bring us directly to our Logos concept as used in John. Judaism

¹Ibid.

²A. Plummer, The Gospel According To St. John, The Smaller Cambridge Bible For Schools (Cambridge: University Press, 1910), p. 60.

of the Diaspora was under a continual bombardment of Greek thinking. Alexandria, a Jewish stronghold as well as an Hellenistic educational center, was the home city of one called Philo. Philo was a great Jewish Scholar and had absorbed much of the Greek culture in his home surroundings. All the potent influences of Greek thought were focalized at Alexandria. Platonism and Neo-Platonism with a strong emphasis upon the infinite, undefinable Absolute had developed contemporaneously with the transcendental God of Judaism.

The prologue of the Fourth Gospel is believed to rely upon a given doctrine. Christ was identified with the Logos, "a principle within the being of God which goes forth from him and reveals him and executes his will."¹

The doctrine was taken over from Philo, the Jewish teacher of Alexandria, who sought by means of it to reconcile the philosophy of Plato and the Stoics with the religion of the Old Testament. He believed that the Greek thinkers had truly discerned the nature of divine action, but that their conclusions applied only to the Logos, which must be distinguished from the transcendent God. In accordance with this doctrine it is assumed in the Fourth Gospel that the Logos, the Word by which God manifests himself, was incarnate in Jesus, and the historical life is viewed in the light of this conception. Jesus appeared as man and was yet the expression of God's own being.²

Wisdom was an important tributary to the Logos background of the Incarnation.³

Philo was evidently a disciple of Plato⁴ though some who know his work best would call him a Neo-Platonist. This Hellenistic leaning was counter-balanced by the fact that Philo was

¹Scott, Purpose of the Gospel, op. cit., p. 109.

²Ibid.

³H. Wheeler Robinson, Inspiration and Revelation In The Old Testament (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1946), p. 11.

⁴Smart, op. cit., p. 69.

interested in explaining the Jewish religion in terms of Alexandrian thought. The canonical concept of Jehovah was for this learned Alexandrian the Absolute of Hellenistic philosophy.

On such a premise, Jehovah was beyond man. One could not say "what" God was only that he "was." "Nothing could be predicated of him except existence."¹

Most scholars admit the great influence which Hellenistic thought had upon the Jewish use of Wisdom and Memra. In this field of inter-action, Philo studied and wrote. He sought to bridge the chasm between man and God by the Greek idea of Logos. Thompson believes that in Philo we have a "forth-shadowing" of the concept of the Logos which the Johannine gospel develops more fully.

We must also bear in mind that Philo in this represents only one step in a process of which the "wisdom" in the Book of Proverbs may be regarded as the lowest step; the Wisdom of Solomon, with its personification of Wisdom, a further advance; upon this Philo advances yet another step.²

Thus we see by gradual steps men were educated to receive the doctrine of the "word of God." It is in the light of this Philonic concept that the author of the Fourth Gospel uses the word Logos to introduce Jesus to his readers.

The Fourth Gospel starts with a Personality as its basis and applies to it the attributes which Philo vaguely applies to some individuality or theory. The Fourth Gospel defines the Person of Jesus of Nazareth as the Logos and goes on to clothe Him in the Judo-Hellenistic garment. Philo has the garment, but cannot make it fit any personality with his knowledge, and thus the Logos with Philo

¹Ibid., p. 70.

²John E. H. Thompson, Books Which Influenced Our Lord And His Apostles (Edinburgh: T. and T. Clark, 1891), p. 160.

remains an indefinable something, while the writer of the Fourth Gospel and the Alexandrian Christians find Jesus of Nazareth the ideal person whom the doctrine of the Logos fits to perfection.¹

John evidently assumes that his readers will understand the expression "Logos." We shall give further discussion to John's use of Logos but before doing so a pertinent quotation from Smart will serve as the setting of the stage.

John did not adopt the idea of Logos because it was technical and academic. It was probably as familiar, and therefore as loosely defined, as are the laws of nature to the average man today. And it was that average man whom John was seeking to bring to belief that Jesus was the Christ, that he might have eternal life.²

The importance of seeing the correct place of importance for the Logos concept in John is insisted upon by Colwell³ and I believe rightly so. He thinks that the apologists and creed makers have emphasized the Logos term to the extent they have colored the entire Gospel for the Christian reader. Thus we must see this direct influence in its historic limitation. After the prologue which introduces Jesus, the Logos concept leaves the writing and the author turns to his task of presenting Jesus as the savior of the world. We should note that some scholars will insist the Logos idea is carried all the way through the Gospel. The word Logos is used often in the Gospel but it does not have the connotation which the author gives it in the prologue.

Some scholars look upon the Johannine Gospel as an allegory and it is possible that it shows a great reliance upon the allegorical method. This also may be attributed to the Philonic and

¹Levison, op. cit., p. 177.

²Smart, op. cit., p. 70

³Colwell, op.cit., p. 127f.

Alexandrian influence.

In summarizing the influence which the Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom had upon the Gospel of John we observe that this influence was primarily expressed through the use of the Logos concept. The Johanne author reflects little of the sayings of Jesus which fit into the wisdom pattern of thought.

CHAPTER V

CONCLUSION

The original intent of this dissertation was to scrutinize the Gospel records in an endeavor to find the influence which the canonical and non-canonical Wisdom had upon them. Such a scrutiny has revealed that Jesus was aware of his great Wisdom heritage and relied upon the form of expression and thought patterns of the Hebrew-Jewish Sages to express his eternal Wisdom.

Jesus gave considerable attention to the ethical and practical side of life. This is reflected in the sayings that gave direction to his disciples and which the early church collected as guiding principles for daily Christian living. The religion of Jesus came to be known as "the Way" and above all things it was a way of living.

In the ethical-religious expressions of the Master, we find an intent that corresponds to the best in the words of the Wise men of Israel. Jesus put into helpful maxims many truths that enabled his followers to live wisely.

We have endeavored to trace the historical development of Wisdom which culminated in Christ himself as the "Wisdom of God." Rankin has this keen discernment:

A study of the origin of personified Wisdom is of importance, not only for the history of the religion of Judaism, but for the religious history of Christianity.¹

¹Rankin, op. cit., p. 224

The indirect influence of the Wisdom movement as it affected the total religious atmosphere (along with the prophetic and priestly movements) must always be considered carefully. The Evangelists were products of their religious environments and their accounts of the Gospel portray the influence which the traditional Hebraic social and religious forces had upon them. Thus the Synoptic Gospels reveal a greater influence from the Hebrew-Jewish Wisdom than that of John, with the exception of the Johannine Prologue which we have treated above.

Jesus used the best of the Wisdom current in his day. "Harnack has said: What is most remarkable about the religion of Jesus is not what He includes in it but what He excludes from it."¹ Jesus filled old terms with new meaning and therein do we partially see His divine originality. This was true of Jesus' choice and use of Wisdom sayings. It was a new spirit even more than a new teaching.

The pithy, sententious, sayings of our Lord put new power into the practical Wisdom of his day. These sayings, although rooted historically in Judaism, have come to be the practical expression of the Gospel to be lived by the children of God. The wise man is he who will hear the sayings of Jesus and do them. Such Wisdom will stand in eternity.

¹H.D.A. Major, T.W. Manson, and C.J. Wright, The Mission and Message of Jesus (New York: E.P. Dutton and Company, Inc., 1946), p. xxx.

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