

Yx16 – The Law Lie 3 – Customs

In the previous two posts in this series, I tried to show some history of two parts of what I call “the Law Lie” (itself a part of what I call “the God Lie”), namely, 1) *the lie that morality is defined by the gods* and 2) *the lie that justice is the jurisdiction of the gods*. In this post, I want to show a little history of a third part of the Law Lie: 3) *the lie that customs were created by the gods*. We can be extremely confident that the above (and the many other parts of the God Lie) aren’t valid descriptions of reality, simply because the firmest knowledge that humans have been able to gain (even firmer than the knowledge that we exist – for we may all be simulations in a humongous computer game!) is that no god exists or has ever existed.¹

I admit, however, that there’s only circumstantial evidence that such “untruths” are also lies (rather than mistakes). This “circumstantial evidence” includes the existence of a huge number of clerical parasites who profit from promoting silly ideas about gods, even though ample evidence is readily available to demonstrate that the concepts are wrong. Nonetheless, most clerics may be fools rather than liars; that is, the liars may be only those few clerics who aren’t fools.

In any event, it’s easy to imagine how primitive people reached the mistaken conclusion that, for example, customs were created by the gods. Having convinced themselves that the gods were “the cause” of everything unknown (from the cause of the wind to the reason for the lights in the sky), then upon finding their societies in possession of a host of cultural peculiarities (from sharing food with others to prohibitions against eating certain foods, and from the existence of the concept of marriage to prohibitions against specific sexual activities), it was then logical to deduce (based on the faulty premiss that gods exist) that the gods created their society’s customs.

Now, to thoroughly investigate the origins of the customs of even one particular society would require dedicated lifetime-efforts of a large number of historians, anthropologists, and archeologists. Meanwhile, though, my professional life was in teaching and research in the physical sciences. Therefore, I plan to severely restrict this post.

¹ For my basis for that statement, see <http://zenofzero.net/docs/liIndoctrinationInIgnorance.pdf>.

For this post, my goal is to provide some evidence for the origins of only a few of the customs that the authors and “redactors” of the Old Testament (OT) claimed were given to them by their god. The few customs on which I plan to focus are, however, arguably the most important, i.e., the customs revealed in “the wisdom literature” of the OT’s *Proverbs*.

By restricting the scope of this post to customs depicted in the OT’s *Proverbs* I’m not suggesting disinterest in origins of other facets of ancient Hebrew culture (and Christian and Islamic cultures that have been significantly influenced by the OT). In earlier chapters of my online book, I’ve already commented (at least a little) on the male chauvinism in Judaism, which seems to have been derived as a part of the cultural transition from rural to urban life, with associated shift in emphasis from fertility (and female fertility goddesses) to trade and intercity warfare (and associated male gods).² Also, in a later post, I plan at least to glance at how the Hebrews apparently combined Egyptian, Persian, and Greek ideas about the gods to (erroneously) conclude that there was only a single god.

Readers interested in other peculiarities of ancient Hebrew culture, such as their aversion to pork and their brutal practice of male circumcision, might want to start by reading *The History by Herodotus*³ (who reports in Paragraphs 2.36, 2.37, and 2.47 that both customs were earlier practiced in ancient Egypt) and then explore further on the internet to find, for example, that the first historical record⁴ of male circumcision is associated with the Egyptian physician Ankhmahor (c. 2300 BCE). Originally, the practice of male circumcision seems to have been a part of any boy’s “coming of age” initiation rite,⁵ starting in Africa tens of thousands of years ago and spreading worldwide with the aborigines of Australia and South America.

If I were asked to defend my plan to focus on Hebrew customs revealed in the OT’s *Proverbs*, I’d not only point to the need to restrict the length of the post but also claim that a substantial portion of the customs of any culture is revealed by its “wisdom literature.” For what follows, my plan is, first, to display the wisdom literature of earlier, Sumerian and Egyptian cultures, then display some of the Hebrew wisdom literature as given in the OT’s

² See the earlier chapter at <http://zenofzero.net/docs/Ix09ChangingGods.pdf>.

³ Available at <http://classics.mit.edu/Herodotus/history.html>.

⁴ See <http://www.noharrrm.org/money.htm>.

⁵ See, e.g., http://www.male-initiation.net/anthropology/bryk/bryk_eng3.html.

Proverbs, and then, finally, ask the reader to consider clerical claims that the wisdom of the Hebrews was derived, not from the people’s experiences, but from the first symmetry-breaking quantum-like fluctuation in the total void that led to the Big Bang (i.e., from “God”).

SOME SUMERIAN “WISDOM LITERATURE”

The first clear record of existing customs appeared when writing was invented, about 5,000 years ago in Sumer, in what’s now called southern Iraq (“Sumer” means “from the south”). Examples of Sumerian customs are contained in their many proverbs available at the Electronic Text Corpus of Sumerian Literature.⁶ In that source, I found particularly informative the following proverbs, which I’ve grouped under the indicated headings. Question marks (?) indicate translation uncertainties and (. . .) indicates missing text. Although it’s unknown when these proverbs were developed, generally they’re from a time period at least twice as long ago as the time period when the OT was put together.

General Sumerian Customs

A good word is a friend to numerous men.

You speak to me – and I will speak to you!

He who insults is insulted. He who sneers is sneered at.

Putting unwashed hands to one’s mouth is disgusting.

One city does not greet another, but one person greets another person.

A hand will stretch out towards an outstretched hand. A hand will open for an opened hand.

Sumerian Family Life

“I’m going home” is what he prefers.

Marry a wife according to your choice. Have children to your heart’s content.

He who does not support a wife, he who does not support a child, has no cause for celebration.

⁶ At http://etcsl.orinst.ox.ac.uk/cgi-bin/etcsl.cgi?text=c.6.1*.

Children and wives and trading agents! How they use up silver! And how they use up barley!

To be sick is acceptable; to be pregnant is painful; but to be pregnant and sick is just too much.

Hand added to hand, and a man's house is built up. Stomach (?) added to stomach (?), and a man's house is destroyed.

A malicious wife living in a house is the worst of all afflictions.

When I married a malicious husband, when I bore a malicious son, an unhappy heart was assigned to me.

I will feed you even though you are an outcast (?). I will give you drink even though you are an outcast (?). You are still my son, even if your god has turned against you.

A brewing (?) trough not previously tried is put to the test by means of salt. A mixing jar (?) not previously tried is put to the test by means of water. A son-in-law whose behavior (?) is unknown is put to the test by means of quarrels.

A man's waterskin is his life. A man's sandals are his eyes. A man's wife is his supervisor (?). A man's son is his protective shade. A man's daughter is his eager servant (?). A man's daughter-in-law is his policeman.

The joy of a daughter-in-law is anger.

As for the fiancé, what has he brought? And as for the father-in-law, what has he sorted out?

For his pleasure he got married. On his thinking it over he got divorced.

The married man, having divorced his wife, examined her: "At least I am taking away my dignity!"

An unfaithful penis matches (?) an unfaithful vagina.

No one walks together with him or directs their steps towards him. Life {passes him by like water} {(1 ms. has instead:) eludes him just as he avoids others}. He is dear to no just man, {plague prevails over him} {(1 ms. has instead:) life is not given to him}. Like a worthless penny, {.....; no one} {(1 ms. has instead:) he is thrown away; no one cares about him}. He is clothed with a garment as if a heavy punishment were assigned to him. {Who is he? His name? A man sleeping with someone's wife.} {(1 ms. has instead:) Who is he? He is a man who slept with someone's wife.}

Sumerian Work & Professional Life

While you still have light, grind the flour.

The warrior is unique; he alone is the equal of many.

The axe belongs to the carpenter, the stone belongs to the smith, the good belongs to the brewer.

He who has silver is happy. He who has grain feels comfortable. But he who has livestock cannot sleep.

He who has silver, he who has lapis lazuli, he who has oxen, and he who has sheep wait at the gate of the man who has barley.

He who shaves his head gets more hair. And he who gathers the barley gains more and more grain.

It is on account of being the boss that you bully me.

If the foreman does not know how to assign the work, his workers will not stop shaking their heads.

How will a scribe who does not know Sumerian produce a translation?

The idleness of a low-life causes losses; his shying away (?) from work is perpetual.

Although you poured out water from a river of mighty waters, it did not cool my temper. It did not put an end (?) to the sorcery affecting me.

When battle approaches, when war arises, the plans of the gods, beloved by the gods, are destroyed. You cause fire to devour the Land. May my god know that my hand is suited to the stylus.

A disgraced scribe becomes an incantation priest. A disgraced singer becomes a flute-player. A disgraced lamentation priest becomes a piper. A disgraced merchant becomes a con-man. A disgraced carpenter becomes a man of the spindle. A disgraced smith becomes a man of the sickle. A disgraced mason becomes a hod-carrier.

“You should serve me” is typical of purification priests. Bowing over your hips is typical of leather-workers. To be stationed in all corners is typical of lukur women [“sacred prostitutes”]. “I will be there with you” is typical of gardeners. “I swear by Enki that your garments will take no time in this establishment” is typical of fullers.

General Sumerian Wisdom

The fool is garrulous.

Flies enter an open mouth.

He turns things upside down.

Your role in life is unknown.

Not to know beer is not normal.

The time passed, and what did you gain?

The stupidest of all shameless men.

In the city with no dogs, the fox is boss.

In the city of the lame, the cripple is a courier.

The mighty man is master of the earth.

A palace will fall of its own accord.

Strength cannot keep pace with intelligence.

Who could compete with righteousness?

Good is in the hands. Evil is also in the hands.

A millstone will float in the river for a righteous man.

When righteousness is cut off, injustice is increased.

The expenses (?) of those who neglect justice are numerous.

Let just men be born in good health, and let their lives last long.

The just man's life lasts long. Life is the gift awarded for it.

What comes out of one's mouth is not in one's hand.

Tell a lie and then tell the truth: it will be considered a lie.

As long as you live you should not increase evil by telling lies; for if you do, to succumb will be your lot.

Talking endlessly is what humankind has most on its mind.

Whatever the man in authority said, it was not pleasant.

The poor man inflicts all kinds of illnesses on the rich man.

That which the thief has taken was made by an honest man.

The beloved true commander distributes the leadership (?).

Let great men stir up the conflict for lesser men to fight out.

Is my ox to provide milk for you?

Moving about defeats poverty.

A stranger is leader in a foreign city.

Like an ox, you do not know how to turn back.

He who keeps fleeing, flees from his own past.

Because he always went, because he always ran, “He carried away. He carried away!” is the name assigned to him. A fool.

A fettered dog is quarrelsome.

When a dog snarls, throw a morsel into his mouth.

Don’t start a fight with a dog. Will that dog not bite you?

“Like the wild bull, you only do what pleases you.”

He who says “I will live for today” is bound like a bull on a nose-rope.

A fox urinated into the Tigris. “I am causing the spring flood to rise,” he said.

Brotherhood is founded on the words of a quarrel. At the witness box, friendship becomes known.

Although I spoke, what did I gain? Although I spoke, what did it add? I covered up for myself, but what success did it bring me?

What is in mankind's mouth is as difficult to hide as a wall. The boy who grew up in your town on you – don't let your mouth accuse him; don't slander him; don't encourage violent retaliation against yourself.

One should pay attention to an old man's words and one should reap the benefits.

By following craftiness, one learns how to be crafty. By following wisdom, one learns how to be wise.

A child should behave with modesty toward his mother. He should take the older generation into consideration.

A younger brother should honor an older brother. He should treat him with human dignity.

Should not intelligence, wisdom and understanding become perfect to the mouth mankind.

Let the favor be repaid to him who repays a favor.

He who can say "Let him hurry, let him run, let him be strong, and he will carry it!" is a lucky man.

When present, it was considered a loincloth; when lost, it is considered fine clothing.

To eat modestly doesn't kill a man, but to covet will murder you. To eat a little is to live splendidly. When you walk about, keep your feet on the ground!

The ditches of the garden should not flow with water, or there will be vermin.

Don't cause the oven in a man's house to smoke. The smoke will ruin (?) the bread.

Because of his arrogance, may his head be bowed to his neck like a damp reed.

He who possesses many things is constantly on his guard.

A wealthy man had accumulated a fortune. "I am spending it for him." That said, it was dispersed. Afterwards he could not work out what went wrong. Things change. No one knows what will happen.

My fingernail that hurts is clutched in my embrace. My foot that hurts is in my sandal. But who will find my aching heart?

Let me tell you about my fate: it is a disgrace. Let me tell you of my condition: it makes a man's mouth taste bitter.

A child without sin was never born by his mother. The idea was never conceived that there was anyone who was not a sinner. Such a situation never existed.

Although the number of unhappy days is endless (?), yet life is better than death.

Pleasure is created. Sins are absolved. Life is rejuvenated.

Notice that none of the above Sumerian proverbs emphasized the gods; in contrast, those listed below emphasize the gods indicated by the headings. For further information on the Sumerian gods see here.⁷

General Gods

... the gods are three. So it is said, so let it be.

A man without a god – for a strong man it is no loss.

To appreciate the earth is for the gods; I am merely covered in dust.

What has been destroyed belongs to a god. No one is able to take it away.

To be wealthy and demand more is an abomination to a god.

Accept your lot and make your mother happy! Run fast and make your god happy!

... man's intelligence comes from god.

Thanks to the word of his personal god, the fate of the man who speaks just words is favorable, and he is with him throughout the day.

A man without a personal god does not procure much food, does not procure even a little food. Going down to the river, he does not catch any fish. Going down to a field, he does not catch any gazelle. In important matters he is unsuccessful. When running, he does not reach his goal. Yet were his god favorable toward him, anything he might name would be provided for him.

Utu (“Shamash” in Akkadian; the Sun god and god of justice)

If wickedness exerts itself, how will Utu succeed?

Whenever wickedness may cause trouble, Utu will not be idle!

Uncleared debts are something which makes debts to Utu.

⁷ <http://www.crystalinks.com/sumergods.html>

When a trustworthy boat is sailing, Utu seeks out a trustworthy harbor for it.

Adding an inheritance share to an inheritance share is an abomination to Utu.

The palace is an ox; you should catch it by the tail. Utu is lord; you should fix your gaze on him.

He who despises a just decision, who loves wicked decisions, is an abomination to Utu.

Utu, the lord who loves justice, extirpates wickedness and prolongs righteousness.

Utu's glance is prayerful. Utu's heart is compassionate. A devotee of Utu is among the holy. Allotted by Utu to be fortunate, a ship reaches the quay.

When a man comes forward as a witness, saying "Let me tell you what I know," but does not know the relevant information, it is an abomination to Utu.

A judge who despises justice, cursing with the right hand, and the chasing away of a younger son from the house of his father are abominations to Utu.

Oh Utu, you are my judge: pronounce my judgment! You are my decision-maker, decide my case! The dream that I have seen – turn it into a favorable one!

To serve beer with unwashed hands, to spit without trampling upon it, to sneeze without covering it with dust, to kiss with [or use] the tongue at midday without providing shade are abominations to Utu.

The wolf wept before Utu: "The animals frisk around together, but I am all alone."

Imagine a wolf is eating. Utu looks down on it and says "Provided you praise me you will grow fat" would be the reply.

Enlil (the god of the Earth, wind, and storms; one of the three great gods, the others two being the sky god Anu and the water god Enki or Ea)

The fox lies (?) even to Enlil.

Enlil's greatest punishment is hunger.

... you shouldn't give a lame man a staff. Enlil is his helper.

Don't give the halt man a club for his arm. Enlil shall be the one to help him!

A fox demanded of Enlil the horns of a wild bull. While it was wearing the wild bull's horns, it started to rain. But the horns rose high above him, so he could not enter his burrow. Until midnight the wind kept blowing, and the clouds brought rain. Afterwards, when it had stopped raining on him, and he had dried off, he said: "I shall return this feature to its rightful owner!"

Suen (Nanna or Sin in Akkadian; the Moon god and god of wisdom)

... if the hand touches a woman's genitals over her clothes – it is an abomination to Suen.

When a man sailing downstream encounters a man whose boat is traveling upstream, an inspection is an abomination to Suen.

When a man comes forward as a witness, saying "Let me tell you what I know about him", but does not know the relevant information, it is an abomination to Suen.

The north wind is a satisfying wind; the south wind is harmful (?) to man. The east wind is a rain-bearing wind; the west wind is greater than those who live there. The east wind is a wind of prosperity, the friend of Naram-Suen.

Inana (Ishtar in Akkadian; goddess of fertility, represented by Venus)

May Inana pour oil on my heart that aches.

For him who is rejected by Inana, his dream is to forget.

Carrying bread to the oven whilst singing is an abomination to Inana.

May Inana make a hot-limbed wife lie with you! May she bestow upon you broad-shouldered sons! May she find for you a place of happiness!

Ninurta (healing god and god of the South Wind)

To take revenge is the prerogative of Ninurta.

To take revenge is an abomination to Ninurta.

Refusing to talk is an abomination to Ninurta.

To remove something from its proper place is an abomination to Ninurta.

They treated an immigrant badly. [1 line fragmentary] It is an abomination to Ninurta.

Coveting and {reaching out for things} {(1 ms. has instead:) spying} are abominations to Ninurta.

The chasing away of a younger son from the house of his father is an abomination to Ninurta.

A judge who despises justice, cursing with the right hand, and the chasing away of a younger son from the house of his father are abominations to Ninurta.

Other Gods

I part the waters (?) like Nirah [a snake deity].

You should not say to Ninjizzida [god of nature]: “Let me live!”

When the authorities are wise, and the poor are loyal, it is the effect of the blessing of Aratta [the land].

He who slanders... for the liar – Ninegala [Ningal (?), the Moon goddess?] will crush his head...

A plant as sweet as a husband, a plant as sweet as a mother; may Ezina-Kusu [the grain goddess] dwell in your home.

The god of the river ordeal will admire the hearts of those who bear words of truth.

SOME ANCIENT EGYPTIAN “WISDOM LITERATURE”

Sayings similar to the above from Sumer were undoubtedly available in ancient Egypt (and other regions), but most Egyptian writings were recorded on papyrus, which (of course) was much more perishable than clay tablets. Some Egyptian sayings were also carved in stone (e.g., on tombs and in pyramids), but of course, such carvings emphasized the “afterlife” of the dead person. Some of the tomb inscriptions, however, provide at least a glimpse of early Egyptian customs – at least, those customs followed (or claimed to be followed!) by the aristocrats buried in their tombs. An example of a tomb inscription that does convey some ideas about Ancient Egyptian culture is the following.⁸

⁸ From http://www.archive.org/stream/sacredbooksearly02hornuoft/sacredbooksearly02hornuoft_djvu.txt.

Inscriptions of Harkhuf, The Explorer (~2525 BCE)

I came today from my city, I descended from my nome, I built a house, I set up the doors. I dug a lake, and I planted trees. The King praised me. My father made a will for me, for I was excellent . . . one beloved of his father, praised of his mother, whom all his brothers loved. I gave bread to the hungry, clothing to the naked, I ferried him who had no boat.

I was one saying good things and repeating what was loved. Never did I say aught evil, to a powerful one against any people, for I desired that it might be well with me in the great god's presence. Never did I judge two brothers in such a way that a son was deprived of his paternal possession.

A much more significant indication of ancient Egyptian culture is available on “the world’s most precious and oldest papyrus known”, namely, the Prisse Papyrus (named after the Frenchmen who purchased it). It contains *The Precepts* [or *The Maxims of Good Discourse*] of Ptah-Hotep.

Actually, the identity of the author isn’t known. There was a vizier under King Isesi called Ptah-Hotep (or Ptahhotep, which seems to mean Ptah is “at peace” or “is satisfied”, where Ptah was claimed by the clerics of Memphis to be the creator god). If this Ptah-Hotep was the author of *The Precepts*, then they are from 2450–2300 BCE. On the other hand, *The Precepts* may be a “literary construct”,⁹ as apparently were other *Instructions* of fathers to their sons. If so, then *The Precepts* may be from ~2300–2150 BCE and by an unknown author. In any case, the author probably relied on available Egyptian proverbs, possibly including those from the time of the first recognized genius in history, the “first engineer, architect, and physician”, Imhotep, c. 2600 BCE.¹⁰

The full text of *The Precepts* is available at many places¹¹ on the web, including *The Internet Ancient History Source Book*.¹² What follows is an abbreviated form of the text copied from the extensive files hosted at Fordham University.¹³ I’ve taken the liberty to italicize portions of the text that I found to be particularly perceptive.

⁹ See <http://www.sofiatopia.org/maat/ptahhotep.htm - intro>.

¹⁰ See, e.g., <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imhotep>.

¹¹ For example, see http://www.sofiatopia.org/maat/ptahhotep_maxims.htm, and http://www.archive.org/stream/sacredbooksearly02hornuoft/sacredbooksearly02hornuoft_djvu.txt.

¹² <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/asbook.html>.

¹³ <http://www.fordham.edu/halsall/ancient/ptahhotep.html>.

Precepts of the Prefect, the lord Ptah-hotep, under the Majesty of the King of the South and North, Assa, living eternally forever.

Beginning of the arrangement of the good sayings, spoken by the noble lord, the divine father, beloved of Ptah, the son of the king, the first-born of his race, the prefect and feudal lord Ptah-hotep, so as to instruct the ignorant in the knowledge of the arguments of the good sayings. It is profitable for him who hears them; it is a loss to him who shall transgress them. He says to his son:

Be not arrogant because of that which you know; deal with the ignorant as with the learned; for the barriers of art are not closed, no artist being in possession of the perfection to which he should aspire. But good words are more difficult to find than the emerald, for it is by slaves that that is discovered among the rocks of pegmatite...

If you find a disputant while he is hot, do not despise him because you are not of the same opinion. *Be not angry against him when he is wrong; away with such a thing.* He fights against himself; require him not further to flatter your feelings. Do not amuse yourself with the spectacle which you have before you; it is odious, it is mean, it is the part of a despicable soul so to do. As soon as you let yourself be moved by your feelings, combat this desire as a thing that is reproved by the great...

If you have, as leader, to decide on the conduct of a great number of men, seek the most perfect manner of doing so, that your own conduct may be without reproach. *Justice is great, invariable, and assured; it has not been disturbed since the age of Ptah. To throw obstacles in the way of the laws is to open the way before violence...*

Inspire not men with fear, else Ptah will fight against you in the same manner. If any one asserts that he lives by such means, Ptah will take away the bread from his mouth; if any one asserts that he enriches himself thereby, Ptah says: "I may take those riches to myself." If any one asserts that he beats others, Ptah will end by reducing him to impotence. *Let no one inspire men with fear; this is the will of Ptah.* Let one provide sustenance for them in the lap of peace; it will then be that they will freely give what has been torn from them by terror...

If you are a farmer, gather the crops in the field which the great Ptah has given you, *do not boast in the house of your neighbors;* it is better to make oneself dreaded by one's deeds. As for him who, master of his own way of acting, being all-powerful, seizes the goods of others like a crocodile in the midst even of watchment, his children are an object of malediction, of scorn, and of hatred on account of it, while his father is grievously distressed, and as for the mother who has borne him, happy is another rather than herself. But a man becomes a god when he is chief of a tribe which has confidence in following him...

Be active during the time of your existence; do no more than is commanded. Do not spoil the time of your activity; he is a blameworthy person who makes a bad use of

his moments. Do not lose the daily opportunity of increasing that which your house possesses. Activity produces riches, and riches do not endure when it slackens...

He is a god who penetrates into a place where no relaxation of the rules is made for the privileged...

If you are a leader, setting forward your plans according to that which you decide, perform perfect actions which posterity may remember, without letting the words prevail with you which multiply flattery, which excite pride and produce vanity.

If you are a leader of peace, listen to the discourse of the petitioner. Be not abrupt with him; that would trouble him. Say not to him: "You have already recounted this." Indulgence will encourage him to accomplish the object of his coming. As for being abrupt with the complainant because he described what passed when the injury was done, instead of complaining of the injury itself let it not be! *The way to obtain a clear explanation is to listen with kindness.*

If you desire to excite respect within the house you enter, for example the house of a superior, a friend, or any person of consideration, in short everywhere where you enter, keep yourself from making advances to a woman, for there is nothing good in so doing...

If you desire that your conduct should be good and preserved from all evil, keep yourself from every attack of bad humor. It is a fatal malady which leads to discord, and there is no longer any existence for him who gives way to it. For it introduces discord between fathers and mothers, as well as between brothers and sisters; it causes the wife and the husband to hate each other; it contains all kinds of wickedness, it embodies all kinds of wrong. When a man has established his just equilibrium and walks in this path, there where he makes his dwelling, there is no room for bad humor.

Be not of an irritable temper as regards that which happens at your side; grumble not over your own affairs. Be not of an irritable temper in regard to your neighbors; better is a compliment to that which displeases than rudeness. It is wrong to get into a passion with one's neighbors, to be no longer master of one's words. When there is only a little irritation, one creates for oneself an affliction for the time when one will again be cool.

If you are wise, look after your house; love your wife without alloy. Fill her stomach, clothe her back; these are the cares to be bestowed on her person. Caress her, fulfill her desires during the time of her existence; it is a kindness which does honor to its possessor. Be not brutal; tact will influence her better than violence; her ... behold to what she aspires, at what she aims, what she regards. It is that which fixes her in your house; if you repel her, it is an abyss. Open your arms for her, respond to her arms; call her, display to her your love.

Treat your dependents well, in so far as it belongs to you to do so; and it belongs to those whom Ptah has favored...

Do not repeat any extravagance of language; do not listen to it; it is a thing which has escaped from a hasty mouth. If it is repeated, look, without hearing it, toward the earth; say nothing in regard to it. Cause him who speaks to you to know what is just, even him who provokes to injustice; cause that which is just to be done, cause it to triumph. As for that which is hateful according to the law, condemn it by unveiling it.

If you are a wise man, sitting in the council of your lord, direct your thought toward that which is wise. Be silent rather than scatter your words...

If you are powerful, respect knowledge and calmness of language. Command only to direct; *to be absolute is to run into evil.* Let not your heart be haughty, neither let it be mean. Do not let your orders remain unsaid and cause your answers to penetrate; but speak without heat, assume a serious countenance. As for the vivacity of an ardent heart, temper it; the gentle man penetrates all obstacles. He who agitates himself all the day long has not a good moment; and he who amuses himself all the day long keeps not his fortune...

Disturb not a great man; weaken not the attention of him who is occupied. His care is to embrace his task, and he strips his person through the love which he puts into it. That transports men to Ptah, even the love for the work which they accomplish. Compose then your face even in trouble, that peace may be with you, when agitation is with ... These are the people who succeed in what they desire.

Let your love pass into the heart of those who love you; cause those about you to be loving and obedient...

If you are annoyed at a thing, if you are tormented by someone who is acting within his right, get out of his sight, and remember him no more when he has ceased to address you.

If you have become great after having been little, if you have become rich after having been poor, when you are at the head of the city, know how not to take advantage of the fact that you have reached the first rank, harden not your heart because of your elevation; you are become only the administrator, the prefect, of the provisions which belong to Ptah. *Put not behind you the neighbor who is like you; be unto him as a companion...*

Do not plunder the house of your neighbors; seize not by force the goods which are beside you...

If you aim at polished manners, call not him whom you accost. Converse with him especially in such a way as not to annoy him. Enter on a discussion with him only

after having left him time to saturate his mind with the subject of the conversation. *If he lets his ignorance display itself, and if he gives you all opportunity to disgrace him, treat him with courtesy rather; proceed not to drive him into a corner; do not ... the word to him; answer not in a crushing manner; crush him not; worry him not; in order that in his turn he may not return to the subject, but depart to the profit of your conversation.*

Let your countenance be cheerful during the time of your existence...

Know those who are faithful to you when you are in low estate...

If you take a wife, do not ... Let her be more contented than any of her fellow-citizens. She will be attached to you doubly, if her chain is pleasant. Do not repel her; grant that which pleases her; it is to her contentment that she appreciates your work...

When a son receives the instruction of his father there is no error in all his plans. Train your son to be a teachable man whose wisdom is agreeable to the great. Let him direct his mouth according to that which has been said to him; in the docility of a son is discovered his wisdom. His conduct is perfect while error carries away the unteachable. Tomorrow knowledge will support him, while the ignorant will be destroyed.

As for the man without experience who listens not, he effects nothing whatsoever. He sees knowledge in ignorance, profit in loss; he commits all kinds of error, always accordingly choosing the contrary of what is praiseworthy. He lives on that which is mortal, in this fashion. His food is evil words, whereat he is filled with astonishment. That which the great know to be mortal he lives upon every day, flying from that which would be profitable to him, because of the multitude of errors which present themselves before him every day.

A son who attends is like a follower of Horus; he is happy after having attended. He becomes great, he arrives at dignity, he gives the same lesson to his children...

Let your thoughts be abundant, but let your mouth be under restraint...

The Instructions of Amenemope

Another important, surviving Egyptian papyrus contains *The Instructions of Amenemope*. It was written in the eleventh century BCE, mostly in the standard “negative declarations” of the time. The text states that it was:¹⁴

¹⁴ From <http://www.touregypt.net/instructionofamenemope.htm>.

Written by the superintendent of the land, experienced in his office; the offspring of a scribe of the Beloved Land, the superintendent of produce, who fixes the grain measure, who sets the grain tax amount for his lord... Amenemope, the son of Danakht... for his son... [who is also] the son of the... chief singer of Horus, the Lady Tawosret.

Some of the text follows; again I've added the italics to emphasize ideas that impressed me.

Chapter 1: Give your years and hear what is said, give your mind over to their interpretation... If you spend a lifetime with these things in your heart, you will find it good fortune; you will discover my words to be a treasure house of life...

Chapter 2: Beware of stealing from a miserable man and of raging against the cripple... Don't let yourself be involved in a fraudulent business, nor desire the carrying out of it... Something else of value in the heart of God is to *stop and think before speaking*.

Chapter 3: Do not get into a quarrel with the argumentative man nor incite him with words; proceed cautiously before an opponent, and give way to an adversary; *sleep on it before speaking*, for a storm come forth like fire in hay is the hot-headed man in his appointed time. May you be restrained before him; leave him to himself, and God will know how to answer him.

Chapter 4: The truly temperate man sets himself apart...

Chapter 5: Do not take by violence the shares of the temple, do not be grasping, and you will find overabundance... Do not say today is the same as tomorrow, or how will matters come to pass? When tomorrow comes, today is past... Fill yourself with silence, you will find life, and your body shall flourish upon earth.

Chapter 6: Do not displace the surveyor's marker on the boundaries of the arable land, nor alter the position of the measuring line; do not be greedy for a plot of land, nor overturn the boundaries of a widow... As for the road in the field worn down by time, he who takes it violently for fields, if he traps by deceptive attestations, will be lassoed by the might of the moon... Take care not to topple over the boundary marks of the arable land, not fearing that you will be brought to court; man propitiates God by the might of the Lord when he sets straight the boundaries of the arable land... do not trample on the furrow of someone else; their good order will be profitable for you... So plough the fields, and you will find whatever you need, and receive the bread from your own threshing floor: better is the bushel which God gives you than five thousand deceitfully gotten, they do not spend a day in the storehouse or warehouse, they are no use for dough for beer, their stay in the granary is short-lived, when morning comes they will be swept away. Better, then, is poverty in the hand of God than riches in the storehouse; better is bread when the mind is at ease than riches with anxiety.

Chapter 7: Do not set your heart upon seeking riches, for there is no one who can ignore Destiny and Fortune. Do not set your thoughts on external matters: for every man there is his appointed time... Do not exert yourself to seek out excess and your wealth will prosper for you; if riches come to you by theft, they will not spend the night with you; as soon as day breaks they will not be in your household... Do not be pleased with yourself (because of) riches acquired through robbery, neither complain about poverty...

Chapter 8: Set your good deeds throughout the world that you may greet everyone... Keep your tongue safe from words of detraction, and you will be the loved one of the people... set a good report on your tongue, while the bad thing is covered up inside you.

Chapter 9: Do not fraternize with the hot-tempered man, nor approach him to converse... take care of speaking thoughtlessly; *when a man's heart is upset, words travel faster than wind and rain.*

Chapter 10: Do not address your intemperate friend in your unrighteousness, nor destroy your own mind; do not say to him, "May you be praised," not meaning it, when there is fear within you. Do not converse falsely with a man, for it is the abomination of God. *Do not separate your mind from your tongue;* all your plans will succeed. You will be important before others, while you will be secure in the hand of God. God hates one who falsified words, his great abomination is duplicity.

Chapter 11: Do not covet the property of the dependent nor hunger for his bread...

Chapter 12: Do not covet the property of an official, and do not fill (your) mouth with too much food extravagantly... Do not deal with the intemperate man, nor associate yourself to a disloyal party.

Chapter 13: Do not lead a man astray reed pen or papyrus document: it is the abomination of God. Do not witness a false statement... Better it is to be praised as one loved by men than wealth in the storehouse; better is bread when the mind is at ease than riches with troubles.

Chapter 14: Do not pay attention to a person, nor exert yourself to seek out his hand, if he says to you, "take a bribe" ... another time he will be brought (to judgment).

Chapter 15: Do well, and you will attain influence...

Chapter 16: Do not unbalance the scale nor make the weights false, nor diminish the fractions of the grain measure... Do not get for yourself short weights... If you see someone cheating, at a distance you must pass him by. Do not be avaricious for

copper, and abjure fine clothes. What good is one cloaked in fine linen woven as med, when he cheats before God?...

Chapter 17: Beware of robbing the grain measure to falsify its fractions; do not act wrongfully through force...

Chapter 18: Do not go to bed fearing tomorrow, for when day breaks what is tomorrow? *Man knows not what tomorrow is!* God is success; Man is failure... Do not say, "I am without fault," nor try to seek out trouble... Be strong in your heart, make your mind firm...

Chapter 19: Do not enter the council chamber in the presence of a magistrate and then falsify your speech... Tell the truth before the magistrate, lest he gain power over your body...

Chapter 20: Do not corrupt the people of the law court, nor put aside the just man; do not agree because of garments of white, nor accept one in rags. Take not the gift of the strong man, nor repress the weak for him. Justice is a wonderful gift of God, and He will render it to whomever he wishes... Do not falsify the oracles on a papyrus and (thereby) alter the designs of God. Do not arrogate to yourself the might of God as if Destiny and Fortune did not exist... Hand property over to its (rightful) owners, and seek out life for yourself...

Chapter 21: Do not say, I have found a strong protector and now I can challenge a man in my town. Do not say, I have found an active intercessor, and now I can challenge him whom I hate. Indeed, you cannot know the plans of God; you cannot perceive tomorrow... Empty not your soul to everybody, and do not diminish thereby your importance; do not circulate your words to others, nor fraternize with one who is too candid. Better is a man whose knowledge is inside him than one who talks to disadvantage...

Chapter 22: Do not castigate your companion in a dispute, and do not let him say his innermost thoughts... May you first comprehend his accusation and cool down your opponent...

Chapter 23: Do not eat a meal in the presence of a magistrate, nor set to speaking first. If you are satisfied with false words, enjoy yourself with your spittle. Look at the cup in front of you, and let it suffice your need...

Chapter 24: Do not listen to the accusation of an official indoors, and then repeat it to another outside. Do not allow your discussions to be brought outside, so that your heart will not be grieved...

Chapter 25: Do not jeer at a blind man nor tease a dwarf, neither interfere with the condition of a cripple...

Chapter 26: Do not stay in the tavern and join someone greater than you, whether he be high or low in his station, an old man or a youth; but *take as a friend for yourself someone compatible*... When you see someone greater than you outside, and attendants following him, respect (him). And give a hand to an old man filled with beer: respect him as his children would. The strong arm is not weakened when it is uncovered, the back is not broken when one bends it; better is the poor man who speaks sweet words than the rich man who speaks harshly.

Chapter 27: Do not reproach someone older than you, for he has seen the Sun before you; do not let yourself be reported to the Aten when he rises, with the words, “Another young man has reproached an elder”...

Chapter 28: Do not expose a widow if you have caught her in the fields, nor fail to give way if she is accused. Do not turn a stranger away your oil jar that it may be made double for your family. God loves him who cares for the poor, more than him who respects the wealthy.

Chapter 29: Do not turn people away from crossing the river when you have room in your ferryboat...

Chapter 30: Mark for your self these thirty chapters: they please, they instruct, they are the foremost of all books; they teach the ignorant. If they are read to an ignorant man, he will be purified through them...

ANCIENT HEBREW “WISDOM LITERATURE”

Now, consider the OT’s *Proverbs*. Below, I’ve arranged a number of the OT’s *Proverbs* in three groups, in an attempt to illustrate: 1) That similar to the claims made one-to-two thousand years earlier by the Sumerians and Egyptians, the Jewish clerics claimed that their customs came from their god, 2) That some of the proverbs certainly contain wisdom (reflecting the best customs of the Jews), and 3) That some of the proverbs are quite unwise. I’ve copied these proverbs from the digitized NET version of the Bible and added a few notes in brackets (especially to explain my reasons for claiming that some of the proverbs are unwise).

I. The Claim in the OT’s Proverbs that God is the Source

2.6 For the Lord gives wisdom, and from his mouth comes knowledge and understanding.

6:16 There are six things that the Lord hates, even seven things that are an abomination to him: haughty eyes, a lying tongue, and hands that shed innocent blood, a heart that devises wicked plans, feet that are swift to run to evil, a false

witness who pours out lies, and a person who spreads discord among family members.

8:22 The Lord created me [Wisdom] as the beginning of his works, before his deeds of long ago. From eternity I was appointed, from the beginning, from before the world existed.

11:1 The Lord abhors dishonest scales, but an accurate weight is his delight.

12:2 A good person obtains favor from the Lord, but the Lord condemns a person with wicked schemes.

14:31 The one who oppresses the poor insults his Creator, but whoever shows favor to the needy honors him.

15:9 The Lord abhors the way of the wicked, but he loves those who pursue righteousness.

16:33 The dice are thrown into the lap, but their every decision is from the Lord.

17:15 The one who acquits the guilty and the one who condemns the innocent – both of them are an abomination to the Lord.

18:22 The one who finds a wife finds what is enjoyable, and receives a pleasurable gift from the Lord.

19:14 A house and wealth are inherited from parents, but a prudent wife is from the Lord.

20:12 The ear that hears and the eye that sees – the Lord has made them both.

II. Some Wise Sayings in the OT's Proverbs

1:10 My child, if sinners try to entice you, do not consent!

1:32 For the waywardness of the simpletons will kill them, and the careless ease of fools will destroy them.

3:27 Do not withhold good from those who need it, when you have the ability to help. Do not say to your neighbor, "Go! Return tomorrow and I will give it," when you have it with you at the time. Do not plot evil against your neighbor... Do not accuse anyone without legitimate cause, if he has not treated you wrongly. Do not envy a violent man, and do not choose to imitate any of his ways...

3:13 Blessed is the one who finds wisdom, and the one who obtains understanding.

4:24 Remove perverse speech from your mouth; keep devious talk far from your lips.

9:7 Whoever corrects a mocker is asking for insult; whoever reproves a wicked person receives abuse. Do not reprove a mocker or he will hate you; reprove a wise person and he will love you.

10:12 Hatred stirs up dissension, but love covers all transgressions.

10:19 When words abound, transgression is inevitable, but the one who restrains his words is wise.

11:2 When pride comes, then comes disgrace, but with humility comes wisdom.

12:11 The one who works his field will have plenty of food, but whoever chases daydreams lacks wisdom.

12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own opinion, but the one who listens to advice is wise.

12:16 A fool's annoyance is known at once, but the prudent overlooks an insult.

13:11 Wealth gained quickly will dwindle away, but the one who gathers it little by little will become rich.

13:20 The one who associates with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.

14:15 A naïve person believes everything, but the shrewd person discerns his steps.

14:23 In all hard work there is profit, but merely talking about it only brings poverty.

14:29 The one who is slow to anger has great understanding, but the one who has a quick temper exalts folly

14:30 A tranquil spirit revives the body, but envy is rottenness to the bones.

15:1 A gentle response turns away anger, but a harsh word stirs up wrath

15:23 A person has joy in giving an appropriate answer, and a word at the right time – how good it is!

16:8 Better to have a little with righteousness than to have abundant income without justice.

16:18 Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall.

17:1 Better is a dry crust of bread where there is quietness than a house full of feasting with strife.

17:28 Even a fool who remains silent is considered wise, and the one who holds his tongue is deemed discerning.

17:25 A foolish child is a grief to his father, and bitterness to the mother who bore him.

18:2 A fool takes no pleasure in understanding but only in disclosing what is on his mind.

18:9 The one who is slack in his work is a brother to one who destroys.

19:2 It is dangerous to have zeal without knowledge, and the one who acts hastily makes poor choices.

19:11 A person's wisdom makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook an offense.

20:1 Wine is a mocker and strong drink is a brawler; whoever goes astray by them is not wise.

21:9 It is better to live on a corner of the housetop than in a house in company with a quarrelsome wife.

21:19 It is better to live in a desert land than with a quarrelsome and easily-provoked woman.

III. Some Unwise Sayings in the OT's Proverbs

1:7 Fearing the Lord is the beginning of moral knowledge. [No! Fear of death and desire to live are the beginning of moral knowledge! Recall from the *Precepts of Ptah-hotep*: "Let no one inspire men with fear; this is the will of Ptah."]

2:1 My child, if you receive my words, and store up my commands within you... then you will understand how to fear the Lord, and you will discover knowledge about God. [Instead of trying to understand how "to fear the Lord", try to understand by applying the scientific method!]

3:5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. [It's terrible to advise people not to rely on their own understanding (and to increase their understanding) and to "trust the Lord" rather than trust themselves!]

3:9 Honor the Lord from your wealth... [a ploy by clerics to increase their revenue stream!]

3:19 By wisdom the Lord laid the foundation of the earth; he established the heavens by understanding. By his knowledge the primordial sea was broken open, and the clouds drip down dew. [Riiiiight. And where did you say the data supporting that speculation were hidden?]

9:10 The beginning of wisdom is to fear the Lord, and acknowledging the Holy One is understanding. [Terrible, again!]

10:1 A wise child makes a father rejoice, but a foolish child is a grief to his mother. [That's just male chauvinism.]

10:4 The one who is lazy becomes poor, but the one who works diligently becomes wealthy. [Would that it were so!]

13:24 The one who spares his rod hates his child... [That's horrible!]

15:20 A wise child brings joy to his father, but a foolish person despises his mother. [More male chauvinism!]

16:12 Doing wickedness is an abomination to kings, because a throne is established in righteousness. [Riiiiight. It's another part of the Law Lie.]

16:15 In the light of the king's face there is life, and his favor is like the clouds of the spring rain. [More of the same – an indication of “slave mentality”.]

16:31 Gray hair is like a crown of glory; it is attained in the path of righteousness. [Would that it were so!]

17:8 A bribe works like a charm for the one who offers it; in whatever he does he succeeds. [Maybe that's a misprint!]

20:24 The steps of a person are ordained by the Lord – so how can anyone understand his own way? [What stupidity!]

20:30 Beatings and wounds cleanse away evil, and floggings cleanse the innermost being. [That's evil!]

21:14 A gift given in secret subdues anger, and a bribe given secretly subdues strong wrath. [So, it wasn't a misprint – it's corruption!]

21:31 A horse is prepared for the day of battle, but the victory is from the Lord. [Another part of the God Lie.]

22:4 The reward for humility and fearing the Lord is riches and honor and life. [Show me the data!]

22:6 Train a child in the way that he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it. [Part is correct (the part about the persistence of childhood indoctrination), but the premiss should be investigated. Does the author know how to “train a child in the way that he should go”? As Schopenhauer suggested, probably the best procedure is to train children not to be “trained” (!) and, instead, to encourage them to learn by themselves *via* experience.]

22:15 Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him. [More hideousness!]

And so on it goes (through *Proverbs 31*), as readers can attest. If readers do so, I hope they’ll notice that the “**Thirty Sayings**” [*Proverbs 22, 17 – 24, 22*] are similar (and in some cases almost identical) to the Egyptian *Instructions of Amenemope*. In addition, there are many repetitions through the rest of *Proverbs* (repetitions that become quite boring), although the final set (*Proverbs 31, 10 – 31, 31*) is a refreshing change: they describe a “**Wife of Noble Character**”.

Finally, I’d ask readers to compare the above illustrations from “the wisdom literature” of the ancient Sumerians, Egyptians, and Hebrews, and then, choose the one of the following two options that, in your opinion based on the evidence presented, seems most likely to have occurred:

- 1) That God (i.e., the first symmetry-breaking quantum-like fluctuation in the total void that led to the Big Bang) dropped in (about 14 billion years later) to provide advice to the authors of the Bible about Jewish cultural norms, or
- 2) That after living in groups for tens of thousands of years, people slowly developed knowledge about how to live together productively, passed their wisdom along to their offspring, recorded their thoughts when writing finally became available, and unsure about the origin of their customs, mistakenly concluded that their customs must have been decreed by their gods.

For readers who chose the first option, I hope they’ll reread, especially, the quoted Sumerian proverbs – and I hope that all readers will join me in thanking the many scholars who worked so diligently and competently to decipher the ancient literature.