

Cambridge University Press

0521633052 - The Book of Proverbs in Social and Theological Context

Katharine J. Dell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS IN SOCIAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

The book of Proverbs is the starting point of the biblical wisdom tradition. But how did individual proverbs, instructions and poems come together to form the various collections we have today? Katharine Dell explores the possible social contexts for this varied material in the royal court, wisdom schools and popular culture. She draws shrewdly on materials from the wisdom traditions of the ancient Near East, in particular Egypt, in order to bolster and enhance her theories. She argues that Proverbs had a theological purpose from its conception, with God's creativity being an integral theme of the text rather than one added in later redactions.

Dell also shows that echoes of other Old Testament genres such as prophecy, law and cult can be found in Proverbs, notably in chapters 1–9, and that its social and theological context is much broader than scholars have recognized in the past.

KATHARINE J. DELL is a Senior Lecturer at the Faculty of Divinity, University of Cambridge. Her publications include *The Book of Job as Sceptical Literature* (1991); *Get Wisdom, Get Insight: An Introduction to Israel's Wisdom Literature* (2000), and *Seeking a Life that Matters: Wisdom for Today from the Book of Proverbs* (2002).

Cambridge University Press

0521633052 - The Book of Proverbs in Social and Theological Context

Katharine J. Dell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

THE BOOK OF PROVERBS IN SOCIAL AND THEOLOGICAL CONTEXT

KATHARINE J. DELL



CAMBRIDGE
UNIVERSITY PRESS

Cambridge University Press
0521633052 - The Book of Proverbs in Social and Theological Context
Katharine J. Dell
Frontmatter
[More information](#)

CAMBRIDGE UNIVERSITY PRESS
Cambridge, New York, Melbourne, Madrid, Cape Town, Singapore, São Paulo
Cambridge University Press
The Edinburgh Building, Cambridge CB2 2RU, UK
Published in the United States of America by Cambridge University Press, New York

www.cambridge.org
Information on this title: www.cambridge.org/9780521633055

© Katharine J. Dell 2006

This publication is in copyright. Subject to statutory exception
and to the provisions of relevant collective licensing agreements,
no reproduction of any part may take place without
the written permission of Cambridge University Press.

First published 2006

Printed in the United Kingdom at the University Press, Cambridge

A catalogue record for this publication is available from the British Library

Library of Congress Cataloguing in Publication data

Dell, Katharine J. (Katharine Julia), 1961–
The book of Proverbs in social and theological context / Katharine J. Dell.
p. cm.
Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 0-521-63305-2 (hardback)
1. Bible. O.T. Proverbs – Socio-rhetorical criticism. 2. Bible. O.T. Proverbs – Theology.
I. Title
BS1465.52.D45 2006
223'. 706–dc22
2005024191
ISBN-13 978-0-521-63305-5 hardback
ISBN-10 0-521-63305-2 hardback

Cambridge University Press has no responsibility for the persistence or accuracy of URLs for
external or third-party internet websites referred to in this publication, and does not
guarantee that any content on such websites is, or will remain, accurate or appropriate.

Contents

<i>Preface</i>	page vii
<i>List of abbreviations</i>	viii
Introduction	i
Social context	3
Wisdom's theology	8
Relationship with other parts of the Old Testament	12
1 Social context(s) in Proverbs 1–9	18
The 'instructions' and Egyptian parallels	22
The school	24
Education within the family	30
The instruction texts in Proverbs	32
Conclusion	48
2 Social context(s) in Proverbs 10:1–22:16	51
The family/folk/tribal setting	52
The question of oral versus literary stages	56
Court and school	58
A preliminary overview	59
Conclusion	63
3 Social context(s) in Proverbs 22:17–31:31	65
Proverbs 22:17–24:22	65
Links with Amenemope	65
The royal court and school	67
Links with Proverbs 1–9	72
Proverbs 24:23–34	75
Proverbs 25–9	76
Analysis of the section	76
Links with Proverbs 10:1–22:16	79

vi	<i>Contents</i>	
	Proverbs 30	82
	Proverbs 30:1–14	82
	Proverbs 30:15–33	83
	Proverbs 31	84
	Proverbs 31:1–9	84
	Proverbs 31:10–31	85
	Conclusion to Chapters 1–3	88
	Proverbs 1–9; 22:17—24:22; 30:1–14; 31	88
	Proverbs 10:1—22:16; 24:23–34; 25–9; 30:15–33	89
4	Mention of Yahweh in Proverbs	90
	Proverbs 1–9	90
	Theological context	90
	Yahwistic elements	94
	Proverbs 10:1—22:16	105
	Mention of Yahweh	105
	Yahwistic elements	108
	Proverbs 22:17—31:31	117
	Mention of Yahweh	117
	Proverbs 24:23–34	119
	Proverbs 25–9	119
	Proverbs 30	122
	Proverbs 31	123
	Conclusion	123
5	Theological context	125
	Emphasis on the role of Yahweh	125
	Wisdom’s separation	126
	Characterizing wisdom’s theology	130
	Wisdom’s place in Old Testament theology	135
	Creation texts in Proverbs	139
	Linking the Yahwistic emphasis with the wider theological debate	146
	Wisdom’s theological integration	151
6	Echoes of other Old Testament texts and contexts in Proverbs	155
	Links with wider Old Testament texts, traditions and genres	155
	Influence on Proverbs from other areas of Israelite life	160
	Prophetic links	160
	Deuteronomic influence	167
	Cultic and psalmic influence	178
	Conclusion	185
	Conclusion	188
	<i>Bibliography</i>	201
	<i>Index</i>	221

Cambridge University Press

0521633052 - The Book of Proverbs in Social and Theological Context

Katharine J. Dell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

Preface

This book on Proverbs has taken shape (and changed shape) over a number of years, and I have used some of my earlier ideas for a more ambitious project in articles that link up with the ideas represented here. Early work on this material was done at the Church Divinity School of the Pacific in Berkeley, during a sabbatical there, and my thanks go to Donn Morgan, in particular, for making me so welcome and exchanging many ideas about wisdom over lunch. I am grateful to the University of Cambridge for sabbatical terms and summer vacations in which I have completed this work. I am particularly grateful to Cambridge University Press for giving me extended time on which to work on this book and for their patience in my delay in producing a final manuscript. During the time of writing this book I have both got married and had a child, and it is to my husband, Douglas Kinnear Hamilton, and to our son, James David Kinnear Hamilton (born 4 February 2003), that I dedicate this book with love.

KATHARINE J. DELL

Cambridge, April 2005

Abbreviations

AB	Analecta Biblica
AOAT	Alter Orient und Altes Testament
BETL	Bibliotheca ephemeridum theologicarum lovanensium
BHT	Beiträge zur historischen Theologie
BKAT	Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament
BS	<i>Bibliotheca Sacra</i>
BTB	<i>Biblical Theology Bulletin</i>
BZAW	Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft
CB	Coniectanea Biblica
CBQ	<i>Catholic Biblical Quarterly</i>
CBQMS	Catholic Biblical Quarterly Monograph Series
DLZ	<i>Deutsche Literaturzeitung für Kritik der Internationalen Wissenschaft</i>
EJ	<i>Encyclopaedia Judaica</i>
EQ	<i>Evangelical Quarterly</i>
ET	<i>English translation</i>
EvTh	<i>Evangelische Theologie</i>
FAT	Forschungen zum Alten Testament
FTS	<i>Freiburger Theologische Studien</i>
HAT	Handbuch zum Alten Testament
HBT	<i>Horizons in Biblical Theology</i>
HUCA	<i>Hebrew Union College Annual</i>
IDB	<i>Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible</i>
ICC	International Critical Commentary
IOSOT	International Organization for the Study of the Old Testament

Cambridge University Press

0521633052 - The Book of Proverbs in Social and Theological Context

Katharine J. Dell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)*List of abbreviations*

ix

<i>JAAR</i>	<i>Journal of the American Academy of Religion</i>
<i>JAARS</i>	Journal of the American Academy of Religion, Supplement Series
<i>JAOS</i>	<i>Journal of the American Oriental Society</i>
<i>JBL</i>	<i>Journal of Biblical Literature</i>
<i>JBR</i>	<i>Journal of the Bible and Religion</i>
<i>JCS</i>	<i>Journal of Cuneiform Studies</i>
<i>JNES</i>	<i>Journal of Near Eastern Studies</i>
<i>JNWSL</i>	<i>Journal of Northwest Semitic Languages</i>
<i>JR</i>	<i>Journal of Religion</i>
<i>JSOT</i>	<i>Journal for the Study of the Old Testament</i>
<i>JSOTS</i>	Journal for the Study of the Old Testament Supplement Series
<i>JTS</i>	<i>Journal of Theological Studies</i>
<i>NF</i>	Neue Folge
<i>NS</i>	New Series
<i>OBO</i>	Orbis biblicus et orientalis
<i>OBT</i>	Overtures to Biblical Theology
<i>OTL</i>	Old Testament Library
<i>OTS</i>	<i>Oudtestamentische Studien</i>
<i>PTMS</i>	Princeton Theological Monograph Series
<i>RB</i>	<i>Revue Biblique</i>
<i>RHPbR</i>	<i>Revue d'Histoire et de Philosophie Religieuses</i>
<i>SBL (DS)</i>	Society of Biblical Literature (Dissertation Series)
<i>SBS</i>	Stuttgarter Bibelstudien
<i>SBT</i>	Studies in Biblical Theology
<i>SJT</i>	<i>Scottish Journal of Theology</i>
<i>SPAW</i>	Sitzungsberichte der Preussischen Akademie der Wissenschaften
<i>TB</i>	<i>Tyndale Bulletin</i>
<i>TBAT</i>	Theologische Bücherei, Altes Testament
<i>Trudy</i>	<i>Transactions of the 25th International Congress of Orientalists</i>
<i>TS</i>	<i>Theological Studies</i>
<i>UF</i>	<i>Ugarit-Forschungen</i>
<i>VT</i>	<i>Vetus Testamentum</i>
<i>VTS</i>	Vetus Testamentum Supplement Series

Cambridge University Press

0521633052 - The Book of Proverbs in Social and Theological Context

Katharine J. Dell

Frontmatter

[More information](#)

x

List of abbreviations

WMANT	Wissenschaftliche Monographien zum Alten und Neuen Testament
ZÄS	<i>Zeitschrift für Ägyptische Sprache und Altertumskunde</i>
ZAW	<i>Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft</i>
ZB	Züricher Bibelkommentare
ZTK	<i>Zeitschrift für Theologie und Kirche</i>