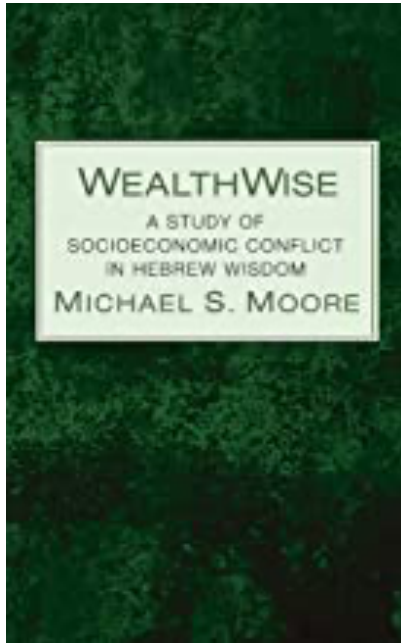


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Michael S. Moore

WealthWise: A Study of Socioeconomic Conflict in Hebrew Wisdom

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Author Michael S. Moore, an Old Testament teacher at Arizona State University and Fuller Theological Seminary in Scottsdale, Arizona, has been dealing with the literature of the ancient Near East for some time. Previously he has dedicated two volumes to the theme of wealth in the Bible and in the cultures neighboring Israel. In 2011 he focused on the Torah texts in *Wealthwatch: A Study of Socioeconomic Conflict in the Bible*; in 2019 he studied the prophetic literature in *WealthWarn: A Study of Socioeconomic Conflict in Hebrew Prophecy*.

In his most recent effort Moore focuses on wisdom literature. The book follows a linear historical development: from the ancient world (Old Testament and similar writings close to the Israelite cultural context), passing through more recent texts (Qumran literature and Greek wisdom of late Judaism) and concluding with the New Testament. Moore offers interesting ideas to understand the delicate relationship between wealth, religion, and poverty, a relationship that touches men and women of all generations and cultures across the board.

In the introduction (ch. 1), Moore asks some important questions. Concerning debates among experts in wisdom literature, he discusses the very meaning of the word *wisdom*. The range of positions is wide: from those who deny that there can be a real wisdom literature to those who link

wisdom to the “art of life” (and therefore to the ethical matters of suffering and the meaning of life) to those who directly compare *hokmah* to the ancient *sophia*.

Chapters 2–5 are the thematic heart of the volume. The second chapter (6–58) distinguishes between Mesopotamian wisdom (subdivided into didactic wisdom, legislative codes, pessimistic wisdom), Anatolian instructions, and Aramaic wisdom. In the third chapter (59–128) the focus is on the Old Testament wisdom literature: Proverbs, focusing on the instructions of Prov 1–9 and the sentences of Prov 10–31; some wisdom psalms; Qoheleth; and Job. In the fourth chapter (129–64) Moore analyzes the socioeconomic aspects of wisdom in early Judaism: 4QInstruction of, the book of Ben Sira, and the Wisdom of Solomon. The wealth-poverty relationship within the Lukan Beatitudes and the Epistle of James is examined in the fifth chapter of the work (165–87); his final conclusions are delivered in the last chapter (188–97). The volume has a large bibliography and two indexes (themes and authors).

Moore's work is primarily anthological, in that he reports the Mesopotamian (transliterated), Hebrew and Greek texts of the wisdom writings. Remarkably, it is his purpose to draw up a transversal and not strictly terminological analysis. In fact, he does not intend to review the *wealth* or *poverty* lexemes in these ancient texts: the volume, as Moore specifies in the introduction, aims to bring together and compare the socioeconomic aspects of the chosen theme (1). This explains why there is a chapter about the Beatitudes, which, strictly speaking, do not fall within the classical canons of wisdom literature. Moore explains that this passage is examined because it exerted a notable influence on the theology and on the overall vision of Christianity, and this is for four reasons: “a) the practical impossibility of ignoring the poverty-wealth polarity, b) the categorical value of alms-giving without the expectation of compensation, c) the categorical value of moneylending without the expectation; d) and the practical difficulty of producing “good things” from ‘wicked wealth’” (167).

In the concluding chapter Moore draws up a list of nine key words that allow us to summarize the aim of the investigation: poverty, wealth, property, trade, debt, labor, fraud, gift, and inheritance. *Ambivalence* is the category that helps one to understand a complex phenomenon that cannot be enclosed in a polar and simplistic categories, such as “wealth is *always* bad” or “poverty is *always* good.” “If the present study says anything,” Moore writes, “it’s that false polarities are too simplistic to be taken seriously, even though they embarrassingly define the thinking of many businessmen, politicians and televangelists; poverty and wealth are not neatly segregated into opposing ‘camps’” (197).

The broad overview offered causes the author to overlook some historical-literary insights into the works (context, genre, versions, editorial work), in favor of the quantity of sources cited. Therefore, linking the chronological distance and the literary genre can be a bit difficult for the reader, who is called to realize the link between cultural universes distant from each other (for example, the

link between the Code of Hammurabi of the eighteenth century BCE and the Epistle of James from the end of the first century CE).

In conclusion, we can say that the volume is very easy to read. The language is clear. Moore's perspective of the study engendered a synchronic result rather than a diachronic study and keeps in line with Moore's two previous volumes dedicated to the Torah and the Prophets. His effort gives to readers a good introduction to the wealthwise in ancient wisdom literature.