

## Selected Ethical Issues and Moral Demands from Old Testament And Yoruba Wisdom Traditions: Lessons For The Exegetes

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**ABSTRACT:** Wisdom is an international phenomenon from the ancient world and it is gleaned from reflections from daily human experience. Since Judeo-Christian wisdom texts gained prominence above some other religious wisdom texts, wisdom from other traditions have not received any meaningful attention or regarded as being inferior. Therefore, this study focused on the selected ethical demands and morals issues through the lenses of wisdom both in ancient Israel and Yoruba society. Using the theory of universality of wisdom among nations, it probed the international nature of wisdom, unravelled contextual, domestic, social, cultural, religious, interpersonal and international relevance of wisdom among ancient Israel and the Yoruba in guiding mankind and preventing human race from falling into cosmic human chaos and moral disaster. Using interview approach to gather selected Yoruba proverbs for this purpose, they were juxtaposed along with the ancient Israelite wisdom. Findings revealed that though ancient Israel was credited for wise sayings and gained such prominence through her Wisdom Literature, especially, Psalms and Proverbs, the Yoruba Wisdom Traditions are equally loaded with many ethical issues and moral guides, which are also similar to the ancient Israelite wisdom tradition. It recommended that the exegetes of the Israelite Wisdom Literature should also use the Yoruba Wisdom Tradition to enhance their hermeneutic delivery for the Africans for better understanding of the Christian wisdom literature and better Christian living.

### I. INTRODUCTION

Wisdom is a commonality among nations, tongues, races, peoples and also a communal heritage of every age and culture. It is not only an aspect of the cultural institution of the society; it is also a cherishing part of speeches among the human race. The Old Testament literature contains considerable books such as the Books of Job, selected Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes that are referred to as wisdom literature, apart from the Deuterocanonical or apocryphal books such as Sirach (Ecclesiasticus), Wisdom of Solomon and Wisdom Psalm. These biblical wisdom literature, like its counterpart in other culture share the feature of reference to 'experience' as the starting point or source of derivation of their writings (Lewis, 2018; Crenshaw, 1981:25).

Wisdom literature has many wise sayings, instructions, guiding principles and warnings that are either coded or made plain for the people to learn, understand and apply in order to please God and be at peace with fellow humans. Wisdom could be likened to a public place such as market where everyone seeks for survival, where the Divine meets the human for norms that will guide them for peaceful coexistence. Ancient Israelites composed their literary works commonly called Wisdom Literature after a long experience and observations of certain results or aftermaths from bad behaviours in general. These wise saying were also composed in order to prepare and guide the young generation for upright living in the nearest future.

Wisdom could be regarded as a human way of securing peace in the family setting, social interaction in the society and pleasing God by aggregating the 'use of reason' and 'human experience' in ancient Israel. Biblical Wisdom Literature aims at striving to discover what is good for children, sons and daughters, men and women, fathers and mothers, servants and masters, kings and subject, rich and poor, young and old, kings and subject, which expresses itself in many ways. It also presents moral guides to mankind in order to safe guide humans from ethical and moral errors. This is done through the study of observable universe and human experience. It could be said that wise sayings, riddles, lore, songs, instructions, and in-depth principles and thoughts surfaced after many ponderings and imaginations and it cuts across nations (Clifford, 1998). In this context, there are striking similarities between the ancient and modern wisdom literature. There are many African proverbs, Yoruba proverbs inclusive, which are highly regarded among the Africans to a point that they are applied in family, social, judicial, political and religious matters.

Ethical issues or moral demands are not only found in the Priestly Codes in Exodus, Leviticus, laws in the Pentateuch, but also in the ancient Israelite Wisdom Tradition. A thorough gulp of both the character and contents of the Israelite Wisdom Literature would reveal careful studies and observations of humans and animals, their character, rewards for the diligent and emptiness of stomach for a lazy man, the purpose of life and vanity of luxurious living, ultimate questions on life and afterlife, undeserved suffering of the righteous, pessimism and optimism, blessings of fearing God and the perils of the foolish ones. It is glaring that every generation gains crucial insights to the challenges and difficulties facing their socio-cultural life, and these were coded into short sayings, easy for memory and unforgettable formulae. It appeared that the people in the Ancient Near East guided themselves with wise sayings, proverbs and riddles where there were no revealed truths. The “steady gaze” of Wisdom Literature penetrates to the very nature of created reality and leads us toward peace and human flourishing (Batholomew & O’Dowd, 2014). In the words of Wisdom Literature, we hear the voice of the Lady Wisdom calling those who have ears to hear to receive wisdom and be prudent (2014).

## II. DEFINITIONS OF WISDOM

The word ‘wisdom’ appears in the Hebrew biblical text for over two hundred times. It is described along side with other terms such as *bina*, meaning, understanding (cf. Job 39:26; Pro. 23:4) *ℓbina* meaning, insight (Ps. 136:5) *sekel*, meaning, prudence (Pro. 12:8; 23:9). It should be submitted that the general and common word for wisdom in Hebrew language is *hokmah*; others are cognates and synonyms while the Greek counterpart is *sophia*. The Hebrew wisdom in the Hebrew text is primarily practical and not philosophical as in the Greek approaches to wisdom since the time of Socrates, Aristotle and others. It could be said that in the practical area, it is ability to think and act in a prudent manner in the face of many choices but choosing the best. It is based on the use of experience gathered from daily life encounters. God is the Source of true wisdom according to Jewish tradition and it is given to His people due to the fear of the Lord. (cf. Job 28:28; Ps. 111:10). According to Balentine (2018) “if the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom formed in the life of faith, its end is nothing less than the shaping of a moral self and community attuned to the character of God. In man wisdom can be referred to as accumulation of knowledge, enlightenment as well as soundness of mind in order to discern, carry out assignments with the displayed of accurate skills and delivery of good judgement (cf. Exo. 28:3; 31:1-11; 1Kgs 2:6).

Schmidt (1992:105) rightly observes that ‘wisdom’ is less the ability to answer questions of theory and principle than the ability to deal with everyday life and to cope with things and persons. Further, he supports this by affirming that

It is founded in observation of the operations that make up life in the association of things that are similar, and in the knowledge of the rules. Insight into existing organisations of things whether in nature or in human relationships, is summed up in language that is imaginative and favours parallelism and can therefore be retained by the mind (1992).

It is clear that human relationships, interactions, survival and peaceful coexistence largely depend on many complexities and ability to understand and/or to study the complexity of human relationships and to cope with reality as it presents itself in the ordinary circumstances of daily experience. Without doubts, after years of acquired experience among the human kind, certain principles, insights, guidelines and acceptable conduct were gained in order to solve difficulties that relate to the human relationship and these were coded as ‘wisdom’ in order not to enter into chaos. Wisdom and its applications to everyday life issues present itself as the way out to guide mankind apart from revealed truths and knowledge. At the same time, young people were taught and instructed not to be as fools but ‘wise’ in their conduct so that they can make their fathers and mothers glad. Similarly, young people learned their parents’ legacy concerning correct diligence, and the many things that enhance life.

Various biblical scholars have studied Israelite wisdom and their deliverance on ancient Israelite wisdom present great similar puzzles. Scholars such as Firth (2017), Belcher (2018), Ortlund (2021), Balentine (2018), Lewis (2018), Bowes (2024), among others lay emphasis on the faith, life, love, striking similarities in ancient Israelite wisdom and others, theological books and hermeneutical implications of wisdom for preachers, problem of reward and retribution in the wisdom literature and the imperative of moral living. Among these scholars, none have taken the Afro-centric perspectives and interpretation of the Wisdom Literature from Afro-centric perspective, much less, the Yoruba Wisdom into considerations. Afro-centric Wisdom in the realm that wisdom is also a legacy of the parents and elders for the “children”, “sons” and “youths” in order to guide them from the fallible tendencies in the nearest future.

### The Ancient Near Eastern Background of Wisdom Tradition

Before the appearance of the Hebrews on the platform of human history, there had been other nations and these nations had their ways through which they guided their society from fallible errors. The Ancient Near Eastern people belong to the group of heterogeneous societies or classes of people like the Africans, Asians, Palestinians, Syrians, Europeans and Mesopotamians (Lambdin, 1992:X). Bernhard (1988), there existed various kingdoms, nations, tongues, culture and religions with shared and similar peculiarities and it is safe to study the peoples, their socio-cultural practices for better understanding of the biblical texts. As diverse human communities emerged in these nations, there were increasing struggles to co-exist and live a daily peaceful life in the society. Besides the quest for good lifestyles and proper order of things in the society in general, one could not rule out the fact that people pondered over the past experience and reflected on the good results and bad consequences of their character. With growth and development evolving, quest for good lifestyles, orderliness in large community, recognition of individual differences at home and society, reflections on experience developed into what we can refer to as “wisdom sayings and proverbs”.

Unarguably, society and family clans in the ancient world served as the origins of wisdom where children first learned wisdom. Firth (2017) affirms that wisdom must be learned from parents, the sages, experience, friends and the teachers. They gathered gleans and reflections of their daily experiences and they became guides and principles of life. Definitely, these gleans became law codes and the fixing of customs to regulate and guide the life of the society and the people as a whole. This could not be without a purpose in the Ancient Near East. There were needs to establish decorum, sound morality, peaceful living and tolerance for peaceful co-existence in the society at large. Even among the family clans, there were needs to prepare and educate the new generation for the sake of the future. According to Ceresko (1999:25) submits that this process of preparing the young generation produced a rich store of parables and proverbs, narratives, both oral and written, to instruct the younger generation. This body of wisdom and the practical advice it offers reflect the values and beliefs of the culture.

By the late fourth millennium, the city-state cultures, religions, civilizations and certain developments had started taking place in the Mesopotamian world. The ancient Sumerians had started certain inventions such as agrarian life, economic exchange, arts and craft, temple constructions for gods, solid-wheeled vehicles driven by oxen or asses, literary works by scribal schools, production of epic tales, myths, proverbs, riddles and wise saying were common during this period. These scribal schools did not only provide training and skills for the ancient kings, princes, they also composed and copied literary works, collections of proverbs and fables, myths, texts on Proverbs, wise sayings, sapiential sayings and triumph of the kings in the ancient near east and such in those categories for the bureaucrat and societal leaders in the Mesopotamian world.

Beside the fact that the scribal schools prepared the students for future moral soundness in the daily living and ethically acceptable behaviours, great success in the daily uprightness, they also had to prepare them with life realities such as infanticide, patricide, matricide mortality in general. The reality of death in particular, which can strike the rich and poor, kings and subject, masters and slaves, young and old at anytime was a great puzzle to the ancient people. The question about life and death in particular, which cannot be answered by the knowledge the young ones were learning has to be handled. A similar treatise of this is found in Job and Ecclesiastes. The comforts of finding joy in the Lord in the time of anguish betray the contents of the Books of Job and the Psalter. The Ancient Near Eastern proverbs and stories had some reflective saying that address why do the innocent suffer? What is the essence of life and why human morality. In the biblical parlance we are of the opinion that the books of Job and Ecclesiastes address such similarities and issues when compared with other Mesopotamian Wisdom Tradition. An example from the epic of Gilgamesh, from the Mesopotamian culture and text sums it up thus:

Gilgamesh whither rovest thou? The life thou pursuit that shalt not find  
when the gods created mankind, Death for mankind the set aside, life in  
their own hands retaining thou Gilgamesh, let full be thy belly, make  
thou merry by day and by night, of each day make thou a feast of rejoicing.  
Day and night dance thou and play.... for this is the task of (mankind)!

It could be argued that wisdom did only originate from the clans, tribes, family set ups scribal schools, the elites, wise men, the ruling class and/or the professional tutors only, the wise individuals who are naturally gifted could have also contributed to the wise sayings in the Ancient Near Eastern wisdom, proverbs and sayings. The ruling class could have a voice to be heard, the scribal schools could have pens to put on Papyrus and parchments for record purpose of their sayings due to their positions at royal courts and temple courts, but the wise individuals' sayings, who because of their poor social status could only be heard and their words not recorded after their names must have greatly contributed to the wisdom of literature in the Ancient Near East.

Another fact is that, it is well known that right from the ancient world that women were saddled with the responsibilities of nurturing and home training of the children. Despite the fact that patriarchal domination prevailed in the Mesopotamian culture, we still found a pocket of women who greatly contributed to the survival of their nations in the ancient world through their wisdom.

At least this is a reflective sign that women also contributed to wisdom, wise sayings and wisdom literature in the ancient world. Biblical references to 2 Samuel 14, Proverbs 10:1 and 31:1-9 also attest to this position that women also contributed to the development of Wisdom Literature, wise sayings and proverbs in the ancient near east.

The Ancient Near Eastern origins and contributions to wisdom and wisdom literature could not be waved aside (2015). Beginning from the clans, gathering experiences from the reflections of the success and failures of the society, pains and gains from bad and good character, rewards and punishment in the society we find proverbs and wise sayings. The necessity of home training, preparing the young generation for the future, with wisdom to guide them certainly led to the formulations of moral codes, fixing acceptable norms, values, customs and cultures, which eventually led to wisdom literature by the scribal schools and bureaucratic elites in the Ancient Near East.

These wise sayings addressed ethical issues and demands in order to regulate and guide moral life in the society. They were also formulated in order to instruct the young generations for future purposes. The scribal schools provided training and skills for the ruling bureaucrat. The fundamentals of international diplomacy, letters and relationship, reading and writing in Egypt these sages instructed the children of Pharaoh and other potential bureaucrats. Their insights concerning proper speech, correct etiquette and interpersonal relationship proved indispensable to aspiring rulers. The wisdom in the Ancient Near Eastern world was poetic as well as full of propaganda of the achievements of the kings. One aspect or characteristic of the Mesopotamian wisdom was that it went beyond wise sayings to unravelling the mysteries of morality, suffering of the innocent and purpose in life among others.

### Origins of Wisdom in Ancient Israelite Traditions

Sneed (2015) and others have revealed that both the religion and wisdom in ancient Israel could not be studied or divorced from the influence of her neighbouring nations. It is apparent that the origins of wisdom in ancient Israelite traditions could not be separated from the influence of her surrounding nations such as Egyptian and Babylonian wisdom traditions just as the issues of kingship influenced her monarchy. The example that Israelites countenance the existence of monarchy and wisdom in the neighbouring nations around her is a good one. In the Wisdom Tradition of Wisdom Literature, especially, Proverbs 22:17-24:22 have been compared with other wisdom of Egyptian especially that of Amen-em-opet. This comparison has shown that certain origins of Wisdom Tradition in Israel have Egyptian origins. Thus the Bible says,

And God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore. Thus Solomon's excelled the wisdom of all men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all-than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the surrounding nations-1 Kgs. 4:29-31.

These factors indicate that Israelite wisdom was influenced by Egyptian wisdom and people from the eastern Palestine. Adamo (2005) acknowledges that fact that though ancient Israelite history was a history of revelation from God she could not deny the influential factors from other nations that directly or indirectly shaped her religion and politics. This shows the international nature of wisdom. The Providence was at work in nations that did not have the revelation or self-disclosure of God as Mosiac revelation to the Israelites on Mount Sinai/Horeb according to Sinaitic and Wilderness Traditions. Wisdom was the instrument used to sustain the society among these nations. The Mesopotamian influence on the origins of wisdom in ancient Israelite wisdom was recognized by biblical scholars. The literary prototype of the books of Job, Proverbs and the Preachers contains more of the commonality of ideas than direct literary relationship and probably, the points of contacts are the royal courts of Solomon and Hezekiah, where necessarily the foreign and local scribes must meet and exchange religious and social ideas.

The wisdom of Solomon was compared with the wisdom of the people of the East or Egypt. There were wise men and sages in Egypt long before the nationhood of ancient Israel. Evidence abounds on the analogy between Babylonian, Assyrian and Israelite wisdom in the light of archaeological discoveries. Other nations such as Canaan, Edom, Tyre and people in the Fertile Crescent of the Mesopotamian world could have contributed to the wisdom tradition of ancient Israel. But the divine origin and the doctrine of inspiration of the Old Testament would rather favour internal factors responsible for the origin of wisdom tradition in Israel. Bernhard is of the view that the love for *hokmah*, in the antiquity and ancient Mesopotamian world was not

necessarily the sole monopoly of any nation then. Wisdom journey in antiquity was international and widely spread than their country of origins. Inasmuch ancient Israel was situated among the nations in the Fertile Crescent, definitely she shared from the widespread of wisdom coming from the Mesopotamian world.

Internally, the origins of wisdom in ancient Israel could also be traced to the parental influences. Mothers, especially are saddled with the responsibilities of the training of children at home. The fathers were expected to teach and train their children so that they could take after them in the nearest future. We find on the pages of the Book of Proverbs in particular references to the teaching of the mothers and fathers. For instance:

My son, hear the instruction of your father,  
And do not forsake the law of your mother-Pro. 1:8.

Therefore, any child that heeds the instruction of father will make him glad, while the unruly and disobedient ones bring grieves to their mothers.

A wise son makes his father glad,  
But a foolish man despises his mother-Pro. 15:20.

A foolish son is a grief to his father,  
And bitterness to her who bore him-Pro. 17:25

After the role of parents, role of sages such as Hushai and Ahithophel in the royal courts of David as members of his cabinet was the next point of wisdom development in ancient Israel (cf. 2 Sam. 16:23; 17: 5, 14) and others that were not mentioned. There was an indication that kings in ancient Israel surround themselves with counsellors, wise men and people with administrative prowess to support and give advice to them during the monarchical era. Though ancient Israelite society tilted toward patriarchal dominance, yet certain women played crucial role when it came to wisdom display in ancient Israel. Some women were mentioned as “wise” women in the Hebrew text. Such women included a “wise woman” from Tekoa (2 Sam. 14:1-21) and a wise woman that saved her city from destruction (2 Sam. 20:14-22). Abigail was another woman who display a good sense of wisdom and advice before King David (1 Sam. 25: 32-33).

Solomon became another pivotal stage of wisdom development in Israel. Solomon was reputed for practicality wisdom and largeness of heart he displayed.

Thus Solomon's excelled the wisdom of all men of the East and  
all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all-than Ethan the  
Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol;  
and his fame was in all the surrounding nations-1 Kgs. 4:29-31.

The era of Solomon uniquely marked the popularization of wisdom in ancient Israel. Comparisons started in the wisdom literature in Israel with the wisdom of the people of the ancient near east. The kind of wisdom displayed by Solomon, his royal courts, administrative structure, friends, recorders and other royal court functionaries (cf. 1 Kgs. 4:1-34). He was tested by the Queen of Sheba from Ethiopia and she found that Solomon excelled in practical wisdom and in judgement (1 Kgs. 10:1-14. This indicates the pre-exilic existence of wisdom in the ancient Israel as well as post-exilic period. The scribes at the royal courts in Israel constituted another stage of the origin of wisdom in Israel as the Book of Proverbs attests. This could be attributed to the origin of wisdom literature in ancient Israel. For instance, Proverbs 25:1 says,

These also are the proverbs of Solomon which  
the men of Hezekiah king of Judah copied.

### **The Origins of the Yoruba Wisdom Tradition**

The Yoruba are people in the south-western part of Nigeria, West Africa. They are people rich in customs, cultures, religions and wisdom. The wisdom tradition of the Yoruba could be said to arise from their cosmological views, beliefs, home training, socio-cultural practices, religion(s), philosophy, economic practices, military prowess, political life, informal education and so on. Their contacts with other tribes, tongues, languages, races, nations and peoples also shaped and contributed to their rich wisdom tradition. Evidently, the Yoruba converts to Christianity must have discovered the relationship between their cosmological views, socio-cultural practices and the ancient Israelite cosmologies, especially in the wisdom traditions.

Just as the ancient Israelites cherished wisdom for practical daily life, the Yoruba adorn and countenance wisdom also for sound morals, prevention of evils in the society and success in one's expedition and peaceful coexistence in life. The Yoruba word for wisdom is *ogbón* while its cognates or synonyms are *imò*, *òye*, and *làákàyé*. All refers to wisdom. Whosoever possesses wisdom is regarded as *ologbónomo*, meaning 'a wise child or *ologbónèniyàn*, meaning, a wise man or a wise person. Wisdom is likened to gold among the Yoruba and



whosoever is wise is regarded as a man with gold in his heart or belly. So, wisdom is regarded as gold in the heart of those who cherish and possess it. *Omo ti o bagbon, isuraiyebiyeni fun obi re*, meaning, a child that is wise is a great treasure to his parents

One could ask, where did 'wisdom originate among the Yoruba? Like other nations, wisdom could be said to have originated from experience of the Yoruba people in the society as a result of their reflections on the aftermaths of certain actions, performances, relationships and interactions. The way providence and nature rewarded both good and bad, diligence and laziness, equity and injustices, morality and immorality and the likes could have been reflected upon and aided in the formulations of coded sayings, proverbs and wisdom in the Yoruba society.

Besides, the role of the family "dos and don'ts", training of children by their parents, instructions to guide them for future purpose and success in life could not be relegated in the search for the origins of Yoruba wisdom tradition. The Yoruba cherish their children behaving as 'wise children' in the society and not as foolish ones. Male children are trained as prospective leaders, fathers, and husbands and responsible in the society. The females are also trained to be good wives, mothers, and home care takers and strong pillars behind their husbands. Hence, a Yoruba wisdom which says, *Ile ni a tii ko eso rode*, meaning, charity begins at home illustrates this position. Another one says, *Bi ode ba se ri, oodelaa wo*, meaning, the character exhibited outside in the society cannot be separated from home upbringing.

Various scholars such as Oyeronke (2003), Bamidele (2003), Fayemi (2019), Babatunde (2013), Aderinto (2014), Akinola (2016), and Fasehun (2009) among others trace the origins of the wise sayings, proverbs and wisdom to various strands and their values in Yoruba society. Familusi is of the opinion that songs, stories, riddles and taboos were the origins of wise sayings among the Yoruba.<sup>47</sup> Yoruba people are fond of proverbs, adages, folklores, and folksongs while speaking. While some submit that proverbs are vehicles of important words the Yoruba, hence a common saying, *owe lesinoro, orolesin owe, bi orobasonu, owe la fi nwa*, meaning, proverbs are horses upon which words ride, when we are short of words, we use proverbs instead. It is good to say that proverbs are appreciated during discussions among the Yoruba. They are used in order to quickly get to the heart of a matter. Proverbs are used to caution, train, adore, praise chant, and ridicule people among the Yoruba. It is also used to sound warnings, carefulness, shape morality, religious beliefs and convey socio-cultural practices among the Yoruba.

It is worthy of note that wisdom, traditions and proverbs usually blend with the discussions among the Yoruba during any discussions. And many cosmological views and experience, cultural and traditional experiences are gathered to express Yoruba proverbs. They are usually loaded with in-depth meanings, which the hearers must endeavour to unravel, understand, assimilate and apply to his character, behaviour and relationships with others. There are many ethical virtues, issues, practices, and demands that are acceptable or unacceptable to the Yoruba, which are expressed through proverbs, and wise sayings. Among the ethical virtues embedded in Yoruba proverbs are: love, peaceful living with one's neighbours, humility, diligence, tactfulness, sexual purity, homage to elders, self-control, truthfulness, equity, respects for parents, praises to husbands who play their role very well, praises to godly wives, wifely devotion and commitment, prudence, trust, bravery, generosity, justice, obedience to one's parents and hosts of others.

### Similarities Between Ancient Israelite Wisdom and Yoruba Wisdom

A critical look at the ancient Israelite wisdom tradition and the Yoruba wisdom tradition show that there are peculiar similarities between the two wisdom traditions. Wisdom in both societies reveals that it is universal. It is apparent that no singular society has the monopoly of wisdom. It traverses through every society where the humans live. Man seeks ways to peacefully live in the society without chaos. Beginning from home to the large society, wisdom guides every step of human beings. The instrument of wisdom is experience of man as a result of his reflections and thoughts over some of the morally and successfully exhibited character and the negative effects of bad behaviours in the society. When someone in the family ate a poisonous fruit and cried out for stomach aches, other members of the family would run away from such a fruit. Then it became a lesson to others that such a fruit is poisonous and no one should eat again. This is due to the experience and reflections of the incidence that one of them had passed through.

Besides, the origin of wisdom in both societies was traceable to family etiquettes, moral teaching from parents that were imparted to the young generation for the sake of the future. The role of mothers in the family especially as originators of wisdom cannot be relegated down in both societies. Mothers played major role in the child upbringing in the family while the fathers also gave instructions to their children. The Yoruba would say, *Ile ni a atiikoeso lo sode*, meaning, charity, decorum and godly character begin at home. It behoved on the children to hearken to these instructions. The obedience of children to these instruments was a determinant factor to show where they belonged: either to the side of the fathers, as obedient children or to the side of the mothers, disobedient children (cf. Pro. 10:1; 13:1). In the ancient Israelite society, wisdom was believed to be resided in the sages and the wise. It could be men or women such as the wise woman of Tekoa and a woman of Abel (cf. 2 Sam. 14:2; 20:16). Elders among the Yoruba are regarded as wise and custodians of wisdom in the Yoruba society.

## Selected Ethical Issues and Demands from the Old Testament Wisdom and Yoruba Wisdom Traditions: A Comparative Analysis

### Seeking peace with your neighbours:

#### Israelite Proverbs:

Do not devise evil against your neighbour, for he dwells by you for safety.

Do not strive with a man without a cause, if he has done you no harm-Pro. 3:29-30

Hatred stirs up strife....Pro. 10:10

...But trouble will come to him who seeks evil-Pro. 11: 28.

#### The Yoruba Wisdom: *Afowó fonná, kì í mowó dúró,*

meaning, whoever packs live coals with his or her hands cannot maintain steady hands. Anyone with the tendency to foment trouble against his neighbours cannot but be under trouble and distress.

The ethical demand: Always seek peace with your neighbours. This Yoruba Wisdom enjoins living peaceably with everyone around you. If you try to cause trouble, you cannot escape its consequences or aftermaths.

#### Patience

#### Israelite Proverbs:

A quick tempered man acts foolishly....-Pro. 14:17

#### Yoruba Wisdom:

*Ojú lónkánàrèṣòtónḍéfílà, tóbágoriíté bàbá a rẹ̀, yóḍḍéohuntójuàránlọ*

A royal prince who wears a cap is simply in haste; he will get to do far more than velvet caps upon ascending his father's throne. Be patient; don't force issues before their time.

#### Endurance:

#### Israelite Proverbs:

If you faint in the day of adversity, your strength is small-Pro. 24:10

Those who sow in tears shall reap in joy. He who continually goes forth weeping, bearing seed for sowing, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him-Psa. 126:5-6

#### Yoruba Wisdom:

*Ojú tìkò rí yànnàyánnáiná, yèrè yèrè òdùrùn, kì í rí yìndìnyìndìnìdè.*

A pair of eyes that will not endure the fiery flames of fire and the searing glare of the sun, cannot enjoy the glittering and/or beauty of shining brass.

Ethical demand: No pain, no gain; no guts, no glory.

#### Confession and Forgiveness

#### Israelite Proverbs:

He who covers his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and forsakes them shall have mercy-Pro. 28:13

#### Yoruba Wisdom:

*Eni ti o bamo ese re ni ese, ki i pe loriikunleniwaju oba.*

If you know that you have committed a sin and you quickly acknowledge it, you will also quickly receive forgiveness from the king. The ethical demand from these proverbs is to acknowledge your faults without any unnecessary defence so that you can be forgiven without punishments.

#### Forbearance and Love

#### Israelite Proverbs:

Hatred stirs up strife but love covers all sins-Pro. 10:12

He who covers a transgression seeks love, but he who repeats a matter separates friends-Pro. 17:9

#### Yoruba Wisdom:

*Àmójúkùrò, ni í múèmfègùn.* Willingness to overlook things is what makes for an enduring loving relationships, in other words, tolerance is crucial and it promotes love.

**The Dignity and Blessings of Labour****Israelite Proverbs:**

Wealth gained by dishonesty will be diminished,  
But he who gathers by labour will increase-Pro. 13:11.

**Yoruba Wisdom:**

*Ohunti a ko bajiya fun, ki i pe lowoeni,  
Ohunti a basise fun, nii pe lowoeni*

What one does not labour for will not last. What will last is what you personally labour for.

**Benefits of Good Speech/Words:****Israelite Proverbs:**

A soft answer turns away wrath,  
But a harsh word stirs up anger-Pro. 15:1

A man has joy by the answer of his mouth,  
And a word spoken in due season, how good it is-Pro. 15:23  
A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver-Pro. 25:11

**Yoruba Wisdom:**

*Oro tutu ninfa obi jade ninu `ap`o,  
Oro lileninfaoko jade ninuako*

Good words attract good gifts but harsh words will only draw sword from the sheath.

**The Value of Wisdom in One's Dealings:****Israelite Proverbs:**

A wise man is strong, yes a man of knowledge increase strength  
For by wise counsel you will wage your war.... -Pro. 24:5-6

**Yoruba Wisdom:**

*Ogbonjuagbara lo*

Another one is:

*Alagbara ma lero, baba ole ni*

**Wisdom is Contagious, Learn from Others:****Israelite Proverbs:**

He who walks with a wise man will be wise....Pro. 13:20

**Yoruba Wisdom:**

*Ogbonolobon, niki i je ki a pe agbaniwere.*

By adopting wise counsels from others, elderly persons generally avoid looking foolish.  
Be humble enough to take lessons from anyone and you will not be despised or called a foolish person.

**Warning against Tale bearing:****Israelite Proverbs:**

A talebearer reveals secrets, but he who is of the faithful spirit conceals  
a matter-Pro. 11:13

He who goes about as a talebearer reveals secrets. Therefore, do not  
associate with one who flatters with his lips-Pro. 20:19

Where there is not wood, the fire goes out, and where there is talebearer,  
strife ceases-Pro. 26:20.

**Yoruba Wisdom:**

*Olofofo o gbaegbaa, ibiopelomo.* A tale bearer has no reward but mere thanks.



**Cooperation among men:**

Israelite Wise Saying:

Two are better than one, because they have reward for their labour....Eccl. 4:9.

**Yoruba Wisdom:**

Agba-jowol'afinsoya, enikankii je awa de. There is a great courage in company or group of people. A single person cannot say "we have come".

**Yoruba Wisdom:**

*Ohuntóbámáakanaráílé, kanaráoko, iwònbal'ènikand'ojúko ó mọ.*

A matter that affects everybody must be cautiously confronted singlehandedly by one person.

Don't make a general problem a personal one; there's strength in numbers; cooperate and collaborate with others.

**Warnings against Ungodly Companionship:****Israelite Proverbs:**

Make not friendship with an angry man, and with a furious man do not go, Lest you learn his ways and set a snare for your soul-Pro. 22:24-25.

The righteous should choose his friends carefully, for the way of the wicked leads them astray-Pro. 12:26.

He who walks with the wise will be, but the companion of fools will be destroyed-Pro. 13:20

We cannot but reflect the company we keep; show me your friends and I'll tell you who you are.

**Yoruba Wisdom:**

*Àgùtàn ò nṣùnláàárínajá, kómá fí arakóéégbon.*

A sheep cannot lie in the midst of dogs and not get dog ticks on itself.

Or *Irúró, nírúúìborùn*

The person you walk with will definitely influence your character and tell who you are.

**Warning against Unnecessary labour:****Israelite Wisdom:**

The person who labors, labors for himself, for his hungry mouth drives him on-Pro. 16:26

The blessings of the LORD make one rich, and He adds no sorrow to it-Pro. 10:22

**Yoruba Wisdom:**

*Ki ra-kita o di ola, ka sise bi eru ko da nkan, Oluwa ningbeniga.*

Trusting ones' efforts for wealth without God is futility but trusting in the blessings of the Lord is the best.

**The Value of Patience and Self-control:**

Israelite Proverbs:

He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty, and he who rules his spirit than he who takes a city-Pro. 16:32.

**Yoruba Wisdom:**

*Òkòtí a bábínújù, kì í pa eyẹ.*

A stone thrown at a bird in anger hardly it could kill the bird. Or actions taken in anger seldom achieve desired results.

**Moderation in Talking:****Israelite Wisdom:**

In the multitude of words sin is not lacking, but he who restrains his lips is wise-Pro. 10:19.

**Yoruba Wisdom:**

*Àpòjùòrò ni í mú'ni pe obalénikejèni.*

*Oro ka iya oba lara, o niounkareiya obo*

Literal translation:

Talking excessively is what makes one (inadvertently) refers to the king as a colleague.

The mother of the king is so impatient to the point that she calls herself "the mother of a monkey" instead of the king.

Moderation is it; too much of anything is bad; exercise self control always.

**Habitual Character****Israelite Proverbs:**

As a dog returns to his own vomit, so a fool repeats his folly-Pro. 26:11

**Yoruba Wisdom:**

*Èéfínniùwà; kòşéé fi pamó*

Character is like smoke; it cannot be covered up. No hypocrisy; we cannot pretend to be what we are not for very long; ultimately, who we really are will show through.

**Righteous Recompense, Justice and Equity:****Israelite Wisdom:**

If the righteous will be recompensed on the earth, how much more the ungodly and the sinner-Pro. 11:31

**Yoruba Wisdom:**

*A kòlètitorípéòbòàtìbejìjònjé ẹdun, kíòbòjeògèdè lóko  
kí a wágbáibejìlétíní'le.*

The monkey should not eat up some bananas at the farm and we should come home to slap the twins, simply because monkeys and twins share the same panegyrics. There should be justice and equity in the human society.

**Child Training and Discipline:****Israelite Wisdom:**

Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will depart from it-Pro. 22:6.

Chasten your son while there is hope, and do not set your heart on his destruction-Pro. 19:18

He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly-Pro. 13:24.

**Yoruba Wisdom:**

*Ògèdè dúdú ò yá á bùşán, ọmọburúkú ò yálùpa.*

As it is tough to take a bite of an unripe plantain, so it is tough to beat a stubborn child to death.

**The Sovereignty of God over Man's Endeavour:****Israelite Proverbs:**

The preparations of the heart belong to man, but the answer of the tongue is from the LORD-Pro. 16:1

**Yoruba Wise Saying:**

*Èyí ó wù á wí, t'Olúwalàşẹ.*

God has the final saying over the matters of any man. Man proposes, God disposes.

This study shows that the origins of wisdom in both ancient Israelite tradition and Yoruba tradition are similar. Ancient Israelite wisdom originated from family, clan and experience from the society before the era of the royal sages and the scribes. The role of the parents in teaching the young ones for future sake is similar to both wisdom traditions. Children are expected to take after certain family traditions and behaviours in Yoruba culture and both parents are expected to train the children for better family etiquettes so that they could be regarded as well trained children in the society. Where this is lacking, the blames and failures are shifted on the mothers in particular. The influence of other nations could not be underrated in the wisdom tradition of the ancient Israelite wisdom tradition and this is an area that cannot be confirmed in the Yoruba wisdom tradition. This is so because Yoruba religion is aboriginal and the culture is unique.

Through comparative approach adopted in this study, it is glaring that certain ethical issues and demands from the ancient Israelite Wisdom Tradition are equally found in the Yoruba Wisdom Tradition. The types of ethical issues and demands that Israelite wisdom addresses are equally addressed by the Yoruba Wisdom Tradition. This shows that wisdom is not limited to a particular race but international in nature. God had given other humans outside the chosen race in the Old Testament elements of general revelation in order to guide and preserve the human race.

### III. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Wisdom tradition be either in the ancient Mesopotamian world or ancient Israel or Yoruba nation started from the gleanings of the experience of man in the society to family circle before the scribal schools began to document them. The sages later added salt into it by borrowing leaves from other nations around them and incorporated them into their religious and socio-cultural beliefs and practices. Yoruba race cannot be relegated to background or sidetracked when we study Wisdom Tradition among nations. Through her wisdom tradition and wise sayings, the Yoruba have contributed to the moral and social-cultural practices and development of the human nations all over the world. The Yoruba wisdom tradition has revealed that God through providence guided the Yoruba through inner instincts, native knowledge, general revelation and wisdom where there were no special and prophetic revelations as it obtained in the ancient Israelite society. Besides, this has equally revealed the Yoruba are not inferior to other human race and nations both ancient and modern.

As ancient Israel moved away from revealed knowledge to existentialistic knowledge as experience taught them, which were coded and summed up wise sayings, the Yoruba also have similar experience through their folklores, fore songs, riddles, proverbs and sayings. This shows that the Yoruba nation also contributed to the moral uplift of the human race through her wise sayings and wisdom tradition. Besides, the Yoruba have lifted the moral standards of her people and the society at large through her wisdom tradition and wise saying.

Therefore, it is recommended if not imperative for the African biblical exegetes of the ancient Israelite wisdom to inculcate this in *paris-pasu* the Yoruba wisdom while expounding the Israelite wisdom. By doing this, it will make the ancient Israelite wisdom to be at home to the hearers. This will lead to the biblical contextualization of Christianity in the African land and before the Africans. Christianity, through this avenue will not be seen as foreign religion as perceived in some quarters. The Afro-centric reading of the Israelite wisdom will be enriched through the comparative reading with the Yoruba wisdom. The moral lessons and gains should be preserved for posterity in order to guide the new generations.

The African converts readily found in the Hebrew text similar sayings to their known religious, socio-cultural sayings and beliefs. These sayings as they show their similarities the Yoruba wisdom tradition, should enhance their understanding of the Christian Scripture they are familiar with. The African exegetes should endeavour to arm themselves with their knowledge of these sayings and incorporate them with the Yoruba wisdom as they proclaim the new gospel of the Christian natives. They should also be ready to challenge all the immoral deeds of both the leaders and laity within the church with the aid of these ethical issues and demands from both the ancient Israelite and the Yoruba wisdom tradition.

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