

# asian missions advance

89

Fall 2025 | Volume 31 | Issue 4

ISSN 2765-0936

Quarterly Bulletin of the Asia Missions Association *published by*  
the East-West Center for Missions Research & Development

## Reading Proverbs 1:1-7 Missionally

*Jaewoo Jeong*

### ABSTRACT

The Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament has not been taken seriously from a missionary perspective. One reason is that Proverbs does not contain elements of redemptive history that exist in other books, such as the covenant, temple, and Abraham's blessing. However, I claim that Proverbs can be considered a missiological book. Firstly, the book borrows the culture and wisdom of other countries to create Israel's own wisdom. Secondly, Proverbs clearly presents general revelation that can be applied to other cultures. God is proclaiming his revelation and salvation through the culture and traditions of human society. The contents of Proverbs can be seen appearing similarly in other countries' cultures and traditions. In particular, we can learn about God's general revelation through a comparative analysis of Korean traditional proverbs with the Book of Proverbs. Thirdly, Proverbs emphasizes the ethical aspect of missionary work. It provides missionary insight into how the redeemed people live among other peoples and cultures. In addition, it emphasizes the mission of stewardship in the relationship with nature, animals, and plants, and this is due to the creation theology that all living things were created by God. So, we can read Proverbs 1:1-7 from a missional hermeneutic. We can see the big picture of God's mission and how different parts of the Bible contribute to the grand story. Lastly, Proverbs can be effectively used as a tool for missions to various communities where evangelism is difficult.

### KEYWORDS

Proverbs, wisdom, culture, general revelation, Korean proverbs, creation theology, ethics, community, mission.

### INTRODUCTION

Can the Book of Proverbs be read missionally? While numerous scholars have examined the Old Testament from a missional perspective, I insist that Proverbs, a significant work of wisdom literature, had not yet been thoroughly explored.

The Book of Proverbs in the Old Testament has not been taken seriously from a missionary perspective. One reason is that Proverbs does not contain elements of redemptive history that exist in other books, such as the covenant, temple, and Abraham's blessing.

However, the Book of Proverbs communicates God's mission of cultivating wisdom and discipline for a fulfilling life in one's family and community. It also shapes communities for participation in God's ongoing redemptive witness.

### CONTENTS

- 1 Reading Proverbs 1:1-7 Missionally  
*Jaewoo Jeong*
- 15 Familial Relationships (Mutualism) of Frontier Missiology of Asia's House Church Networks  
*David S. Lim*
- 22 God's Mission and Ethical AI: Opportunities & Challenges for the future of Mission in Asia  
*Shankar Shikdar*
- 26 Missional Small Group: A House Church Model of Mosaikkirche Nordwest  
*Mariel R. Eberhard*
- 30 Two Sports as a Model for Intercultural Mission and Theological Education  
*Jim Harries*

This project will offer a missional reading of Proverbs 1:1–7. Such a reading is beneficial because, first, the Proverbs borrowed the culture and wisdom of other countries and created Israel’s own wisdom. Second, it clearly presents a general revelation that can be applied to other cultures. Third, it emphasizes the ethical aspect of missionary work, which provides missionary insight into how the redeemed people live among other peoples and cultures. Finally, it can be a powerful tool for mission work in various communities where direct mission work may not be possible.

My focus was primarily on Proverbs 1:1–7, although I also referenced other sections relevant to missions. First, I would like to explore missional hermeneutics. Next, I will examine the relationship between Proverbs and the cultures of surrounding nations. Then, I will investigate the general revelation of how the teachings of Proverbs can be applied to other cultures, especially Korean proverbs. Furthermore, I will explore the concept of community and its importance in participating in God’s mission. Finally, I aim to reveal the missional implications of Proverbs as a powerful tool for missionary work in regions where the gospel has difficulty penetrating. I will conclude with a summary that synthesizes all the insights gained from previous writings and presents recommendations.

## MISSIONAL HERMENEUTICS

First, I would like to explore missional hermeneutics. The methods of reading the Bible have changed. During the premodern era, subjective approaches to reading the Bible, such as for moral instruction, as a way of contemplation, or to support discipleship, were widespread. In the modern era, historical criticism rooted in logic and science gained prominence and it once became a standard to interpret the Bible. In the postmodern era, having a variety of interpretations is a crucial aspect in the academic world.

There are many ways to interpret the Bible,<sup>1</sup> but ultimately, I believe interpretation must be based on the Great Commandment (Deut. 6:5; Lev. 19:18; Matt. 22:36–40). It is important to note that Augustine’s well-known interpretive principle of *caritas* (love) can offer a theological justification for interpreting the biblical text in a way that leads to a greater understanding and love of God and our fellow human beings. This principle serves as a criterion for accurate interpretation.<sup>2</sup> Also, we need to read the text with sensitivity to the dynamics of social systems and their impact on local communities both ancient and contemporary. At the same time, as Leticia A.

Guardiola-Saenz suggests, all interpretations are culturally mediated, reflecting the readers’ social and cultural context. Therefore, the outcome of each interaction between the reader and the text is unique and never final.<sup>3</sup>

Historically, biblical hermeneutics has been developed by various scholars.<sup>4</sup> Due to the prevalence of pluralism in academia in the postmodern period, many perceive biblical interpretation to be subjective and unavoidably so. We have moved from a time when Scripture’s meaning was apparent and discoverable through historical criticism, separate from faith, to an era of uncertainty and rampant pluralism where any interpretation is as valid as hundreds of others. While faith is still welcome, it is often relativized. Historical criticism posed a risk of limiting the Bible to the past, whereas postmodernism threatens to make it so contemporary that we only hear the “echoes of our own voices.”<sup>5</sup>

As an alternative to this, instead of using the nineteenth-century Enlightenment model, a “conversation model” has been proposed which deals with questions and answers between the original meaning of the Bible and the contemporary context.<sup>6</sup> We should avoid assuming that we can separate what the Bible meant “back then” from what it means “now.” I argue that the conversation model is more suitable for interpreting the Bible in the postmodern

3. Leticia A. Guardiola-Saenz, “Borderless Women and Borderless Texts: A Cultural Reading of Matthew 15:21–28,” *Semeia*, no. 78 (1997): 71.

4. Biblical scholars have generated multiple interpretations. We can read the Bible from a variety of angles. For the unity of Scripture (unity is to look at Scripture’s narrative unity with four big movements: Creation, Fall, Redemption, and Glory). See Ellen F. Davis and Richard B. Hays, *The Art of Reading Scripture* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 2003). For spiritual reading, see Angela Lou Harvey, *Spiritual Reading: A Study of the Christian Practice of Reading Scripture* (Cambridge, England: James Clarke & Co, 2016). For feminist reading, see Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Whispering the Word: Hearing Women’s Stories in the Old Testament*, 1st ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005). For minority reading, see Esau McCaulley, *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as An Exercise in Hope* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 2020). For ecological reading, see Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009); David G. Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology, Biblical Challenges in the Contemporary World* (New York: Routledge, 2014). For missional reading, the following books are helpful. Michael W. Goheen, *Reading the Bible Missionally, The Gospel and Our Culture Series* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016); Richard Bauckham, *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in A Postmodern World* (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 2003); Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2006); Walter C. Jr. Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel As a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012); Johannes Nissen, *New Testament and Mission: Historical and Hermeneutical Perspectives*, 2nd ed. (Frankfurt am Main: P. Lang, 2002); Arthur F. Glasser, *Announcing the Kingdom: The Story of God’s Mission in the Bible* (Grand Rapids, Mich: Baker Academic, 2003); Donald Senior, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1983); Andreas J. Kostenberger, *Salvation to the Ends of the Earth: A Biblical Theology of Mission, New Studies in Biblical Theology 11* (Leicester, England: Apollos, 2001).

5. Craig G. Bartholomew et al., *Renewing Biblical Interpretation, Scripture and Hermeneutics series*, v. 1 (Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 2000), xxv.

6. Joel B. Green, *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995), 329–330.

1. Richard B. Hays proposes seven exegesis criteria: “availability, volume, recurrence, thematic coherence, historical plausibility, history of interpretation, and satisfaction.” Richard B. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, New edition (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1993), 29–32.

2. Ellen F. Davis, *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 3.

era because the original intention of the Bible is not fixed but can be changed or altered to a new meaning according to different contexts and times. Missional hermeneutics also emerged within such a contemporary context.

How do mission and theology of mission relate to biblical interpretation? Biblical scholars have yet to come to a consensus on the significance of mission for interpreting Scripture. One of the reasons for this is that the concept of mission has historically been variously defined. For a considerable period, the mission was used to describe the intentional efforts of the church to spread the Christian faith among unbelievers, particularly in foreign cultures and countries. This understanding of mission has historically made it difficult for biblical scholars to identify mission in the Old Testament, as few specific cross-cultural mission activities are recounted therein. Another tendency for identifying mission in the Bible has been to focus on “sending texts” such as the Great Commission in the New Testament, particularly the version in Matthew 28:18–20.<sup>7</sup>

Missiology and biblical scholarship have traditionally been divided regarding missional interpretation of the Bible, but recent trends indicate that a missional hermeneutic could now be appropriate. According to Michael Barram, this approach prioritizes the Christian community’s missiological “location” for interpreting Scripture in a critical and faithful way. Our personal situations, experiences, characteristics, and presuppositions inevitably influence our interpretation of the text.<sup>8</sup> For example, when Black Americans read the Bible, they tend to read and interpret it from their own perspective.<sup>9</sup> Asians read the Bible through Asian culture and traditions. That is why aspects such as the ideology of Confucianism are important to them. Martin Kähler stated that mission is “the mother of theology” by which he meant theology originated as a supporting manifestation of the Christian message. Bosch, who popularized Kähler’s dictum in his groundbreaking work, *Transforming Mission*, builds on this insight asserting that theology originally emerged as a natural part of the Christian mission. He argues that writers of the New Testament wrote the Scriptures “in the context of an ‘emergency situation’ of a church which, because of its missionary encounter with the world, was forced to theologize.”<sup>10</sup> In a similar fashion, Dana Robert mentions that the New Testament is not a systematic book of theology, but rather a book of missionary character in which early

Christians bear witness to what they had seen.<sup>11</sup>

What is a missional hermeneutic? Goheen introduces the three central aspects: “reading the whole Scripture with mission as a central theme, reading Scripture to understand what mission really is, and reading Scripture to equip the church for its missional task.”<sup>12</sup> Wright argues that missional hermeneutic means: (1) God’s purpose for his whole creation, including redemption and eschatology; (2) God’s purpose for human life; (3) God’s election of Israel; (4) the centrality of Jesus Christ; and (5) God’s calling of the church.<sup>13</sup> I would like to recommend a missionary reading of Proverbs from two perspectives. We read Proverbs, first, with mission as the central theme, and second, as God’s purpose for human life.

According to Bauckham, there are two methods that the Bible uses to lead us in a missional direction. First is a canonical hermeneutic, “a way of reading the Bible as a whole.” Second is a narrative hermeneutic, which means the Bible as a whole tells a God’s story. We need to read the Scripture with a canonical hermeneutic and a narrative hermeneutic (God’s story and our own stories).<sup>14</sup>

Wright also claims that we must read the Bible messianically and missionally. A missional reading of the Bible means a reading that explores its dynamic significance in God’s mission for Israel and the world and its relevance to the Christian mission today.<sup>15</sup> Adopting a missional hermeneutic can help reconcile the tension between theology and mission. In this way, we can read the Scripture holistically.

## GENERAL REVELATION

### Relationship with Other Cultures

Second, I insist that the Proverbs borrowed the culture and wisdom of other countries and created Israel’s own wisdom. Many scholars argue that the Book of Proverbs was greatly influenced by the culture and traditions of surrounding countries. Paul R. House claims that “Proverbs is a product of the ancient Near Eastern Wisdom tradition in general and the Israelite Wisdom tradition in particular.”<sup>16</sup> James B. Pritchard’s edited volume, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament (ANET)*. He claims, “The Egyptians delighted in compilations of wise sayings, which were

7. Series; No. 16 (Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991), 16–20; Michael Barram, “The Bible, Mission, and Social Location: Toward a Missional Hermeneutic,” *Interpretation (Richmond)* 61, no. 1 (2007): 42–58. Many Christians and mission leaders have considered “Great Commission” in Matthew 28: 18–20 as the only biblical foundation for mission. Other passages are Mark 16:15–16; Luke 24:44–49; John 20:19–23; and Acts 1:7–8.

8. Barram, “The Bible, Mission, and Social Location”: 42–58.

9. See Esau McCauley, *Reading While Black: African American Biblical Interpretation as An Exercise in Hope* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2020).

10. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 16.

11. Dana Lee Robert, *Christian Mission: How Christianity Became a World Religion, Blackwell Brief Histories of Religion Series* (Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 11.

12. Michael W. Goheen, *Reading the Bible Missionally, The Gospel and Our Culture Series* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016), 15.

13. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2006), 67.

14. Christopher J. H. Wright, *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible’s Grand Narrative* (Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2006), 67.

15. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 24.

16. Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1998), 440.



directive for a successful life."<sup>17</sup>

Another scholar, Holscher argues that the so-called older proverb literature is from the Persian period. The final version of the Book of the Proverbs may have been completed after the Exile. However, wisdom literature existed in the Fertile Crescent region even before the book of Hebrews emerged in history. This similarity confirms that "Solomon's proverbs were part of an international, pan-oriental, wisdom literature" (cf. 1 Kgs. 4:29-34; 5:9-14).<sup>18</sup>

According to Giovanni Pettinato, the royal archives at Tell-Mardikh (Ebla) had some tablets that contained a collection of proverbs. It can be inferred that the tablets date back to a period between 2400 and 2250 BCE.<sup>19</sup> This ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature sheds light on the theology of Proverbs, covering topics such as authorship, literary forms, structure, arrangement, transmission, and exegesis. The holy number "30" symbolizes complete and perfect teaching (Prov. 22:20). Yahweh is depicted as the one who "weighs the heart" and stands at the judgment of the dead next to the scales with a human heart (Prov. 24:12).<sup>20</sup> This idea is based on the ancient Egyptian concept of judgment after death, where the deceased was weighed by the god Thoth.<sup>21</sup>

The Wisdom Literature, which includes Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes, is a type of literature that was prevalent in ancient Near Eastern culture for over a millennium prior to the Israelites settling in Canaan. The Israelites were aware of this and even held the wisdom of other nations in high regard while praising the wisdom of their own. For instance, when the historian mentions that Solomon's wisdom surpassed that of wise men from other lands, it is meant as a compliment, as those individuals were already recognized for their exceptional wisdom (1 Kgs. 4:30-31).<sup>22</sup>

17. James B. Pritchard, *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3d ed., with supplement. (Princeton, N. J: Princeton University Press, 1969), 412; Carol L. Meyers, *Exodus*, New Cambridge Bible Commentary (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 26. John J. Pilch, "Proverbs in Middle East North Africa (MENA) Cultural Context," *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 45, no. 4 (2015): 202-14. John J. Pilch compares the Book of Proverbs and Middle East North Africa (MENA) and finds a close similarity. He suggests four cultural scenarios for understanding the Book of Proverbs: (1) "normative inconsistency," (2) "collectivistic personality," (3) "three-zone personality," and (4) "secrecy, deception, and lying." Normative inconsistency makes a satisfying and fulfilling life possible despite contradictions. Collectivistic personalities make a sharp distinction between in-groups and out-groups. Every person is understood to be embedded in others and have his or her identity only in relation to these others who formed this fundamental group. There are three zone personality. Human beings consist of three mutually interpenetrating yet distinguishable zones of interaction with persons and things in the human environment symbolically interpreted: the zone of emotion-fused thought, the zone of self-expressive speech, and the zone of purposeful action. Honor is a core cultural value using secrecy, deception, and lying. Lying is justified for the maintenance of honor.

18. Bruce K. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs. Chapters 1:1-15*, New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004), 29.

19. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs. Chapters 1:1-15*, 29.

20. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs. Chapters 1:1-15*, 31.

21. Gerhard von Rad, *Old Testament Theology*. (New York: Harper, 1962), 437.

22. Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs. Chapters 1:1-15*, 31.

In the Old Testament, there are several nations known for their class of wise men, including Babylon, Edom, Tyre, Assyria, and Persia. However, the most prominent ones are Egypt and Babylon, which is evident in the wisdom texts that survived from those locations. Egypt's wisdom texts include "Ptahhotep, Merikare, Amenemhet, Ani, Amenemope, and Onksheshonqy." On the other hand, Babylon's wisdom texts include the "Counsels of Wisdom, Man and his God, Ludlul, the Dialogue of Pessimism, the Babylonian Theodicy, and Ahikar." These texts can be read in translation, and there are various detailed comparisons made between their teachings and Old Testament proverbial literature.<sup>23</sup>

According to Wright, it is evident from these comparisons that Israel had a significant amount of interaction with their counterparts in neighboring nations. The Wisdom literature stands out as the most internationally influenced. This is demonstrated in two ways. Firstly, it addresses many topics commonly found in other cultures' wisdom texts.<sup>24</sup> Secondly, it also addresses differences with other cultures. There are three main uniquenesses of Israel's Wisdom Literature: (1) integration, (2) absence of deities and idols, and (3) monotheistic ethic.<sup>25</sup> Therefore, Israel was willing to incorporate wisdom materials from other nations, while also carefully evaluating and modifying them based on their own beliefs before seamlessly integrating them into their sacred Scriptures.<sup>26</sup>

The significance of royal wisdom in the ANE is confirmed in 1 Kings 4:29-34 and 10:23-25, which may also connect to Solomon's trade and cultural relations with Egypt. Additionally, chapter headings in Proverbs 30:1 and 31:1 suggest the existence of other sources of proverbial collections that are not well-known. These facts indicate that wisdom has its roots in common experience and was widely embraced.<sup>27</sup>

23. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 442-443.

24. These include fundamental social and relational skills within society and particularly in positions of power, as well as concerns about moral order and social stability, personal, familial, and political success, happiness, and peace, reflections on divine justice in the world, the absurdities of life and how to handle them, and the challenge of enduring suffering, particularly when it seems undeserved. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 443.

25. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 443.

26. origins were not Israelite. Additionally, it is widely accepted that Proverbs 22:1-24:22 drew heavily from the Egyptian text, *Wisdom of Amenemope*. Tremper Longman III's concise commentary on Proverbs provides a systematic comparison of the wisdom found in Proverbs 22:17-24:22 and other ancient Near Eastern wisdom texts, highlighting numerous similarities and common themes. Another example is a notable absence of belief in other deities and a rejection of magical, divinatory, and occult practices of neighboring cultures. Israel's sages did not promote actions that were forbidden by Israel's laws. Also, The Wisdom literature warns against idolatry through metaphorical personifications of Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly in Proverbs 1-9. Lady Wisdom represents God, the source of true wisdom, while Lady Folly represents other gods who lead to death. A polytheistic worldview can lead to cynicism regarding morality and fatalism concerning life, but these attitudes are not prevalent in Israel's teachings. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 443-444; Longman, *How to Read Proverbs*, 77.

27. James D. G. Dunn and J. W. Rogerson, *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003), 438.

## PROVERBS AND GENERAL REVELATION

Proverbs is closely related to general revelation. General revelation refers to general truths that

can be known about God through nature (Psalm 19:1–4; Romans 1:20). Special revelation refers to more specific truths that can be known about God through the supernatural.<sup>28</sup>

What is the relationship between general revelation and the Proverbs? What is important here is that wisdom came to humans first. The consequences of those who accept it and those who do not are recorded in Proverbs 1:20–23. The teachings of Proverbs are rooted in general revelation rather than special revelation, with a theological basis that suggests God is intricately involved in people's everyday lives. By reflecting on the workings of life, we can gain valuable insights into the truth about life. This principle also extends to teachings expressed through cultural traditions and experiences.

At the same time, Proverbs teaches lessons in the context of Yahweh, the God of Israel. Life before Yahweh requires taking account of insights from experience and tradition, expressed both inside and outside of Israel. These insights must be placed in the context of Yahweh. That principle applies to some ancient Egyptian works, such as Ptahhotep, Ani, and Amenemope, which contain discourses and sayings known as "Instructions."<sup>29</sup>

Catholic theologian Avery Dulles outlined five models of revelation: (1) "Revelation as doctrine." This view emphasizes the "propositional content of revelation" and sees faith as "a reasonable act of trust." (2) "Revelation as history." It is a story and narrative in Scripture. (3) "Revelation as inner experience." This considers revelation as an interior experience of grace or communication with God. (4) "Revelation as dialectical presence." God is not an object to be known by inference from nature or history, by direct perception or by propositional teaching. (5) "Revelation as new awareness." Revelation is an expansion of consciousness or shift in perspective that engages people to join in works of social liberation.<sup>30</sup>

John Calvin claims that "Without knowledge of self, there is no knowledge of God"<sup>31</sup> and "without knowledge of God there is no knowledge of self."<sup>32</sup> Calvin's argument explores the mutual relationship between God and human beings. However, this does

not mean that human reason is the starting point of all thinking, as rationalism believes, nor does it mean that human experience itself is the epistemological basis, as empiricism asserts. This is because autonomous reason and experience are based on the premise that any knowledge is possible without God. The general revelation is not effective for salvation, but it is useful for knowing God. The knowledge that Calvin refers to is not an intellectual capacity or a theory. Rather, it is a living encounter with God.<sup>33</sup>

Karl Rahner holds that God's grace is present throughout creation. Further, human beings are endowed with what he calls the "supernatural existential." The supernatural existential is the component of the human being that makes it possible for the human being to be a recipient of God's grace. It is that which makes human beings able to respond to God's offer of grace. Because of this, Rahner argues that all human beings have a prethematic (subconscious) awareness of and orientation to God, if not an explicit awareness of and orientation toward God. Even the person who denies the existence of God has this orientation, at a minimum, on the subconscious level. All human beings have an innate awareness and inclination toward God, even if they are not consciously aware of it.<sup>34</sup>

What aspects of the Bible's teachings about humanity are relevant to our exploration of biblical mission? According to Christopher J. Wright, the Bible's affirmation that human beings are created in the image of God (Gen. 1–3) implies at least four significant truths about humanity that are essential to biblical mission.

First, regardless of culture or religious worldview, human beings, made in God's image, can hear God's voice and benefit from the gospel's life-giving potential for sinners and rebels. Second, all humans are accountable to God. This is the basis of universal biblical ethics. People must answer to God and have an ethical responsibility towards each other, regardless of culture or religion. Though nations may not know Yahweh's law, they understand ethical responsibility (Ps. 33:13–15). Third, all humans have dignity and equality, regardless of gender, ethnicity, religion, or status. We are created in God's image, which sets us apart from animals and unites us. Christian mission should treat everyone with respect and love, as it's an essential implication of our shared humanity. Lastly, the biblical gospel is universal and relevant to everyone. Christian mission aims to help people become more fully human through the transformative power of the gospel. It restores the common glory of what it means to be truly human—a man or woman

28. Belgic Confession, Article 2: The Means by Which We Know God, Accessed in May 25, 2024, <https://www.crjna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/belgic-confession#toc-article-2-the-means-by-which-we-know-god>.

29. John Goldingay, *Proverbs*, Commentaries for Christian Formation (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023), 6.

30. Gerald R. McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions?: Jesus, Revelation & Religious Traditions* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), 61–63.

31. McNeill, *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*, 35. In the following, Calvin, Institutes, Chapters and Sections, and numbers are indicated. For example, Calvin, Institutes, 1.1.1.

32. Calvin, *Institutes*, 1.1.2.

33. Sung-Won Jung, "John Calvin's Understanding of the General Revelation and Its Apologetical Significance," *Korea Reformed Journal (KRJ)* 12, (2009):335–370.

34. Mary M. Veeneman, *Introducing Theological Method: A Survey of Contemporary Theologians and Approaches* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017), 51.

created in the image of God.<sup>35</sup>

When we read Proverbs, we feel comfortable with proverbs because they are a universal phenomenon in various cultures and societies, especially traditional societies. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, an African woman scholar, highlights the existence of numerous African proverbs that can assist in crafting a theology of creation that integrates both the African cosmology, which acknowledges God's presence in all aspects of creation, and the biblical theology of creation, which recognizes Jesus Christ as the Wisdom and Word of creation.<sup>36</sup>

Like Africans, Koreans are experiencing proverbs similarly. When I first encountered the Book of Proverbs, it felt like I was listening to a traditional Korean proverb, and I barely noticed any foreign parts. I would like to introduce Korean traditions and proverbs that are similar to the Book of Proverbs. Both ancient Israel and Korea are surrounded by unique geopolitical environments, powerful countries like Egypt, Babylon, and Roman Empire for Israel, and China, Russia, and Japan for Korea. They have struggled to survive through centuries of suffering throughout their history. Hebrew Proverbs are expressions of wisdom based on the fear of God. It deals with the daily lives of ancient Israelites in Canaan, the fierce battlefield of hegemonic powers. Korea also survived as a weak country, sometimes as a colony and sometimes as an independent country, among powerful countries around it. We have lived under the influence of China above and Japan below, exchanging political, cultural, and economic benefits. A proverb is a short saying/proverb that condenses folk wisdom and values handed down from ancient times. It is the crystallization of wisdom that contains the Korean people's long life experiences and the lessons of self-discipline and conduct. Similar to proverbs, there are aphorisms or maxims, which are short sayings that fit the logic and can teach a lesson.<sup>37</sup>

### Comparison of the Book of Proverbs and Korean Proverbs

I will compare the Book of Proverbs and Korean proverbs. I will deal with practical issues such as disciplining children, modeling, words, and so on.

#### Discipline Children

*"Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray (Prov. 22:6)."*

*"A needle thief becomes a cow thief" (Korean proverb).*

These proverbs mean that if the first small fault or bad habit is repeated, it will result in a later big fault or

mistake; There is a saying, "Habits from three years of age to eighty," meaning that once a habit is ingrained, it is not easily changed and persists until old age. This means that we train the child to follow the path of obedience and godliness, taking into account his or her nature, and talents. Departure or time. Habits and habits at the time of writing have an influence until the end (Cf. Prov. 13:24; 29:15).<sup>38</sup>

*"Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him" (Prov. 22:15).*

*"Give your precious child one more beating" (Korean proverb).*

Both proverbs mean that you should discipline your children so that they grow up properly. This proverb is intended to encourage one to be more diligent even though one is working diligently. "Do not fail to discipline a child; you may whip him with a whip, but he will not die; if you whip him, you will save his soul from Sheol" (Prov. 23:13-14). Today, spanking is considered taboo, but children still need to be disciplined. This also means disciplining children from a young age. It is a wise prescription for children's education to correct children's instinctive tendencies towards evil or their self-perpetrating personalities. This means that rather than giving your children what they want right away, you can teach them value in waiting.<sup>39</sup>

#### Modeling

*"If a ruler listens to falsehood, all his officials will be wicked" (Prov. 29:12).*

*"When the water above is clear, the water below is clear" (Korean proverb).*

Leaders and superiors must behave properly and honestly so that subordinates do not make mistakes. The logic is that if flattery and deception are used in the relationship between the ruler and the ruled, evil deeds will continue to gain the favor of the ruling class, leading to corruption and the destruction of the community.<sup>40</sup>

#### You Reap What You Sow

*"The iniquities of the wicked ensnare them, and they are caught in the toils of their sin" (Prov. 5:22).*

*"If not, will there be smoke in the chimney?" (Korean proverb).*

If you sow evil, you will reap evil results and be bound by the causality of sin. The law of action is to reap what you sow. If there is a cause, there will be

35. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 421-424.

36. Mercy Amba Oduyoye, "The Church of the Future, Its Mission and Theology: A View from Africa," *Theology Today (Ephrata, Pa.)* 52, no. 4 (1996): 501.

37. Jong-Keun Lee, "Hebrew Proverbs and Korean Proverbs," *The Korean Journal of Old Testament Studies* 27, no. 1 (2021): 257.

38. Lee, "Hebrew Proverbs and Korean Proverbs," 259.

39. Lee, "Hebrew Proverbs and Korean Proverbs," 267

40. Lee, "Hebrew Proverbs and Korean Proverbs," 260.



a result. "Do not deceive yourself... For whatever a person sows, that will he also reap" (Gal. 6:7). In Korea, this means that there is no smoke when the fire is not lit in the kitchen furnace. This is an expression that emphasizes the fact that everything has a cause to have an effect all.<sup>41</sup>

### Words

*"Death and life are in the power of the tongue, and those who love it will eat its fruits" (Prov. 18:21).*

*"Even if your mouth is crooked, speak straight" (Korean proverb).*

A person's fate is determined by how he uses his tongue, and in the New Testament, Jesus said, "I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak" (Matt. 12:36).

In any case, you must speak the right and correct words, which means that you must not distort your words. Instead, convey the facts as they are. There is a saying, "A bird hears what you say during the day, and a mouse hears what you say at night." This means that no matter how secretly you say something, it can easily leak out, so you should always be careful about what you say. There are similar passages in Proverbs: "The tongue of the wise gives knowledge well, but the mouth of fools pours out foolishness" (Prov. 15:2). "He opens his mouth to give wisdom, and his tongue speaks the law of kindness" (Prov. 31:26).<sup>42</sup>

*"The words of a whisperer are like delicious morsels; they go down into the inner parts of the body" (Prov. 18:8).*

*"A horse without feet travels a thousand miles" (Korean proverb).*

Both proverbs mean that you should always be careful about what you say because gossiping about others is easy to hear and is easily accepted. There is a saying that words do not have legs like horses, but like horses, they can travel as far as a thousand miles. The fallen nature of humans is prone to accepting and spreading negative rumors (cf. Prov. 20:27, 30; 26:22).<sup>43</sup>

*"A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in a setting of silver" (Prov. 25:11).*

*"A word can pay off a thousand debts" (Korean proverb).*

A word used appropriately according to the time and place means that it goes well together like good-looking and fragrant fruit on a beautiful plate. A similar expression means that difficult or impossible problems can be solved just by saying the right words for the situation. Even if you have a lot of debt, it can

be forgiven depending on what you say, which means that one word is very important.<sup>44</sup>

*"When words are many, transgression is not lacking, but the prudent are restrained in speech. The tongue of the righteous is choice silver; the mind of the wicked is of little worth." (Prov. 10:19–20).*

*"If the word you say is good, then the word coming back at you is good"; "Why should I spit on a smiling face" (Korean proverb).*

Talking a lot inevitably leads to conversations about indiscreet, untruthful, and vulgar topics, which ultimately lead to faults. Therefore, controlling one's mouth is wisdom. The tongue of the righteous speaks edifying words, like pure, refined silver without any impurities. The idea is to speak with a smiling face and with an attitude of truth and love. Making this posture a habit will bring good results, such as not spitting on a smiling face.<sup>45</sup> Both Israel and Korea value the skill of speaking and share many common expressions and proverbs.

### Foolishness

*"One's own folly leads to ruin, yet the heart rages against the Lord" (Prov. 19:3).*

*"If things go well, it's because I did well. If things go wrong, it's my ancestors' fault" (Korean proverb)*

Because people are foolish, they lack or have no understanding or sense, so they do not know their own ways, and they justify them according to their evil inclinations and blame God for their foolish actions. To escape from human foolishness, one must coolly reflect on oneself and be humble (cf. 2 Chr. 28:9; Isa. 30:30).

This refers to not blaming one's own mistakes or shortcomings when something goes wrong but only blaming others or the world. This is a warning against the attitude of saying that when things go well, it is because you did well, and when things don't go well, you blame others or blame it on fate. Similar proverbs include "The blind man reprimands the stream." The meaning is that the blind man who falls into the river does not think about his fault and blames only the river. A person who blames others for his fault. In a similar case, "I don't know that my face is dirty, so I just scold the mirror."<sup>46</sup>

### Man Proposes, God Disposes

*"The human mind plans the way, but the LORD directs the steps" (Prov. 16:9; cf. 19:21).*

*"Su In Sa Dae Cheon Myeong (Heaven helps those who help themselves)" (Korea proverb).*

41. Lee, "Hebrew Proverbs and Korean Proverbs," 260–261.

42. Lee, "Hebrew Proverbs and Korean Proverbs," 261.

43. Lee, "Hebrew Proverbs and Korean Proverbs," 264.

44. Lee, "Hebrew Proverbs and Korean Proverbs," 264–265.

45. Lee, "Hebrew Proverbs and Korean Proverbs," 265.

46. Lee, "Hebrew Proverbs and Korean Proverbs," 261–262.

These proverbs mean that people plan things, but it is heaven that makes them happen. A plan that is contrary to heaven's will only leads to futile results. No matter how much humans plan and proceed, if heaven does not help, a favorable environment or conditions for achievement are not created. "Su In Sa Dae Cheon Myeong" means that people do their best and wait for heaven's will. It is also a word of warning against regarding the positive results of something as natural human results. The Bible says, "Unless the Lord builds the house, those who build it labor in vain. Unless the Lord guards the city, the watchman keeps awake in vain" (Ps. 127:1).<sup>47</sup>

### *Commonalities, Differences, and Contributions*

The Book of Proverbs and Korean proverbs have similarities and differences in content. The common aspects are as follows. First, we see that both cultures enriched their lives through a particularly large number of proverbs and sayings. This appears to be based on the shared experience of hardship between both Israelite and Korean cultures. Second, Proverbs and Korean proverbs are all meaningful words that have been widely used for a long time. These are things that provide diversity in communication and expression in various situations in life and help promote smooth relationships. Third, both aim for expressions with meaning and wit, and the style is in the form of poetry. Fourth, some things must be inherited in spirit but reinterpreted in application. For example, Proverbs says to spank children for education (Prov. 20:30), but now spanking children is considered taboo in Korea. Derogatory expressions against women, such as the proverb that says that when a hen crows, the family will be ruined, run counter to the trend of gender equality, and we need to reflect on their literal meaning.<sup>48</sup>

Also, there are differences between the two types of proverbs. First, Hebrew Proverbs are characterized above all by being based on theism. While the tenor of Proverbs is based on the fear of God, Korean proverbs use the term "heaven" to refer to God, but there is no mention of God as clearly expressed as in Hebrew Proverbs. Second, Hebrew Proverbs and Korean proverbs are in the form of poetry, but Korean proverbs have a more metrical aspect. Most Korean proverbs have a rhyme structure that is pleasant to listen to and easy to remember.<sup>49</sup>

Proverbs is the daily life of the Hebrews in Canaan and the wisdom literature of the Ancient Near East. It especially reflects Egyptian literature. It summarizes the principles of daily application of Hebrew religious teachings. It is based on theism and is an expression of wisdom and fear of Jehovah. On the other hand, Korean proverbs, which have suffered from threats and conflicts from world hegemonies throughout

history, are the crystallization of wisdom and rules of conduct that contain long life experiences. They mainly consist of short sayings that condense folk wisdom and values and a rhyme structure that is easy to listen to and remember. They must involve customs handed down from ancient times; they are popular and popular among the public, and instructive in presenting life's teachings and policies. This means that it must be concise in form and have an implicit meaning appropriate to the situation in content. Hebrew Proverbs and Korean proverbs have similarities and differences. The divine origin of Proverbs and its use appears to have contributed to opening insight into the possibilities of challenging the limitations of life. Especially in times of crisis, further systematizing, establishing, and utilizing Hebrew Proverbs and Korean proverbs is expected to enhance the biblical-theological value of Korean society in suffering.<sup>50</sup>

### **ETHICAL LIFE**

Third, I argue that Proverbs emphasizes an ethical life. Overland explains that verse 3 starts with "equity," צְדָקָה (*tsedeq*) which means moral and fair exchange. Morality is the subject to be taught. To cultivate ethical character, one must already possess wisdom enough to withstand the inevitable pain of reproof (1:3a).<sup>51</sup> He translates *tsedeq* as "equity" while others use "righteousness." מִשְׁפָּט (mishpat) can be translated as "justice" and מִשְׁשָׁר (meyshar) as "equity."

The Old Testament frequently uses the phrase "keeping the way of the LORD" or "walking in the way of the LORD" as a metaphor to describe Israel's ethical code. This metaphor implies following the path of God rather than the ways of other gods, nations, sinners, or one's own way. This implies that Israel was on a journey guided by God's example and required to mirror his moral requirements to become a visible exemplar to other nations of the nature and character of their God (Deut. 4:5-8).<sup>52</sup> Those who are chosen are bound to have responsibilities. Otherwise, we have no choice but to fall into ethnocentrism. This responsibility is an ethical life. How to live as God's people in relationship with neighbors and foreign countries is a missionary life.

Bosch explains, "Mission is God's turning to the world in respect of creation, care, redemption and consummation."<sup>53</sup> The scope of the mission reaches beyond evangelistic outreach to affect all people in all aspects of their existence. He continually insists that the concept of mission is prevalent throughout the entire Bible. Rather than simply selecting specific verses to support his argument, he identifies four

47. Lee, "Hebrew Proverbs and Korean Proverbs," 265-266.

48. Lee, "Hebrew Proverbs and Korean Proverbs," 267-268.

49. Lee, "Hebrew Proverbs and Korean Proverbs," 268-269.

50. Lee, "Hebrew Proverbs and Korean Proverbs," 269-270.

51. Paul Overland, *Proverbs*, Apollos Old Testament Commentary 15 (London, England: Apollos, 2022), 37-40.

52. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 363.

53. Bosch, *Transforming Mission*, 391.



hermeneutical principles in both the Old and New Testaments: compassion, history, suffering, and conduct. In the same way, Donald Senior argues that the Bible does not provide a specific formula for proclaiming the Word of God but suggests the “biblical patterns of evangelization.”<sup>54</sup>

### Compassion

The first principle is compassion, where God is portrayed as the defender of the weak, afflicted, and oppressed.<sup>55</sup> The purpose of the election of Israel was to service for other nations. Israel, however, did not fulfill the duty of election through the Old Testament. Despite Israel’s failure to be a servant for other nations, God is compassionate without no boundaries.<sup>56</sup>

There are many compassion verses in Proverbs. 2:8 (Guards the paths of justice); 8:15–16 (kings and rulers do justice and right); 8:20 (Walk in the way of righteousness); 12:10 (taking care of animals); 14:21, 31 (Have pity on those in need); 17:5 (Concern of poverty, disaster); 19:17 (pity the poor); 21:13 (Listen to the cry of the poor); 22:2 (The Lord is the maker of the rich and the poor), 22:23 (The Lord pleads the poor and the afflicted); 23:10 (Do not encroach on the field of orphans); 28:3 (A ruler who oppresses the poor), 28:27 (Gives to the poor).

### HISTORY

The second principle is history, where the Old Testament highlights God’s interactions with Israel. The Old Testament reveals the enormous missionary significance of God’s dealing with Israel. God is the God of history who saved the Israelites from Egypt and made a covenant with them at Mount Sinai. History is the arena of God’s activity. This becomes apparent in the call of Abraham (Gen. 12:1–3).<sup>57</sup>

God’s election of Abraham promises blessing to the nations. God called Abraham and made a covenant (Gen. 18:18–19).<sup>58</sup> Kaiser claims that Abraham’s blessing in Genesis 12:3 is present throughout the Bible, from Genesis to the New Testament.<sup>59</sup> The interpretation of “blessing” has been in debate until recently. He argues that God’s promise to Abraham in Genesis 12:3 is for the sake of all nations. He utilized an interpretation that focused on Gentiles. He recognizes that the verb “to bless” has different interpretations and can be translated passively rather than reflexively, meaning that “all people on earth

will be blessed” by Abraham rather than they “will bless themselves.” Most scholars have interpreted reflexively that nations would say, “May we be blessed like Abraham.”<sup>60</sup>

The blessing of God given to Abraham was intended to reach people groups as well as nations. Paul describes these words as “the gospel in advance” (Gal. 3:8 NIV). Blessing for the nations is the bottom line of God’s promise to Wright, *The Mission of God*, 216. Abraham.<sup>61</sup> Genesis 12:1–3 is also universal. The outcome of God’s blessing of Abraham and commanding Abraham himself to be a blessing would be a blessing for “all the kindship groups of the earth.”<sup>62</sup>

Proverbs indirectly deals with God’s salvation history through Israel. 8:35 (life); 9:3–6 (Invitation), 13–18 (Folly’s invitation); 14:12 (A way to the death); 16:26 (A way to the death); 18:10 (The name of the Lord is a strong tower); 19:23 (The fear of the Lord is life); 20:7 (The righteous walk in integrity), 20:22 (The Lord helps); 24:12 (Repay according to the deeds); 28:13 (Confess transgressions), 28:18 (Integrity is safe), 28:26 (Wisdom is safe); 29:25 (Trusting in the Lord is secure); 30:5 (God is a shield).

### SUFFERING

The third principle is suffering, where God’s witness is realized through national disasters and Israel’s role as a “kingdom of priests” who serve through innocent suffering for the benefit of others. Israel was allocated a priestly function in the world, and such service can consist of suffering for the sake of others (Exod. 19:5–6). Being God’s witness to the world does not mean an aggressive campaign with much verbiage but silent suffering on behalf of others (Isa. 53). In the deepest humiliation of the history of Israel due to the captivity, kings and princes will draw nearer to Israel. “Kings will see and arise, Princes will also bow down, Because of the LORD who is faithful, the Holy One of Israel who has chosen You” (Isa. 49:7).<sup>63</sup>

The Book of Proverbs was written over several periods and was completed during the Babylonian captivity. During their captivity, the Israelites went through national hardships during the captivity, similar to their experiences in Egypt. The Book of Proverbs itself does not contain much information about suffering.

### CONDUCT

The fourth principle is conduct, where actions speak louder than words, and it is essential to be resent for others. Proclamation is not just spoken words but the manifestation of service. To witness is to

54. Donald Senior, *The Biblical Foundations for Mission* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1983), 332

55. David J Bosch, “Hermeneutical Principles in the Biblical Foundation for Mission,” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 17, no. 4 (1993): 443.

56. Walter C. Jr. Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel As a Light to the Nations* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2012), 69–70.

57. Bosch, “Hermeneutical Principles in the Biblical Foundation for Mission,” 445.

58. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 358.

59. Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, xi–xii

60. Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, 19.

61. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 194.

62. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 216.

63. Bosch, “Hermeneutical Principles in the Biblical Foundation for Mission,” 445

exist and experience the mission of being there for others (Isa. 42:18–20; 48:8–13). This is the centripetal dimension of mission in the Old Testament.<sup>64</sup> Israel's specific mission was more centripetal than centrifugal. People of the Old Testament played a passive role in witnessing the Word of God; rather, people from other nations did come to Zion to seek God (centripetal).<sup>65</sup>

God chose Abraham with the intention of creating a community that reflects God's character, particularly in terms of righteousness and justice. This community's existence is crucial for God's plan of blessing the nations to come to fruition. There is no biblical mission without biblical ethics, as the ethical quality of life for the people of God is inseparable from God's ethical demand for the community to be a blessing to the nations (Gen. 18:19).<sup>66</sup>

The Old Testament emphasizes the importance of righteousness and justice, which appear frequently in various forms throughout the text. First, the root of the word for righteousness is "sdq," צדק which means "fixed and fully what it should be." A possible definition is a norm by which other things are measured. When applied to human actions and relationships, it refers to conforming to what is expected and right. Second, the root "spt" שפט involves judicial activity and means to act as a lawgiver and arbitrator in disputes. The word "mispat" מִשְׁפָּט refers to a legal ordinance. The phrase "the *mispat* of the orphan and widow" refers to their rightful case against those who would exploit them.<sup>67</sup>

In Proverbs, there are many verses relating to conduct. 3:27 ("Do not hold good from those to whom it is due."); 11:1 (Accurate weight), 11:20 (Blameless ways), 11:24–25 (Generous person), 11:27 (Seeks good); 14:2 (Walk uprightly), 14:22 (Plan good); 16:2 (Pure in eyes), 16:7 (Peacemaker); 21:3 (Do righteousness and justice), 21:26 (The righteous give); 22:10 (The generous share), 22:22 (Do not rob the poor and crush the afflicted); 24:17 (Do not rejoice in enemies' fall), 24:29 (Forgive others); 25:21 (Give enemies food and water); 29:7 ("The righteous know the rights of the poor."); 31:9 ("Defend the rights of the poor and needy"). The Old Testament missionary foundation consists of four closely interrelated elements. The God who shows compassion to all is also the God of history, who uses Israel's specific history as a platform for his dealings with nations. He is with Israel in their times of suffering, and they witness God's work through their conduct. The Book of Proverbs does not cover the history of the Israelites, but it speaks specifically about how they should live.

## CREATION CARE

Western theology focuses on issues of reconciliation

64. Bosch, "Hermeneutical Principles in the Biblical Foundation for Mission," 446.

65. Kaiser, *Mission in the Old Testament*, xiii.

66. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 365–368.

67. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 366.

and salvation only between humans and God. According to Walter Zimmerli, "The Book of Wisdom argues that it must be viewed within the framework of a theology of creation."<sup>68</sup> Relating to creation and mission, Wright argues that if our mission is to be faithful to God's mission, it must embrace the entire planet and the entirety of human existence and needs. Just as the purpose of human life is to glorify God, creations must also glorify God the Creator and live in harmony. God's mission is for us to take good care of nature without destroying it because everything in the universe belongs to God (Deut. 10:14).<sup>69</sup>

George Monbiot wrote that "we inhabit the brief historical interlude between ecological constraint and ecological catastrophe."<sup>70</sup> Throughout most of human history, people were limited by the natural environment in which they lived. However, in the modern era, the Western world became dedicated to using science and technology to dominate nature and extend human power.<sup>71</sup> David G. Horrell argues that Genesis 1:26–28 calls for stewardship, not "aggressive technological dominance of the earth. The Bible is widely regarded as a significant source of positive ecological theology."<sup>72</sup>

Richard Bauckham stresses the importance of acknowledging the praise that creation offers in ecological spirituality. Other creatures can help humans worship God. Biblical texts (Isa. 42:10; Ps. 19:1–4; 69:34; 96:11–12; 98:7–8; 103:22; 148; 150:6; Phil. 2:10; Rev. 5:13) that speak of creation's praise are often misunderstood as "pre-scientific animism" or "panpsychism." However, these passages are metaphorical and point to the reality that all creatures glorify God by fulfilling their God-given roles in His creation.<sup>73</sup> Similarly, C. S. Lewis said that Christians need to balance between "identifying God too closely with the world and not keeping God close enough."<sup>74</sup>

Scott Hoezee calls this "the ecology of praise" which is "creation's choir that sings a song of high and holy praise To God's name."<sup>75</sup> Being around animals reminds us of Saint Francis of Assisi's connection with

68. Amy Plantinga Pauw, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*, First edition., Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015), 1–2. 7.

69. Wright, *The Mission of God*, 397–420.

70. George Monbiot, *Heat: How to Stop the Planet from Burning* (Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007), xxi.

71. Richard Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology*, 1st ed. (Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011), 1.

72. David G. Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology*, Biblical Challenges in the Contemporary World (New York: Routledge, 2014), 12. "An ecological biblical theology might centre around a confession that God has created all things good, has bound Godself eternally in covenant to all the earth, calls all creation to a vocation of praise, and is bringing about the reconciliation and redemption of all things in Christ." Horrell, *The Bible and the Environment*, 136.

73. Bauckham, *Living with Other Creatures*, 149.

74. Scott Hoezee, *Remember Creation: God's World of Wonder and Delight* (Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998), 84. C. S. Lewis, *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*, [1st American ed.], Harvest/HBJ Book (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964), 74.

75. Hoezee, *Remember Creation*, 45.

nature. According to Francis Schaeffer, we don't need to believe in evolution to recognize our link with all living things. As Christians, we know that we are ultimately related to animals and trees because we were made by the same Creator God.<sup>76</sup> Biodiversity reflects the goodness of God beyond imagination. One creature alone cannot express God's image. Denis Edwards notes that only the diversity of life, including trees, ants, parrots, wildflowers, and humans, can give expression to "the radical diversity and otherness of the trinitarian God." He argues that humanity and the world are being made into the image of God, and faith is an ecological communion growing in love towards the fullness of life as seen in the Resurrection of Jesus.<sup>77</sup>

According to Edwards, Thomas Aquinas had explained long ago that God's way of acting in the world (known as primary causality) is not in opposition to the entire system of cause and effect in nature (known as second causality). In other words, God's work is accomplished through the natural cause and effect that occurs in the world.<sup>78</sup>

All life on Earth is one community, emerging from the same biological process. Humans need other species to survive; trees, for instance, absorb carbon dioxide and release oxygen. We are not rulers of nature, but fundamentally dependent on it. The biblical vision of the community of creation offers a similar perspective, with all beings sustained by the Creator of everything.<sup>79</sup> Today, we can interpret Proverbs as a guide to address pressing environmental issues. For example, Proverbs 12:10 emphasizes the importance of compassion towards animals, while condemning the cruelty of those who neglect or abuse them. Ultimately, Proverbs invites us to see creation as a reflection of God's wisdom and care, rather than a disposable or exploitable resource.<sup>80</sup>

Proverbs points out that there are many stories about animals, plants, and nature, and that humans have much to learn from them. Lazy people should go to the ants and learn ("go to the ant") in Proverbs 6:6. A tree of life connects life and trees (11:30; 13:12; 15:4, 12:10). Of course, it is personified, but trees continuously supply the oxygen that humans need. It is said that righteous people know the needs of animals, but wicked people treat animals cruelly. Protecting the natural environment is the mission given to humans by God.

OBJECT	BIBLE	EXPLAIN
Animals	12:10	"The righteous know the needs of their animals"

76. Hoezee, *Remember Creation*, 37.

77. Elizabeth A. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the God of Love* (London: Bloomsbury, 2014), 149; Denis Edwards, *Ecology at the Heart of Faith* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, c2006), 78.

78. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 168; Edwards, *The God of Evolution: A Trinitarian Theology* (New York: Paulist Press, 1999), 47.

79. Johnson, *Ask the Beasts*, 266.

80. Pauw, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*, 2.

OBJECT	BIBLE	EXPLAIN
Ants	6:6 30:25	"Consider its ways" (6:6) "the ants are a people without strength, yet they"
Tree of Life	3:18 11:30 13:12 15:4	"She is a tree of life to those who lay hold of her" (3:18) "The fruit of the righteous is a tree of life" (11:30) "A desire fulfilled is a tree of life" (13:12) "A gentle tongue is a tree of life" (15:4)
Fountain of Life	13:14	"The teaching of the wise is a fountain of life"
Oxen	14:4	"Where there are no oxen, there is no grain"
Lion	22:13; 28:15; 30:30	"The lazy person says, 'There is a lion outside'" (22:13) "Like a roaring lion" (28:15) "The lion, which is mightiest among wild animals" (30:30)
Sparrow	26:2	"Like a sparrow in its flitting, like a swallow in its flying"
Horse and Donkey	26:3	"A whip for the horse, a bridle for the donkey"
Dog	26:17	"Like somebody who takes a passing dog by the ears is one who meddles in the quarrel of another"
Bird	27:8	"Where there are no oxen, there is no grain"
Fig Tree	27:18	"Anyone who tends a fig tree will eat its fruit"
Flocks and Herds	27:23	"Know well the condition of your flocks, and give attention to your herds"
Lambs and Goats	27:26	"The lambs will provide your clothing, and the goats"
Bear	28:15	"a charging bear is a wicked ruler over a poor people"
Leech	30:15	"The leech[c] has two daughters; 'Give, give,' they cry"
Ravens and Vultures	30:17	"The eye that mocks a father and scorns to obey a mother will be pecked out by the ravens of the valley and eaten by the vultures"
Snake	30:19	"the way of a snake on a rock"
Badgers	30:26	"the badgers are a people without power, yet they make their homes in the rocks"
Locusts	30:27	"the locusts have no king, yet all of them march in rank"
Lizard	30:28	"the lizard[e] can be grasped in the hand, yet it is found in kings' palaces"
Rooster and He-goat	30:31	"the strutting rooster, the he-goat, and a king striding before[g] his people"

Figure 1. Animals and plants that appear in Proverbs

## COMMUNITIES FOR PARTICIPATION IN GOD'S MISSION

Finally, I claim that Proverbs is related to a community. The Book of Proverbs contains numerous terms related to teaching, discipline, knowledge, skill, and instruction. Wisdom is not something that you are born with. It is something that needs to be learned, and the best way to learn it is through being part of a community.<sup>81</sup> Proverbs not only encourages us to be a community of faith but also equips the mission community to participate in God's ongoing mission. Community is an important agency for participation in God's ongoing redemptive mission.

81. Pauw, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes*, 18.



Newbigin argues that many people in the West have grown accustomed to reading the biblical story starting with the question of individual salvation. This “soteriological selfcenteredness” is a Western perversion of the gospel.<sup>82</sup>

A missional reading of Proverbs is concerned not only with the fear of God, but also with how the Proverbs can continue to equip communities of believers to participate in God’s mission today. Goheen insists that “We must keep in mind the missional thread in the biblical story: the people of God are to be a distinctive community for the sake of the world.”<sup>83</sup> Richard B. Hays interpretation.<sup>84</sup> Nicholas Lash also argues that the interpretation of the Bible should be within the life and activities of the community.<sup>85</sup>

Jones also mentions the importance of community. Community is a central theme in Christian theology. It is important to understand that theology is inherently communitarian. There are two types of community. The first is liberal individualism, which places the individual at the center of social life and views social interaction as based on contracts between individuals. The second type is the retrieval of community, which highlights the importance of the social unit for various crucial aspects of human existence. The community provides personal identity, and people orient their aspirations, judgments, and tastes around their reference group. Therefore, she claims that theology should be communitarian, and the communitarian nature of theology leads to the concept of community as the integrative motif of Christian theology.<sup>86</sup>

In this regard, Christianity in Asian, African, and South American societies, which values community more than the individualistic Christianity in Western society, may be the ideal community pursued by the Bible. Wisdom encompasses ethical relationships between individuals and communities, including righteousness, justice, and equity.<sup>87</sup>

Citing Alister McGrath’s writings, Gerald R. McDermott defines the characteristics of evangelicalism as follows. One of the characteristics is the importance of Christian community for spiritual nourishment, fellowship, and growth. Evangelicals have often been individualistic, but tradition emphasizes the importance of the Christian community for spiritual growth. The Holy Spirit has continuously unfolded the truth of the Word in the church.<sup>88</sup>

82. Goheen, *Reading the Bible Missionally*, 280.

83. Goheen, *Reading the Bible Missionally*, 258.

84. Hays, *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*, 191.

85. Nicholas Lash, *Theology on the Way to Emmaus* (London: SCM Press, 1986), 43.

86. Beth Felker Jones, *Practicing Christian Doctrine: An Introduction to Thinking and Living Theologically* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014), 191–213.

87. Carol A. Newsom, Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley, *Women’s Bible Commentary*, 3rd ed., twentieth anniversary ed. (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012), 234.

88. McDermott, *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions?*, 32.

The two aspects of missions, evangelism and social concern, still remain controversial among scholars, but holistic (wholistic) ministry that integrates them is becoming more important. Wright says that the cross of Christ must be at the center of missions. What binds

these two things, spreading the gospel and social participation, is the message of the cross.<sup>89</sup> Missions require spreading the gospel and social interest. There is ongoing debate as to which of the two is more important. It’s a topic of endless debate of which came first, similar to the egg or the chicken debate.

Jesus came to this earth for the salvation of humans. And he gave his disciples and the church the mission of spreading the gospel. In addition, Jesus healed the oppressed, the poor, and the sick in society. He did the holistic ministry of spirit and body. Social interest is essential in missions, especially for the gospel to be spread effectively.

In that respect, the Book of Proverbs has a deep social participation character. It talks about how the Israelites, chosen by God, can live ethically in community on this land. Proverbs speaks of practical patterns of behavior that maintained a faith that was unique to Israel, although it was influenced by the cultures of surrounding countries.

The Book of Proverbs is both universal and local. The Book of Proverbs also serves as a bridge in areas where the gospel is not well-received. The Proverbs is similar to the culture of North Africa, which is dominated by Islam. It also shares characteristics with the cultures of most Asian countries. While the Proverbs does not contain a direct gospel message, it can serve as an intermediary to find commonalities between cultures and lead them to the gospel.

## CONCLUSION

Historically, the relationship between missions and biblical theology has been tense. Fortunately, in the postmodern era, there has been a strong trend toward interpreting the Bible from a cultural perspective, with interpretation being determined by the context of the reader or interpreter rather than by what the original language of the Bible says. Missiological interpretation is also affected by this situation.

Reading the Scriptures through a missional lens leads us to adopt missional practices that emerge from the text. Continuously engaging in missional reading encourages us to embrace missional practices in our communal life as the people of God.<sup>90</sup> Wisdom permeates not only the religious sphere, from the family to churches, cathedrals, and mosques, but also the secular sphere, including business, such as markets, intersections, and cities.

The Book of Proverbs has been marginalized not only in the Old Testament but also in missionary

89. Craig Ott, Stephen J. Strauss, and Timothy C. Tennent. *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010), 149–156.

90. Goheen, *Reading the Bible Missionally*, 277.

terms. The content of the Book of Proverbs does not contain theological elements that are very important to Jews, such as the law, sacrifices, and worship, but holds proverb-like stories from the world. It deals in detail with practical aspects that are very necessary when living in the world. These include the relationship between nation and individuals, the relationship between parents and children, relationships with other people, financial issues, issues with the opposite sex, and so on. It also emphasizes community. This is an ethical aspect of mission. In this world created by God, we need wisdom to learn how to live together with people and even nature.

I argue that the Book of Proverbs should be approached missionally with several themes. Firstly, humans were created in the image of God. Therefore, humans instinctively fear God and tend to get along well with their neighbors. And people naturally recognize God (or gods) in society and culture, and lives by nature by observing natural law. Calvin called this “general revelation.” The Book of Proverbs well represents general revelation in the Old Testament. Secondly, the Book of Proverbs interacted with and influenced the surrounding countries and cultures. It is a product of these intercultural exchanges. Additionally, it is a special law given to the Israelites. When the Israelites learn and practice the wisdom found in Proverbs, surrounding countries and peoples can recognize God.

Thirdly, Proverbs are ethical. This is the ethical part of missionary work. Ethics are a very important part of missions. In the Bible, the words indicative and imperative appear, and ethics is imperative. In spreading the gospel, both the Word of God and the act of obeying the Word of God are important. The Book of Proverbs implies that living an ethical life is part of missionary work. Missions provide love, interest, consideration, and practical help to our neighbors. This means that actions convey a message more powerfully than words. Fourthly, the Bible’s Wisdom literature draws its ethics and theology from a universal, creation-based moral order. This universality is important when addressing issues with people of different cultures and faiths. Furthermore, it stresses the importance of stewardship in our interactions with everything around us. This perspective is rooted in creation theology, which emphasizes that all living things were created by God. In the Book of Proverbs, we learn about

## BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Barram, Michael. “The Bible, Mission, and Social Location: Toward a Missional Hermeneutic.” *Interpretation (Richmond)* 61, no. 1 (2007): 42–58.
- Bartholomew, Craig G., Colin Greene, and Karl Möller. *Renewing Biblical Interpretation*. Scripture and hermeneutics series, v. 1. Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 2000.
- Bauckham, Richard. *Bible and Mission: Christian Witness in A Postmodern World*. Carlisle, Cumbria, UK: Paternoster Press, 2003.
- . *Living with Other Creatures: Green Exegesis and Theology*. 1st ed. Waco, TX: Baylor University Press, 2011.
- Belgic Confession, Article 2: The Means by Which We Know God, Accessed in May 25, 2024, <https://www.crcna.org/welcome/beliefs/confessions/belgic-confession#toc-article-2-the-means-by-which-we-know-god>.
- Bosch, David J. *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission*. American Society of Missiology Series; No. 16. Maryknoll, NY: Orbis Books, 1991.
- . “Hermeneutical Principles in the Biblical Foundation for Mission.” *Evangelical Review of Theology* 17, no. 4 (1993): 24–35.
- Davis, Ellen F. *Scripture, Culture, and Agriculture: An Agrarian Reading of the Bible*. New York: Cambridge University Press, 2009.
- Dunn, James D. G., and J. W. Rogerson. *Eerdmans Commentary on the Bible*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 2003.
- Edwards, Denis. *Ecology at the Heart of Faith*. Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, c2006.
- Goheen, Michael W. *Reading the Bible Missionally*. The Gospel and Our Culture Series. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2016.
- Goldingay, John. *Proverbs*. Commentaries for Christian Formation. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2023.
- Green, Joel B. *Hearing the New Testament: Strategies for Interpretation*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans Pub. Co., 1995.
- Guardiola-Saenz, Leticia A. “Borderless Women and Borderless Texts: A Cultural Reading of Matthew 15:21-28.” *Semeia*, no. 78 (1997): 69–81.
- Hays, Richard B. *Echoes of Scripture in the Letters of Paul*. New edition. New Haven: Yale University Press, 1993.
- Horrell, David G. *The Bible and the Environment: Towards a Critical Ecological Biblical Theology*. Biblical Challenges in the Contemporary World. New York: Routledge, 2014.
- Hoezee, Scott. *Remember Creation: God’s World of Wonder and Delight*. Grand Rapids, MI: W.B. Eerdmans, 1998.
- House, Paul R. *Old Testament Theology*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 1998.
- Johnson, Elizabeth A. *Ask the Beasts: Darwin and the*

- God of Love*. London: Bloomsbury, 2014.
- Jones, Beth Felker. *Practicing Christian Doctrine: An Introduction to Thinking and Living Theologically*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2014.
- Jung, Sung-Won. "John Calvin's Understanding of the General Revelation and Its Apologetical Significance." *Korea Reformed Journal (KRJ)* 12, (2009): 335-370.
- Kaiser, Walter C. *Mission in the Old Testament: Israel as a Light to the Nations*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 2000.
- Lash, Nicholas. *Theology on the Way to Emmaus*. London: SCM Press, 1986.
- Lee, Jong-Keun. "Hebrew Proverbs and Korean Proverbs." *The Korean Journal of Old Testament Studies* 27, no. 1 (2021): 244-79. 24
- Lewis, C. S. *Letters to Malcolm: Chiefly on Prayer*. [1st American ed.]. Harvest/HBJ Book. New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1964.
- Loader, J. A. *Proverbs 1-9. Historical Commentary on the Old Testament*. Leuven: Peeters, 2014.
- Longman, Tremper. *How to Read Proverbs*. Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002.
- McDermott, Gerald R. *Can Evangelicals Learn from World Religions?: Jesus, Revelation & Religious Traditions*. Downers Grove, Ill: InterVarsity Press, 2000.
- McNeill, John T. *Calvin: Institutes of the Christian Religion*. The Library of Christian Classics. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2001.
- Meyers, Carol L. *Exodus*. New Cambridge Bible Commentary. Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 2005.
- Monbiot, George. *Heat: How to Stop the Planet from Burning*. Cambridge, MA: South End Press, 2007.
- Newsom, Carol A., Sharon H. Ringe, and Jacqueline E. Lapsley. *Women's Bible Commentary*. 3rd ed., Twentieth anniversary ed. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2012.
- Oduyoye, Mercy Amba. "The Church of the Future, Its Mission and Theology: A View from Africa." *Theology Today (Ephrata, Pa.)* 52, no. 4 (1996): 494-505.
- Ott, Craig. *Encountering Theology of Mission: Biblical Foundations, Historical Developments, and Contemporary Issues*. Encountering Mission. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2010.
- Overland, Paul. *Proverbs*. Apollos Old Testament Commentary 15. London, England: Apollos, 2022.
- Pauw, Amy Plantinga. *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes: A Theological Commentary on the Bible*. First edition. Belief: A Theological Commentary on the Bible. Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 2015.
- Pilch, John J. "Proverbs in Middle East North Africa (MENA\*) Cultural Context." *Biblical Theology Bulletin* 45, no. 4 (2015): 202-214.
- Pritchard, James B. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*. 3d ed., with Supplement. Princeton, N. J: Princeton University Press, 1969.
- Rad, Gerhard von. *Old Testament Theology*. New York: Harper, 1962.
- Robert, Dana Lee. *Christian Mission How Christianity Became A World Religion*. Blackwell Brief Histories of Religion Series. Malden, MA: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009.
- Senior, Donald. *The Biblical Foundations for Mission*. Maryknoll, N.Y: Orbis Books, 1983.
- Smit, Dirkie. "Reading the Bible through the Ages? Historical and Hermeneutical Perspectives." *STJ | Stellenbosch Theological Journal* 1, no. 2 (2015): 175-94.
- Veeneman, Mary M. *Introducing Theological Method: A Survey of Contemporary Theologians and Approaches*. Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2017.
- Waltke, Bruce K. *The Book of Proverbs*. Chapters 1-15. New International Commentary on the Old Testament. Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2004.
- Wright, Christopher J. H. *The Mission of God: Unlocking the Bible's Grand Narrative*. Downers Grove, Ill: IVP Academic, 2006.



Jaewoo Jeong  
jeongong@gmail.com

Dr. Jaewoo Jeong is currently teaching Missiology and Old Testament at Sabah Theological Seminary (STS) in Malaysia. He first studied Economics in Korea before pursuing theological studies abroad. He received his M.Div. in Hong Kong, followed by an M.A. in Intercultural Studies (MAICS) at Fuller Theological Seminary in the United States. He then completed his Ph.D. in Missiology at Concordia Theological Seminary in Fort Wayne, Indiana. In 2023, he further pursued advanced biblical studies, earning a Th.M. in Old Testament at Western Theological Seminary in Holland, Michigan.