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## Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence

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followed? If he is correct, then Paul would be contradicting his own thesis in Rom 6, where he argues that Christ should be the justified Christian's only master.

Perhaps there is another explanation. Could the preponderance of first-person pronouns and verbs be indicating an emphasis on self? Could this be reference to a person who is trying to keep the law in his or her own strength? Could this be a neophyte Christian or even a mature Christian who has shifted focus from Christ-centeredness to self-centeredness? Indeed, such an interpretation would be compatible with his argument. He correctly states that "the essence of sin is the attempt to put oneself in God's place, to make one's own ego and the satisfaction of its desires the center of one's life. This is the fundamental sin of every one of us whether we are unbelievers or believers" (see 34-35).

Cranfield's arguments contra Professors Dunn, Hays, Heikki Raisanen, and S. W. Gray are convincing. His defense of the resurrection of Jesus and the virgin birth are welcome additions to NT scholarship. His caution regarding interpretations which limit the use of πιστις Χριστου to the faith of Jesus should be noted. Indeed, Professor Cranfield has made a significant contribution, in his typical fashion, to Pauline scholarship generally and to the understanding of Romans particularly. It is a must-read for those who question the role of the law in the Christian life, Pauline scholars, graduate students—especially those pursuing studies in Romans—and thoughtful pastors. They will doubtless find this volume stimulating and thought-provoking. I recommend it, the lack of a subject index and an introduction notwithstanding.

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Crenshaw, James. L. *Education in Ancient Israel: Across the Deadening Silence*. Anchor Bible Reference Library, ed. David Noel Freedman. New York: Doubleday, 1998. 320 pp. Hardcover, \$34.95.

James L. Crenshaw is the Robert L. Flowers Professor of Old Testament at Duke University and is well-known for his scholarship in wisdom literature. His latest book explores the possibility that ancient Israel possessed an educational infrastructure to ensure knowledge acquisition and values transmission from one generation to the next. Because of the paucity of direct historical evidence for an established tutoring system in Israel (in comparison to Egypt and Mesopotamia, where evidence abounds) Crenshaw develops a hypothesis for its existence on the basis of Israel's wisdom literature.

He first discusses the variety of possible reading audiences for ancient literature, stating that although some texts were purely aesthetic, most were for functional purposes, providing a vehicle of training for the many court officials, secretaries, and clerks needed for the smooth running of a sophisticated bureaucratic system as in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Crenshaw presumes that Israel must have had training institutions in place, similar to other parts of the ancient Near-Eastern milieu.

There is evidence to suggest that although writing was not welcomed at first during the era of oral tradition, it was used quite extensively during the last 150 years

of Judah's monarchy (c. 722-585 BCE). Although inscription proved useful for bureaucracy, magic, empire building, religion, and entertainment, it is not clear how widespread literacy was in ancient Israel. Crenshaw thinks that the rural economy would have discouraged formal schooling, and implies that the rhetoric of Deut 6:9 (encouraging people to write the commandments on their lintels and gateposts) would not have been taken seriously. In a similar vein, he suggests that the literacy rate in Egypt may have been only 1 percent (compared to no more than 10% in Hellenistic Greece), despite the written warnings and curses posted for tomb robbers. Did that mean only the literate were in the business of robbing tombs? Or, does it imply a dramatic fall in literacy rates from a previous "golden era" when most people could read at least the very basic inscribed notices of the day (hence the tomb constructors' presupposing that their written curses could be understood by the average bandit), to a time when literacy was in fact only 1 percent?

Despite the apparent poor literacy rates of antiquity, it can be demonstrated that just as wisdom literature (especially Job and Qohelet) has been very influential in Western culture, such is also the case in antiquity. The genre had a "common context of origin" born of traditional insight, bequeathed as a legacy to posterity, and couched in debate, entertainment, taxonomy, ritual, polemic, and counsel.

Although the first positive indication of schools operating in Israel was Ben Sira's "house of instruction" of the second century BCE, there is some tentative indication of schools in other places well before then, with the training of officials for the courts of possibly Solomon and Hezekiah. Crenshaw cites as evidence Isa 28:9-13 that describes the childish babble of rote learning by young students, possibly in a temple school. Isaiah also speaks of waking each day to teach, using the "tongue of a teacher" that God had given him (50:4). There are also a number of references throughout Proverbs (i.e., 22:17-21; 23:22; 4:5,7; 17:16), although Crenshaw does acknowledge that some of them deal directly with parental teaching. The obvious need to provide a supply of competent bureaucrats remains, and as early as the tenth century (when David sent a letter by the hand of Uriah the Hittite to Joab) there are biblical references that presuppose some degree of literacy at least among certain classes; even the NT witnesses to a carpenter's son who was literate.

Despite inscriptions recovered by Palestinian archaeology, there is not the same level of evidence for formal instruction as is observed in Egypt and Mesopotamia. Israelite inscriptions on potsherds and plaster pieces (the more durable of the economically viable materials thought to be used in ancient classrooms for copybook work) show no corrective markings and erasures as do similar artifacts elsewhere.

Next, Crenshaw traces the development of the acquisition of knowledge, using the riddle and the introduction of a feminized personification of wisdom. To overcome any youthful resistance to education, wisdom is likened to the fairest and most desirable of young women. This tactic is employed to keep the eyes of the young men from the temptations of illicit sex and overeating, harnessing their latent sexual energy for more academic pursuits.

Crenshaw extends this logic to decry modern scientific "dispassion" (presently under attack by postmodernism) to bemoan the resistance of the modern publishing establishment to print a greater number of scholarly works, to lament the growing

gap between religious scholars and the pious masses, and to howl at the "undermining" of theological education (in denominations as diverse as the Southern Baptists, the Lutheran Church—Missouri Synod, and the Seventh-day Adventists), caught in the crossfire between absolutism and relativism. It is obvious, even to the casual reader, that Crenshaw's hidden agenda bubbles to the surface at this point, and he seizes the opportunity with both hands while he has it.

The final chapters address the relationship between the teacher and the student. Crenshaw notes that the student seems to be the silent observer in the process, while the teacher drones on, in much the same way as a father lectures his son. He does not paint the relationship in very positive terms and cites as evidence the Egyptian hieroglyphic symbol for teaching as a raised strong arm ready to strike with a cane.

Formal education presumably progressed using a copybook approach, maybe using some sagacious work like the book of Job. Such would indicate a learning process based not just on a divine voice, but also on observation and everyday experience. Other works used may have included Proverbs, although Crenshaw thinks there is little to recommend it as a textbook except for some material suitable for training junior clerks. The stories of Ruth, Joseph, and Jonah, because of their sophisticated descriptions of divine providence, may also have been suitable. The ancient sages of wisdom literature saw that knowledge is derived not only from the eyes and ears, but also by an "openness to mystery." Attempting to interpret sapiential texts merely by experiential wisdom is, therefore, shown to be inadequate, because by its very nature wisdom brings the student into direct contact with God.

One stone that is left unturned is the role of the mother. Although Crenshaw gives passing comment to the possibility of some women being formally trained, he does not say much in regard to their influence on the education of their children. In a milieu of oral tradition how much would a woman have been able to pass on to her children in matters of common wisdom? Crenshaw mentions that Plato saw education competing with memory, but misses the point that oral tradition finely honed the memory, while education would have made a person more reliant on what was written down. Therefore, the women of ancient Israel would have been able to accurately pass on to their children many of the things the youngsters may then have been able to read about later, should they have a chance to gain a formal education.

Students of ancient Near-Eastern history will find this book useful. The theory that wisdom literature was pedagogical material has been around for over 70 years, and some scholars may have taken the arguments too far. Crenshaw's present work seems to restore a little balance to that trend, and offers a more sane approach. The hesitations of scholars like Stuart Weeks to accept such a hypothesis (he would prefer to see other explanations for wisdom literature's universal appeal other than pedagogical or bureaucratic needs) also need to be taken seriously, but nobody would deny the value of Crenshaw's latest addition to the discussion. It is "must" reading for students of wisdom literature.