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Word Biblical Commentary Vol. 22, Proverbs (murphy), 384pp

Roland Murphy

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"Proverbs is the fountainhead of the wisdom movement, providing 'old things and new,' " explains Dr. Roland E. Murphy. Yet in the field of wisdom studies Proverbs has suffered a certain neglect. Even Dr. Murphy admits that during his career as a scholar he did "almost anything else with wisdom literature except write a commentary on this book."

Drawing upon a distinguished academic career, Dr. Murphy now shares his vast insight into Wisdom Literature in this fresh translation and in-depth discussion.

Dr. Murphy approaches Proverbs as "a collection of collections, ... prefaced by an introduction (chaps. 1-9)." The long poems of chapters 1-9 serve to introduce the collections of short sayings in chapters 10-31, which make up most of the book of Proverbs. With this division the writer accepts "the unproven but likely assumption" that during the postexilic period chapters 1-9 "set the tone" for the mostly preexilic collections in chapters I 0-31.

Murphy cautions his readers to consider the limitations of proverbial sayings. The Israelite sages sought in their optimistic teachings to express "the mystery that surrounds all human action: not only self-knowledge, but knowledge of the mysterious role of God." Much of the wisdom of Proverbs points out the ambiguities of life. Yet the proverbs do not provide the final word; "rather they act as a goad, a prod to further thought."

This treatment of Proverbs will be invaluable to clergy and lay readers who desire a penetrating study of the book. The writer leads us through all the types of proverbs: instructions, exhortations of a parent/teacher, speeches of personified Wisdom, and short sayings.

"Israelite wisdom is more practical than theoretical. It attempts to persuade, cajole, threaten, of command a particular attitude or course of action . . . . When the sage says 'listen,' 'hear,' the meaning is 'obey.' " Roland Murphy, in this new commentary, helps us uncover this practical message of Proverbs.

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