

**“The Role and Education of Children in Old Testament Times”**

**Shirley May Allen**

**Assignment presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements  
For the degree Master of Philosophy in Bible Skills  
At the University of Stellenbosch**



**Supervisor: Prof PA Kruger  
December 2001**

### **Declaration**

I, the undersigned, hereby declare that the work contained in this assignment is my own original work and that I have not previously in its entirety or in part submitted it at any university for a degree.

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## ABSTRACT

Children in the Old Testament world, at first glance, seem to play a very minor role in the make-up of that society but was this really so? In researching the role and education there are many questions, which need answering.

Questions that come to mind are: What role did children play in the tribe, clan and family? How did children relate to their fathers, mothers and siblings? What education and training did children receive? When did they receive it? Was it formal or informal? Did the status and education of children change from early Israel through to the beginning of New Testament times? How could children identify with their religion? What did children contribute to their religion? What legal rights did children have? How did their situation compare to the children in other countries in the Ancient Near East?

In investigating these questions in chapter one it was necessary to research the social system, which included the complex multigenerational family. It was also important to look at children in the Old Testament world from a sociological anthropological stance. As religion and religious concepts were embedded in the fabric of the Old Testament society it was important to see which ones influenced the status of children. There was also a need to investigate how children were protected by the law and how they were affected by the economy as Israelite society was largely an agrarian society.

In chapter two when investigating the education of children in the Old Testament world it was necessary to look at parental responsibility as well as the role of priests, prophets, sages, scribes and teachers. Wisdom literature in the Old Testament played an important role in the education of every child, either formally or informally. Not all of the education was moral education; much of the instruction that children received was vocational. The challenge when looking at education is that the evidence is mostly inferred.

In analysing the role of children in the Old Testament world it becomes apparent that children play a far greater role and are of higher social status than it appears at a cursory glance when looking at the patriarchal society in which they lived. The education of children took place mostly in the setting of the home on an informal basis. It was only much later that formal education was introduced and even then the exact beginning of schools is difficult to pinpoint.

It would be incorrect to attempt to transplant the role of the child in the Old Testament world into contemporary culture without transplanting the whole society. It would however be correct to look at the Old Testament child within the context of the extended family as far as redemptive history and creation is concerned.

## ABSTRAK

Kinders in die Ou Testamentwêreld blyk met die eerste oogopslag 'n geringe rol te speel in die samestelling van daardie gemeenskap, maar is dit werklik so? Met die navorsing van die rol en opvoeding was daar baie vrae wat beantwoord behoort te word.

Vrae wat opduik is: Watter rol het die kinders gespeel in die stam, familiegroep en gesin? Wat was die verhouding tussen die kinders en hulle vaders, moeders, broers en susters? Watter opvoeding en onderrig het kinders ontvang? Wanneer het hulle dit ontvang? Was dit formeel of informeel? Het die status en opvoeding van kinders verander van vroeë Israel deur tot aan die begin van Nuwe Testamenttye? Hoe kon die kinders met hulle geloof identifiseer? Watter bydrae het kinders tot hulle geloof gelewer? Watter wetlike regte het kinders gehad? Hoe het hulle situasie vergelyk met die kinders in ander lande in die Antieke Nabye-Ooste?

Deur hierdie vrae in hoofstuk een te ondersoek was dit nodig om die maatskaplike stelsel te ondersoek, wat die komplekse veelvuldige geslag-familie ingesluit het. Dit was ook belangrik om na kinders in die Ou Testamentwêreld vanuit 'n sosiologiese antropologiese oogpunt te kyk. Aangesien godsdiens en godsdienstige konsepte ingebed was in die wese van die Ou Testamentiese samelewing, was dit belangrik om te sien watter die status van kinders beïnvloed het. Dit was ook nodig om te ondersoek hoe kinders deur die wet beskerm is en hulle beïnvloed is deur die ekonomie aangesien die samelewing in Israel hoofsaaklik 'n landelike gemeenskap was.

In hoofstuk twee met die ondersoek van die opvoeding van kinders in die wêreld van die Ou Testament was dit nodig om te kyk na ouerlike verantwoordelikheid sowel as die rol van priesters, profete, wysgere, skrifgeleerdes en leermeesters/onderwysers. Wysheidsliteratuur in die Ou Testament het 'n belangrike rol gespeel in die opvoeding van elke kind, hetsy formeel of informeel. Die opvoeding was nie alles morele opvoeding

nie; 'n groot gedeelte van die onderrig wat kinders ontvang het was beroepsgerig. Die uitdaging wanneer na die opvoeding gekyk word, is dat die meeste bewyse hoofsaaklik afgeleide bewyse is.

Wanneer die rol van kinders in die Ou Testamêntwêreld geanaliseer word, word dit duidelik dat kinders 'n baie groter rol gespeel het, en 'n hoër maatskaplike aansien geniet het as wat 'n bloot tersaaklike blik op die patriargale samelewing waarin hulle gewoon het, aantoon. Die opvoeding wat kinders ontvang het, het hoofsaaklik in die konteks van die huis, en op 'n informele basis plaasgevind. Dit was eers baie later dat formele opvoeding bekendgestel is en die presiese begin van skole is ook moeilik om vas te stel.

Dit sou nie korrek wees om te probeer om die rol van die kind in die Ou Testament oor te plaas in die wêreld van die kontemporêre kultuur sonder om die hele samelewing ook oor te plaas nie. Dit sou egter korrek wees om na die Ou Testament kind te kyk binne die konteks van die uitgebreide gesin wat verlossingsgeskiedenis en die skepping aan betref.

## **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I wish to express my deepest gratitude and appreciation to those who made it possible for me to successfully complete my M. Phil studies at the University of Stellenbosch.

1. To God, who has given me many opportunities to grow and learn in this life.
2. To my husband Dave, whose constant support and encouragement was always there when I needed it.
3. To my children Sheldon, Chantelle and Darren who continue to cheer me on with my studies.

Dedicated to all those who minister to children.



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## Chapter One

### The significance of the child in the Old Testament world

#### 1. Introduction

The *family* exists in every society. How it exists, its form, functions and the dynamics are distinctive in each culture. Within each culture there are also many differences. Families are dynamic, they constantly change as people marry, children are born and people die. The family in ancient Israel also had to adapt to the challenges that the Palestinian Highlands brought as well as their cultural heritage.

In order to investigate the child as portrayed in the Old Testament it is necessary to look primarily at the family as the social structure that had the most influence on the child. These family units are not clearly written about in the Old Testament. Meyers (1997:4) points out that one has to keep in mind that those who wrote the books of the Old Testament were mostly elite male urban dwellers. Their perspective coming from a minority group could not be considered balanced data on all members of society. There would also be two different approaches, the official one as portrayed in the canon and the public perspective as experienced in the everyday lives of the people.

The portrayal of the family in ancient Israel and early Judaism is incomplete. One has only a partial glimpse into the nature and character of the ancient Israelite and early Jewish family, since the limited textual and archaeological data are themselves not sufficient to flesh out all the details of this social institution. This incomplete picture is also true for the larger social world of ancient Israel and early Judaism in which the family was situated. Perdue (1997:244) underscores the fact that, "*Much about the family in the Hebrew Bible must remain the object of supposition and intelligent guesswork, hardly producing the stuff of divine fiat and authoritative prescription and proscription*".

Perdue (1997:244) highlights the point that the family in Jewish and Israelite culture was subject to movement and change. This would impact the nature and practice of the family during any given time period. This would include the families' theology and ethics, which would be multifaceted and varied. Perdue goes on to say, *"And this diversity becomes even more apparent when considering the changes that occurred both in the institution and its different valuations during its cultural evolution. In other words, there are synchronic differences in the nature and assessments of the family, just as there are diachronic changes throughout ancient Israel's and early Judaism's social evolution"*.

Changes would include the transition of the Israelites from nomads, to a settled life, and later to the development of town life, which brought about social changes, which affected family customs (De Vaux 1961:22).

Another factor, which needs to be taken in to account when looking at the child in the Old Testament is androcentrism. Androcentrism is apparent throughout the Old Testament. Genealogies, which are mostly male is one example, others would be the legal codes, which are addressed to men, and the masculine forms of generic speech. Further, most characters in the Bible are men. Men dominated all forms of public life, they were the rulers, judges and lawyers. Men were also the only ones who could be priests. Perdue (1993:246) argues that, *"This male-centeredness does, at times, cross the threshold and enters into male domination and patriarchy. These observations mean that, in speaking of the value of the biblical representation of the family for contemporary life, androcentrism and patriarchy impose significant challenges and impediments"*.

A further pitfall when researching a topic is which anthropological theoretical option to choose. Deist (2000:97) points out that some theories are idealist, others materialist. *"Some assign realistic value to*

*their constructed theories, while others see theories as valuable fictions and still others take a critical realist stand.*" He argues that once one has chosen a theory the explanation one gives for a situation should show a relationship to it and must adhere to it.

According to Rogerson (1996:25) the families that we read about in the Old Testament are leading or ruling families with the exception of Naomi and Elimelech. The Old Testament is the story of Israelite rulers and leaders. Rogerson states we must take this fact into account because most of these ruling or leading families were polygamous unlike the majority, the ordinary families.

## **2. Social organisation in the Old Testament World**

When a group of people live together as a society, cooperation is essential. In an economy where people most often lived from hand to mouth it is even more important that every member of that group contributes to the economy in order for them to survive. That society sets goals and organize themselves, and the way in which they organize themselves depends largely on their physical environment (Deist 2000:233).

Brueggemann (1990:121) finds that Gottwald (1983:25-37) has the most complete hypothesis to help in the understanding of the social world prior to Solomon. Brueggemann explains Gottwald's idea by stating that, "*In ancient Israel, in the premonarchal period, from Moses to Samuel, there is a radical departure from the conventional state (city-state) modes of organization best known and mostly practised in Canaan. Israel "withdrew" from that mode of social organization and organized itself in an alternative way as a covenantal-egalitarian social experiment*". Brueggemann (1990:121-122) argues that not only was Israel a theological oddity but also a sociological oddity. The surrounding cultures were bureaucratic, hierarchical and exploitive. Instead ancient Israel relied on "revelation" through the Torah, which gave guidance about how to order community life.



Rogerson (1989:62) highlights two features of ancient Israelite life that are totally different to our way thinking. Firstly the feeling of solidarity between individuals and their social group, which functions to protect individuals from harm, injustice and poverty. The second feature has to do with religious ideology. It promoted mutual responsibility based on being a member of a covenant community.

Social organization was influenced by the fact that ancient Israel moved from being a segmentary society to chiefdom under David's rule. Brueggemann (1990:123) argues that to begin with early ancient Israel was segmented into equal units of power, goods and leadership, with no central government and with no dominating power positions. Because there was no accountability to a central authoritative body there was splintering into social units that were autonomous and which had equal authority. Once the chiefdom emerged so did the centralized authority. This influenced the emergence of economic surplus and monopoly. Finally Israel became a state under Solomon.

According to Perdue (1997:174) the three primary units of social organisation in ancient Israel, apart from the nation itself shaped by kinship structures are the tribe, the clan and the family household (Josh 7:16-18; 6:15; 1 Sam 9:21; 10:20-21). The family household in this form persisted throughout the twelve hundred year history of Ancient Israel and early Judaism.

Rogerson in his essay "Anthropology and the Old Testament" concurs with Lemche's (1985:248-70) challenge of the assumption that the family household (*mishpaha*) was the most important of the three units. His opinion is that lineage (*bêt 'āb*) was much more important. He argues that the family was a residential group while the lineage was a descent group, which was made up of several residential groups. Lemche states that the *mishpaha* overlaps with the *bêt 'āb* and probably means 'lineage' and 'maximal lineage'. Both authors agree

that the lineage was the most important social unit. This lineage existed independent of tribal organisation and survived the monarchy. It was because of lineage that family members had an obligation to redeem land (Clements 1989:29, 30).

Wright (1992:761) argues that the family is the social grouping that had the most impact on the individual member of the family and the tribe had the least influence.

### **2.1. The tribe – shebet / matteh**

De Vaux (1961:4) defines a tribe as, “*An autonomous group of families who believed they are descended from a common ancestor. Each tribe is called by the name or surname of that ancestor, sometimes, but not always, preceded by ‘sons of’ (1961:4)*”. In the Bible we find both ‘Israel’ and ‘sons of Israel’, both ‘Judah’ and ‘sons of Judah’ used. Instead of ‘sons’ the term ‘house’ is also used: ‘the house of Israel’. What unites all the tribesmen is the blood-relationship, real or supposed; they all consider themselves brothers. The whole social organisation of a tribe is summed up in its genealogy (De Vaux 1961:5).

Rogerson (1989:58) notes that the terminology used for the word tribe is fluid. Judah is called both a shebet and a *mishpaha*. When Judah is called a tribe (shebet) it is viewed as a residential group and when it is called a clan (*mishpaha*) it is viewed as a descent group.

The twelve tribes of Israel had the names of the twelve sons of Jacob. Instead of Joseph being one of the tribes his sons Manasseh and Ephraim had tribes named after them. In terms of impact on the everyday life of the people the tribe had the smallest influence (Wright 1992:761) although it was the primary unit of social and territorial organization (Wright 1992:761).

The number of members of a tribe could decrease until they disappeared. The tribe of Reuben grew weaker and the tribe of Levi disappeared. The remnants of the tribe of Simeon were absorbed into the tribe of Judah (De Vaux 1961:7).

The twelve tribes of Israel were a federation. The importance of the Israelite confederation was mainly religious. It was not only their kinship that was important, but also their common faith in Yahweh, which united the tribes particularly for the religious feasts (De Vaux 1961:7). Avalos (1995 :624) points out that the tribes were also important for the organization of the military levy and territorial identification.

## **2.2. The Clan - *mishpaha***

The word "clan" is the best translation of *mishpaha*, which is difficult to translate. English versions often use the term "family" but this is misleading because the clan consisted of several families. It was smaller than a tribe but larger than a family. It was a unit of kinship. Marriage had to take place within the clan and was therefore endogamous to preserve Israel's system of land tenure (Wright 1992:761).

Rogerson (1989:56-57) argues that a *mishpaha* was, "*Probably a maximal lineage – that is, a descent group which established ties of kinship between families through a common ancestor who was no longer living*".

The clan also had a territorial identity. The tribes were allotted land according to their clans (Josh 13-19). Each household had a patrimonial portion (Judg 21:24) (Wright 1992:762).

Several families composed the clan known as a *mishpaha*. The *mishpaha* lived in close proximity and its members always met for common religious feasts and sacrificial meals (1 Sam 20:6, 29). A group of clans formed the tribe. The clan often assumed the

responsibility for blood vengeance. The head of the family or elder ruled the family (De Vaux 1961:8).

In early Israelite society it was important to know who one's relatives were. As there was no police force to maintain law and order and to punish wrongdoers a person's safety was in the hands of the group to which he or she belonged. They had to stand together (Rogerson 1989:46).

Blood ties were important between families not only for the purpose of mutual defence but also for blood revenge and for the redemption of land and persons. In the case of blood revenge a close relative of the murdered person had the duty to find and kill the murderer. The only recourse for the person who had committed the crime was to go to a city of refuge and plead his case. If the murder was an accident then those living in the city could grant him refuge (Num 35:9-29) (Rogerson 1989:47).

Hopkins states that the *mishpaha* can be seen as a protective association of families. These households struggled to subsist and produce children. It was their interdependency that gave them a chance for survival (Hopkins 1994:216).

Commenting on the ambiguity of the term *mishpaha* Gottwald (1979: 257) argues that, *"It is better to keep the meaning more open, however, and we shall translate mishpahah by the more neutral and structurally more accurate term "protective association of extended families."*

Gottwald (1979:267) also states that, *"The mishpaha stands out as a protective association of families which operated to preserve the minimal conditions for the integrity of each of its member families by extending mutual help as needed to supply male heirs, to keep land, to rescue members from debt slavery, and to avenge murder. These functions were all restorative in that they were emergency means to*

*restore the normal autonomous basis of a member family, and they were all actions that devolved upon the mishpaha only when beth av was unable to act on its own behalf."*

### **2.3. The family household - *bêt 'āb***

The word "family" is used to translate several Hebrew words, none of which means exactly what "family" means in today's use of the word in Western society (Wright 1992:761). Rogerson (1989:56) states that it denotes two different ideas. The first was that of a family living together. Israelite families had an estimated five or six members allowing for the fact that several children would never survive childhood as in Genesis 50:8. The second was to denote descent or lineage as in Genesis 24:38.

The primary terms for the family household are *bayit* and *bêt 'āb* translated respectively and literally as house and house of the father. The best translation for these terms would be family household and extended or compound family. Family households were multi-generational (up to four generations) and included the social arrangement of several families related by blood and marriage, which lived in two or three houses architecturally connected. Israelite families were patrilineal and patrilocal. The family household was primarily a kinship system that included lineal descent and lateral extension: grandparents, adult male children and their wives and children, unmarried children, and widowed and divorced older daughters who may have had children. Marginal members of households outside of this immediate kinship structure could include debt servants, slaves, concubines, resident aliens, sojourners, day labourers, orphans and Levites, along with any of their family members (Perdue 1997:175).

Unborn progeny, comprising the future generations of the household were also considered in a way to be members of the family at least, future generations were often in mind in the stories and teachings of the Hebrew Bible and in the literature of early Judaism. In Genesis the

ancestors are promised that they would become the fathers of a great nation (Gen 12:2) and that their numerous descendants would inherit the lands of Canaan as their patrimony. In Deuteronomy, faithfulness to the tradition of story and law would enable future generations to be born and to be blessed by Yahweh. The future of Job's household, as set forth in the story of his redemption, was secured in the birth of another seven sons and three daughters, to replace those who had died earlier. Through his children, Job's household and name continue beyond his own time (Perdue 1997:176).

Wright (1992:763) states that, "*Sociologically the bêt-'āb was the most important small unit in the nation and for the individual Israelite, man, woman, or child – slave or resident alien – it was the essential locus of personal security within the national covenant relationship with Yahweh*".

Wright (1992:765) gives three valid reasons for the family having a pivotal role in Israel's relationship with God. These three points included social, economic and theological areas. The family was the fundamental component of Israelite kinship and social organization. It was the basic economic component of Israel's land possession, with a wide range of rights, responsibilities and purposes. It was of central importance in the experience and safeguarding of the covenant relationship with Yahweh. In fact the security and stability of the family as a whole was more important and more highly prized than the life of one of its members as the law of the incorrigible son shows (Deut 21:18-21) (Wright 1992:767).

### **3. The dynamics of society and the family as it impacted the lives of children**

#### **3.1. Social attitudes to children**

In the story of creation, the first woman was called Eve, because she was the “mother of all living” (Gen 3:20). This was a source of hope for all parents (Grassi 1992:904). Because of the fall and the promise of a redeemer all parents hoped that their child would be the one who would be the redeemer.

Because children were highly thought of, a favourite image was that of a father, mother and children seated round a table (Ps 128:3-4). Every birth was considered a divine miracle but those who gave birth under difficult circumstances were considered to have had divine intervention in their conception and birth (Gen 17:17; 21:6) (Grassi 1992:904).

Children in ancient Israel were considered a gift from God (Ps 127; 128). Wright states that, “*Besides long life, a large family, was among the most tangible of God’s blessings*”. To have many children was a coveted honour. At a wedding the guests often expressed the wish that a couple should have a large family e.g. Rebecca (Gen 24:60) and Ruth (Ruth 4:11; 12). According to Proverbs 17:6 children are, “The crown of man” and according to Psalm 128:3 sons are, “Olive plants around the table”, they are also, “A reward, like arrows in the hand of a hero; happy is the man who has his quiver full” (Ps 127:3-5) (De Vaux 1961:41).

Sterility on the other hand was considered a trial and even a punishment from God (Gen 16:2; Gen 20:18; 30:2; 1 Sam 1:5). It was considered a disgrace, so much so that Sarah, Rachel and Leah tried to clear themselves by adopting children, which their maids bore to their husbands (De Vaux 1961:41).

The Hebrew Bible often refers to the desire of the households to have many children. The household’s concern for children was based not

only on the fact that they provided the lineage for preserving the inherited property and perpetuating the ancestral name. In addition, they provided the care network for sustaining older parents. These reasons explain why there is no record in the Old Testament of intentional abortion or infanticide (Perdue 1997:189).

Because ancient Israel had a subsistence economy the greater the number of children the more hands there were to carry out necessary tasks. Because the infant mortality rate was high if you were able to have more children then there would be a greater likelihood of someone to take care of you in your old age. This is one of the reasons why fertility was such an issue (Deist 2000:234).

Daughters were not as important as sons who perpetuated the family line and ancestral inheritance. Daughters would leave the family and join their husband's family when they got married. The family strength was therefore not measured by how many daughters there were (De Vaux 1961:41). Davies (1989:384) points out that this valuing was more for practical reasons because the daughters joined their husband's family and therefore weakened her own. He adds that there are indications that female relatives were respected. One such instance is shown when a priest was permitted to defile himself for the death of a female relative as well as that of a male (Lev 21:2).

Despite the family's special esteem for children, children were the powerless ones on the bottom rung of Hebrew and other ancient societies. Tradition and custom allotted the most important place to older people (Prov 16:31; Job 12:12 Sir 25:4-6). Parents had almost absolute authority over children, who were educated through strict obedience often enforced by severe physical punishment (Prov 13:24; 19:18; 22:15; 23:13; Sir 30: 1, 12). Although Westermann (1995:27) disputes the usual interpretation of the parent's absolute authority that is generally given, the law reinforced parental authority with its own strong sanctions (Ex 21:17; Lev 20:9) (Grassi 1992:905).



Wright (1992:767) argues that several laws show that a man's children were legally regarded as his property with an economic value that could be calculated.

Child sacrifice was never an acceptable form of behaviour in religion in Israel. It did occur despite it never officially being allowed. During the 7<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> century when Assyria dominated the surrounding countries Israel reverted to all kinds of pagan practices. The Law, the prophets and the narrative literature of the Old Testament all condemn child sacrifice (Wright 1992:767).

Family solidarity is at the root of the incidents where whole families, including the children, were executed because of something the father had done or because of blood vengeance. There were no incidents where children were a substitution for any offence the parents may have committed (Wright 1992:767).

Bechtel points out that unlike Western society which has a guilt orientation (1991:47-48) the Old Testament was based on shame and guilt, two different responses as a social control and that shame was slightly more important. A person's place and status in the community was very important. It was important for people to belong to a group and the group experienced a group-oriented shame culture. There were different rungs of status and each rung had a different amount of authority. At the top was the authority a ruler had over his subjects, and then there was the authority parents had over their children. Husbands had authority over their wives and elders had authority over the young. Bechtel maintains that, "*Only friends were equals. Of great importance is the honour and respect the younger generation must show for the elderly and the honour shown to parents. Honour increases status, while shame decreases honour and lowers status*" (Bechtel 1991:52-53).

Blenkinsopp (1997:66) gives the reason for the existence of the family in Israel as well as elsewhere as the procreation and nurture of children. Aries (1962:58) points out that childhood as a distinctive phase of life has only been acknowledged in recent history. He argues, *“that for most of recorded history in most cultures small children—minors—were practically invisible where they appear in literature and image, they are represented as scaled-down adults; and in our western culture, we have to wait for the late sixteenth or early seventeenth century for boys to emerge as the first “specialized children”*.

Blenkinsopp (1997:66) disagrees somewhat with Aries (1962:58) because of the way that children appear in funerary art in Greece and Egypt does not support this. The Israelite habit, during the times of the kingdoms, in identifying the child with reference to the father e.g. Saul son of Kish, Micaiah son of Imlah he feels is an argument in favour of it.

Blenkinsopp (1997:67) clarifies the Old Testament concepts of childhood through the vocabulary that is used. *“The most common Hebrew terms, which appear in English as “child” or “youth”, are yeled and na'ar. The former can refer to the foetus (Ex 21:22), a newborn baby (the Hebrew children, including Moses, (saved from death in Egypt), a young child can still be carried in the arms (Ishmael, the widow's son resuscitated by Elijah), a page at court (Daniel's companions), or a young man in general (Rehoboam's companions; 1 Ki 12:8-14). Some special and sombre occurrences may be noted: an apparent case of sexual abuse (Gen 21:9), child prostitution (Joel 3:3; 4:3), infanticide, and cannibalism (Lam 4:10). The term na'ar can also refer to infants (Moses again, Ichabod, grandson of the priest Eli) and to the young in general (Ishmael, Isaac, etc.) including those still very immature (e.g. the son of Gideon who was afraid to kill), as well as ne'arim such as Shechem who was capable of rape (Gen 34:19). Joseph a seventeen year old na'ar, is the only young person whose actual age is given (Gen 37:2) Absalom presumably some years older, is always referred to by David as a na'ar. The term also serves to*

*designate military personnel (Gen 14:24; Judg 8:20; 1 Sam 21:5-6), civil servants (1 Ki 20:14-15; Esth 2:2; 6:3, 5; Isa 37:6), and servants in general (as the French garçon does for waiter); perhaps also cultic officials (Ex 24:5; 33:11; 1 Sam 1:24, 27). It therefore functions more as a designation of status and office than simply of age” (Blenkinsopp 1997:67).*

This terminology shows as Ariés’ (1997:67) has shown that there are no distinct categories or ages when childhood ended and youth began. Blenkinsopp (1997:67, 68) clarifies the terminology. He states that the first biblical source that refers to childhood or youth is in Ecclesiastes 11:9-10 which refers to the days of our youth. In Jeremiah 6:11 Jeremiah foresees divine retribution being meted out to, *“infants (’ôlāl), youths (bahûr), husbands and wives, old folk (zāqēn), and the really old (literally “full of days”). But we do find the really early years of life well covered. For the period from birth to weaning, generally about three years, there are three terms (’ôlēl, ’ôlāl , yônēq), all derived from two verbal stems, which means, “suck” or “suckle.” Once past this stage (a passage, that many, perhaps most, would not have survived), the child is a gamûl (fem gēmûlâ) , “a weaned child” (Isa 11:8) or simply a yeled or na’ar. The savage side of the Near Eastern Society in antiquity may be gauged from the statistic that twenty-two of the thirty occurrences of these terms for infants refer to them being violently destroyed”.*

Deist (2000:262) states that when referring to children all children who had not reached puberty were grouped together. This included babies. The very young were all grouped together (Ps 8:3; Lam 2:11; Joel 2:6). This group was characterised as being dependent and vulnerable (Is 65:20; Lam 4:4).

### **3.2. The role and function of the family**

The family units comprising the village were the *mishpaha* or kinship group. The nuclear families in a family compound consisted of a maximum of seven people. Two nuclear families plus a senior pair and

perhaps one or two other cousins, aunts or uncles or sojourners, the family size would seldom be more than fifteen.

According to Meyers (1997:21) the individual member of a family was embedded in the domestic group. Individual identity did not exist in the Biblical world. *“The profound interdependence of family members in self-sufficient agrarian families thus created an atmosphere of corporate family identity, in which one could conceive not of personal goals and ventures but only of familial ones. People located themselves on the superimposed domains of land and kin group and did not view themselves as independent actors in domains of their own choice or making. In the merging of self with family, one can observe a collective, group-oriented mind-set, with the welfare of the individual inseparable from that of the living group. ... Work and family were not independent spheres just as property and family were not independent entities.”*

Family life for those in the Palestinian Highlands was task oriented. Daily, weekly, seasonal and annual and sporadic activities formed the core of family life (Meyer 1997:23).

Meyers (1997:24) states that seasonal tasks such as harvesting required everyone in the family to help. Other tasks such as the tending of orchards and vineyards and the regular need to milk animals may also have been activities distributed across gender as well as age lines.

It is most important to note that children were valued beyond their economic worth to their families otherwise we will have a skewed picture. The announcement of pregnancy was a time of great rejoicing, and the day of birth was the occasion for celebration among family members. Tenderness, love and affection for children are often expressed in the Hebrew Bible, as is the sustaining care provided to children (Perdue 1997:171).

Villages, consisting usually of related family households, provided the network of care for children. In Psalm 128:3 the text suggests that it was customary for children to eat at least some meals seated with their parents around the dinner table (Gruber 1995:636).

Wright (1992:764) argues that one of the most important features of the role of the family in ancient Israel was as the “*vehicle of continuity for the faith, history, law, and traditions of the nation*”. He referred to these as ‘*national assets*’. This faith, history, law and tradition would of necessity be passed on from one generation to the next, from fathers and mothers to sons and daughters. The main responsibility lay with the father.

### **3.3. The role and status of fathers**

From the time of the earliest documents the Israelite family was patriarchal and was reckoned according to the patrilineal principle.

Pilch (1991:128) states that, “*The cornerstone of the patriarchal and patrilineal social edifice is the father. Children are taught at a very early age to subordinate personal ego to the authority of the father and/or actual head of the family*”.

The genealogies were always given in the father’s line, and women are rarely mentioned. In the normal types of Israelite marriage the husband is the ‘master’, the ‘baal’, of his wife. The father had absolute authority over his children, even his married sons if they lived with him, and over their wives. In the early times this authority included even the power over life and death as in the case of Judah and Tamar his daughter-in-law (Gen 38:24) (De Vaux 1961:20).

In the household, the authority of the senior male, the ‘pater familias’, in all areas of family life was considerable, ranging from assigning economic roles to family members, deciding on the male heir who

would assume his role and own much of the families patrimony, and judging family disputes to arranging marriages with other households, handling the sale of children when the household was not economically viable, and having at least for a short time period, the apparent power of life and death over children and other household members judged in violation of certain laws (Gen 19:8; 38:24; Ex 21:7-11; Judg 11:29-40; 19) Married sons and their families remained under the authority of the head of the household until he died or became incapacitated (Perdue 1997:180).

Pilch (1993:128-129) maintains that frequent and severe punishment is the means of instilling obedience and subordination in Bible times. Many proverbs bear this out as the way to bring about obedience when parenting. *"He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is diligent to discipline him"* (Prov 13:24). Another much quoted proverb would be, *"Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you beat him with a rod he will not die"* (Prov 23:13). Proverbs 10:13; 12:1; 13:1; 15:5; 17:10; 19:18; 19:29; 22:15; 26:3; 29:15, 17 are other examples. This harsh discipline was used for adolescent boys. Accordingly fathers were viewed as severe, stern and authoritarian (Pilch 1993:129).

Wright (1992:767) disputes the idea that the father had absolute judicial power of execution of his children in any circumstances. Although the father had the legal right of execution during the patriarchal times he argues that the evidence is not as strong as originally thought.

Deist (2000:291) points out that the extent of the authority of heads of households and clans was reduced after a centralized authority was introduced but the, *"mechanisms of internal and informal social control remained in place in these smaller units... 'Internalized social control' means that members of a society are educated to take personal responsibility for their own conduct and to expect some form of punishment should they transgress against what they know is right"*.

Part of the father's duty was didactic. It was also the father's duty to teach the Law of Yahweh to his children. If a father did this he was promised a prolonged enjoyment of his land (Deut 6:7; 11:19; 32:46). The faith, history, law and traditions needed to be passed on to the next generation.

The father also needed to give explanations to his children about some of the events, institutions and memorials that ancient Israelite families considered important. There are five question and answer texts which Soggin (Wright 1992:765) terms "catechetical" because of the formula that is repeated, "When your son asks you ... you shall say ... " (Ex 12:26; 13:14; Josh 4:6; 21-23; Deut 6:20-24). He also regarded them as liturgical but still placed them within the context of the family. The topics include the Exodus, the Conquest, the gift of land and the receiving of the Law, which all form a basis for Israel's faith and relationship with Yahweh. It was crucial that the family pass this on from one generation to the next.

Another important role of the father was to provide for the physical needs of the family. Many of the farming activities that required physical strength fell on his shoulders. According to Peoples and Bailey (Meyers 1997:24), "*The differential allocation of productive tasks along gender and age lines meant that adult males, for the most part, engaged in the plough agriculture necessary for growing field crops. In relation to that activity, men were also normally the ones to clear new fields of undergrowth or trees (Josh 17:18), to hew out cisterns, to build homes, and to construct terraces – that is to carry out and start operations.*" They also would therefore have made and repaired all the tools that they needed for these tasks.

### **3.4. The role and status of mothers**

Blenkinsopp (1997:75) argues convincingly that there is no one view of women in the Old Testament but "*rather a plurality of views determined*

*by variables such as epoch, literary genre, and social class. Quite simply, the Old Testament is not an entity capable of generating any one view of women”.*

The wife occupied the highest position next to the father in the family. According to some texts, the value of a wife depended on her ability to bear children (Gen 30:1) and on her ability to run the household (Prov 31:10-31). Deist (2000:264) argues that women enjoyed little legal status but high social status.

Davies (1989:384) argues that to value a woman according to the number of sons she gave birth to is a misrepresentation of marriage. In fact there are cases in the Old Testament where the opposite was apparent. In Jacob's polygamous marriage he loved Rachel more than Leah despite the fact that at that stage she did not have sons and there is Elkanah who preferred Hannah to Peninnah despite Hannah not having sons (Gen 29:32, 34; 1 Sam 1:4). Elkanah's thoughts in 1 Samuel 1:8, "*Am I not more to you than ten sons?*" may not have been an isolated example.

As families lived in a subsistence economy the birth of children was essential to the survival of the family. Because the women breastfed their children for prolonged periods they had fewer children as this acted as a natural birth control method. The practice of polygamy and concubinage also needs to be viewed in the context of the need to have more children in order to survive. More wives could provide more children to help with the farming (Deist 2000:234).

The mother was viewed as loving and compassionate. Children respected and feared the father but loved the mother affectionately even after they were married. Rebekah's influence on Jacob and Esau and Bathsheba's conniving on behalf of Solomon show how influential a role mothers continued to play in the lives of their adult children (Pilch 1993:129-130).



Several authors emphasise the fact that there was a high rate of infant mortality. According to Meyers (1997:19) it was as many as one in two children that did not survive until the age of five. There was also a high rate of maternal death at childbirth. Stager (1985:18) states that it would not be unusual for a married couple to have six births of which only two survived so that the whole family consisted of four. Perdue (1997:171) gives the reason for the high infant mortality rate as being childhood illnesses, which took their toll. This was a harsh reality of daily living.

The child was raised under the care of his or her mother and nursed for a customary period of three years (Perdue 1997:171). Infants and children remained under the mother's influence for the first seven to nine years. Pilch (1993:129) also maintains that boys were pampered while girls were hastened towards womanhood. Blenkinsopp (1997:78) points out that the relationship between mother and son was in some cases exploited to counteract the authority of the father and to give the mother more leverage.

Meyers (1997:25) states that the tasks that were to be performed in this agrarian society were not rated superior or inferior, as all the tasks were essential to the survival of the family in the pre-modern agrarian family. This is important because in today's thinking we tend to grade tasks and work in order of importance and value people accordingly. Common female tasks included caring for small children, tending gardens and small animals, producing textiles and taking responsibility for food preparation and preservation.

Meyers (1988:169) elaborates that as there would have been little food surplus and little opportunity for exchanging or obtaining goods the society would have been free of hierarchical differentiation and early Israel would be termed an egalitarian society. Sanday (1974:189-206) points out that the status of females seems to reach its highest level

when a 40 : 60 ratio of female to male contributions to household productivity exists. Leviticus 27 is offered as supporting this interesting theory. This passage provides information, which suggests that women did assume close to 40 percent of productive tasks. Gender differentiation in a society living at subsistence level implies complementarity and interdependence.

Some of the food preservation tasks took a great deal of time like the preparation of grains by soaking, milling, grinding, making a dough, setting and rising in order to make bread. Women could spend upward of ten hours a day in indoor, outdoor and courtyard chores. A wide range of learned skills were necessary. The turning of wool and flax into garments required many different skills (Meyers 1997:25).

(Meyers 1997:27) suggests that, *"The essential role of child labour in agrarian households meant, of course, that childbearing was an additional component of a woman's life. Reproduction in such a context was not simply a biological process; and it certainly was not a process subject to the choice of an individual woman as she reached childbearing age. Rather, it was integral to the fundamental issue of family survival. It is no wonder that Biblical texts contain injunctions for human fertility—"be fruitful and multiply" is addressed to male and females—and narratives about females overcoming infertility. Economic conditions mandated large families"*.

In referring to the role of the woman portrayed in Proverbs 31 Blenkinsopp (1997:84) states that, *"The portrait of the woman as displayed at the end of Proverbs is one of the woman who does her husband proud and brings up a clutch of perfectly adorable children while engaged in a daunting range of managerial tasks"*. Blenkinsopp (1997:84) refers to this as an *"ideal, or perhaps an unattainable, male fantasy of the perfect spouse"*. The fact that many verses in the Proverbs refer to quarrelsome and contentious women shows that the

writer himself was having difficulty in controlling his own household. Good wives were portrayed as being frugal, submissive and obedient.

Children, including adult children who married were required to honour, and while they lived within their birth household, to obey both parents. To honour parents meant not only to obey them but also to care for them in their old age and to provide them a proper burial. In the Covenant Code, the penalty for cursing or striking one's father or mother was death. When a woman joined her husband's household, obedience to her birth parents was transferred to the husband's head of household.

### **3.4.1. Birth**

One of the functions that women in biblical times had to fulfil was "*to be fruitful and multiply*" (Gen 1:28). It was very important for women to conceive and give birth to children and women looked forward to the birth of their first child. The Bible makes no reference to the time of delivery but only mentions it briefly. Reisenberger (1987:26) states that in most cases a set formula was used when referring to labour and birth after a full term gestation: "*and when her days to be delivered were fulfilled...*" (Gen 25:24). Reisenberger sites only one recorded instance of premature labour (1 Sam 4:19) when a pregnant woman learned of a national and personal catastrophe and because of the shock "*she sank down and gave birth; for her pains came suddenly upon her*". Miscarriages or spontaneous abortions are mentioned a number of times but only indirectly and not specifically (Job 3:11,16).

Levin in Reisenberger (1987:26) argues that in Genesis 3:16 where it speaks of Eve's punishment for sin being, "*In etzev shalt thou bring forth children*" that the word *etzev* correctly translated should read 'in sadness' rather than 'in pain' and she questions that perhaps it may better describe puerperal depression rather than birth pains.

There is an obscure text in Exodus 1:16 where a woman in labour perhaps sat on two stones placed a slight distance from each other. These stones would be the equivalent of a birthing chair. This would be similar to the chair mentioned in rabbinical times and still used in the East (De Vaux 1961:42).

Exodus 1:19 leads one to deduce that the women of Israel had easy deliveries but if one compares this to the pronouncement in Genesis 3:16 then this idea is nullified. The prophets often used the pain of childbirth in a metaphorical sense (Isa 13:8; 21:3; 26:17; Jer 4:31; 6:24) (De Vaux 1961:43).

The mother was assisted by a midwife (Gen 35:17; 38:28) and Exodus (1:15) refers to professional midwives. According to Jeremiah (20:15) the father was not present at the birth (De Vaux 1961:43). The father had to wait for a messenger to bring the news as to whether a son or a daughter had been born (Jer 20:15). There were also other women with her during labour (Ruth 4:14; 1 Sam 4:20). Reisenberger (1987:26) points out that only women were allowed to be present and all passages dealing with delivery only use feminine form of the verbs (1 Sam 4:20).

Reisenberger (1987:27) describes delivery in this way *“At the time of the delivery the woman knelt down and pressed her heels against her thighs. (The kneeling position – in Hebrew kara – is also used in Job 39:6 to describe an animal giving birth.) In order to make the receiving of the baby easier for the midwife the woman in confinement sat in a raised position”*.

Blenkinsopp (1997:68) highlights the fact that there is much that we do not know on the birth and nurture of children. One instance would be whether or not it was the usual practice for the father to acknowledge a child as his by taking the child on his knees as Job 3:12 hints. He states, *“More likely something of this nature only occurred when there*

*was grounds for doubt, as with the practice attested in the Hammurabi Code of simply pronouncing the phrase "my children". It is thought that women gave birth in a sitting position, as was the common practice with women everywhere. Sometimes it was with and sometimes without the help of a midwife.*

Deist (2000:262) supports this. He agrees with Matthews and Benjamin (Deist 2000:262) who argue that the practice that a newborn baby first had to be adopted by his or her father or else was considered stillborn was unlikely. His argument is based on the fact that in a subsistence economy children are an important status symbol (Ps 128:3) and because they were a source of labour there is no record in any Old Testament literature of the paternity of a child being contested. The metaphoric reference to a foundling in Exodus 16:3-5 cannot be used to prove that there was such a custom being practised. Deist (2000:262) further argues that children are spoken of as a divine gift (Ps 37:26; 13:9; 115:14; 128:3) for whom, a father has compassion (Ps 103:3) and whom a mother will never 'forget' (Isa 49:15). There is a great deal of compassion displayed in the poetic line 'My eyes are spent with weeping; my stomach churns; my bile is poured out on the ground because of the destruction of my people, because infants and babes faint in the streets of the city' (Lam 2:11).

De Vaux (1961:43) states that the practice was that when a baby was born it was washed, rubbed with salt and wrapped in swathing cloths (Ezek 16:4; Job 38:8-9). The treatment that was given to newborns can be gathered from the prophet Ezekiel. Although it is a metaphor for the birth of Jerusalem or Zion Reisenberger (1989:89) argues that its details could serve as a medical record. "*This is how you were treated at birth: when you were born, your navel-string was not tied, you were not bathed in water ready for rubbing, you were not salted as you should have been, nor wrapped in swaddling clothes. No one cared for you enough to do any of these things or, indeed, to have any pity for*

*you; you were thrown out on the bare ground in your own filth on the day of your birth (Ezek 16:4-5).*

Mention is made of the use of a *tzur* to cut the umbilical cord. The *tzur* is a sharp, knife-like instrument made of flint (Ex 4:24; Josh 5:3). (Reisenberger 1988:90)

Reisenberger (1988:90) argues against the interpretation that salt was rubbed on the body of the newborn. She argues convincingly for the interpretation of the text to mean rather rags or worn out clothes as in Jeremiah 38:12. The swaddling clothes were then wrapped tightly around the baby. And then the baby was given to the mother.

Mother's were sequestered after childbearing (and during menses) for a period of eighty days for a baby girl and forty days for a baby boy (Blenkinsopp 1997:75). After this she was ritually purified and was able to engage in all activities – sacred and profane (Resienberger 1987:29).

There are only two cases of multiple births recorded in the Bible. Both are found in Genesis. They are the twin sons of Isaac and Rebekah (25:24-26) and the twin sons of Tamar (38:27-30). Reisenberger (1997:1548) argues that, "*The Bible probably only refers to these two particular cases of twin deliveries because they were exceptional: the first delivery involved newborn boys with a peculiar appearance, and the second involved an unusual birth sequence*".

Reisenberger (1997:1548-1549) argues that Jacob and Esau were identical, monozygotic twins, "*That developed from one fertilised egg, which splits in two genetically identical twins who may share the same placenta, chorion and amniotic sac, are of the same sex, and look identical, although they may have different birth weights*" In her paper Reisenberger proposes that their differences were a result of, "*Twin-twin transfusion syndrome, a condition in which identical twins share an amniotic sac have an abnormal blood circulation*" (1997:1549).

### 3.4.2. Naming children

Reisenberger (1988:92) states that *“the baby was named by one of three who were considered as partners in his creation: God, the father, or the mother”*.

De Vaux (1961:43) argues that a child's name was usually given at birth by the mother (Gen 29:31-30:24; 35:18; 1 Sam 1:20) but sometimes by the father (Gen 16:15; 17:19; Gen 35:18; Ex 2:22). The custom of postponing the naming of a child until after the circumcision, eight days later, is not recorded until the New Testament (Luke 1:59; 2:21). Reisenberger (1988:92) argues correctly that the dominant family member cannot be shown by who named the baby. She also maintains that God provided the name for the child when the mother did not conceive easily or when there was some intervention by heavenly powers as in the case of Ishmael (Gen 16:11) or Isaac (Gen 17:19).

*“For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith Yahweh, so shall your seed and your name remain”* (Isa 66:22). The promise to Abraham and the other patriarchs that their seed, their children, would bless the earth was passed down to each succeeding generation. The seed according to Pedersen (1926:254) was identical with the name. It was a compliment to a father that his son was greater than he was because this makes his name greater as in the case of David and Solomon (1 Ki 1:47, 48).

In the early biblical time, immortality was linked to living on through children who carried on the name of their parents (Gen 48:16) (Grassi 1992:904).

It was common in the ancient Near East for a name to denote the essence of a thing. To name something was to know it and have power over it. In the Garden of Eden when God allowed men to name the animals (Gen 2:19-20) it was a sign that he was putting them under

man's power. To know the name of a person was also to be able to hurt that person or to do them good as in the case of Moses who God knew by name (Ex 33:12, 17). It was also a reason why people were to know the name of their God (Ex 3:13-15). De Vaux (1961:43) states that, "*The name defines the essence, the character and destiny of the person. The name became the expression of hope or a symbol, which men use to decipher by rough etymologies*" (De Vaux 1961:43).

Pedersen (1926:252) states that the most important feature of the name given is the association that it has. When one of the children of Isaiah is to be called "Quickspoil Lightning-plunder" then it means that is bound up in the defeat of the people. It was a common wish to call one's children by good names to which good associations were attached. Among the Jews of a later period it was common practice to use the names of one of the ancestors, especially that of the paternal grandfather. Many names contain good associations like, "Yahweh helps", "Yahweh gives", "Yahweh makes fast", which have an association of divine protection. Prophets names also reflected the bearer: In Hosea 1 the names "Graceless", "Not-my-people", "Jezreel" or in Isaiah 7, 14 and 9:5 "With-us-God".

Sometimes a particular circumstance of birth provided inspiration for a child's name. It might concern the mother who bore the child. Eve called her firstborn Cain because she had acquired a man (Gen 4:1) (De Vaux 1961:43).

Names of animals were also commonly used especially in the early ages. Rachel means 'sheep', Deborah 'bee', Yona 'dove' and Caleb 'dog'. Some authors maintain that these were originally the names of clan. De Vaux maintains that these are the names of individuals and not clans. Names taken from plants were much rarer like that of Tamar, which means 'palm tree' (De Vaux 1961:44).



The most important category of names is that which used some form of God's name. These were more commonly used during periods of religious revival. The term *baal*, which often referred to the Canaanite god was often used. The name of Yahweh or El was also frequently used. Names were often changed so that the term Yahweh or El were used in place of Ba'al. Some of these names were also abridged e.g. Nathan instead of *Nathanyahu* (De Vaux 1961:45).

In Israel Messianic titles were given to the child who was to succeed the king, probably the Emmanuel, whose birth is foretold in Isaiah 9:5. According to 2 Samuel 12:24-25 the child of David and Bathsheba received the name of Solomon from his mother, but the prophet Nathan named him *Yediyah*. This name never appears again. The reigning name displaced the name given at birth and it is probable that the kings of Judah took a new name when they succeeded to the throne. During the time of the kingdoms the children identified with reference to the father e.g. Saul son of Kish (De Vaux 1961:8).

Occasionally Israelites or Jews had foreign names in and outside of Palestine. Aramaic names began to appear after the exile. During the Greco-Roman period a person may have a Greek or Roman name in addition to a Jewish name (De Vaux 1961:45).

The most dreadful thing that could happen was for a name to be completely annihilated. Pedersen (1926:255) states that, "*In the name lies the whole substance of man's soul; if it is killed, then there is only absolute emptiness*". When Saul was in the power of David he asked that the house of Kish not be exterminated (1 Sam 24:22). The danger that a name could be exterminated had a tremendous impact on Israel as it meant future oblivion for that family (Pedersen 1926:256).

### **3.4.3. Nursing**

The suckling baby is called *yonek*, which differentiates it from *olel*, which is the collective name for the young. *Olel* does not give any

indication of exact age or nature of feeding. Reisenberger (1988:94) also points out that it was a matter of survival for the child to be fed by the mother because of famine, drought and epidemics. Mothers who could feed were considered blessed and those who refused to nurse their babies were despised and considered despicable (Lam 4:3). As the baby and the mother were considered vulnerable following birth both mother and child were excused from long trips to fulfil religious duties (1 Sam 1:22) and national gatherings (Joel 2:16). If they had no option but to travel when they travelled it was in wagons (Gen 45:19; 46:5).

The child was weaned much later than nowadays (1 Sam 20-23). There are varying opinions as to exactly when. According to 2 Maccabees 7:27 the child was weaned at age three. This was also the custom in ancient Babylon. When Isaac was weaned it was celebrated by holding a feast (Gen 21:8) (De Vaux 1961:43).

Reisenberger (1988:97) points out that from contracts of Egyptian and Roman wet nurses the usual lactation period was two years. In a rabbinical debate (*Ketuboth* 60b) the period of between eighteen and twenty-four months is mentioned. She also suggests that there are always exceptions to the rule.

Blenkinsopp (1997:68) also agrees with De Vaux coming to the conclusion that children were nursed for a period of three years. Under exceptional circumstances the mother handed the child over to a wet nurse for a period of three years or more. It is interesting to note that Isaiah 28:9-10 may imply the learning of letters by rote and therefore the child's education began immediately after weaning.

Gruber (1995:645) gives several factors that accounted for the low fertility rate in Israelite women. They include late puberty, early menopause, and relatively early mortality (about 40 years old). This can be accounted for because of the lack of animal protein in the diet. The

most important reason was that the mothers nursed their children for up to two years. Long-term nursing resulted in a birth rate 60 percent below that of comparable societies. Reisenberger (1988:96) argues that it cannot be assumed that the people of antiquity believed that lactation reduced fertility and that Hosea 1:8 cannot be used to prove that they did as the verse is indecisive.

Pilch (1993:129) argues that boys were breast-fed twice as long as girls were, until long after they could speak. Hannah first weaned Samuel, her son, when he was old enough to remain at Shiloh and to minister to the Lord with Eli the priest and his sons (1 Sam 1:21-28; 2:11).

### **3.5. The role and status of children**

When one talks about children in the Old Testament it is difficult to know exactly what age group is being referred to. All children including babies up until puberty were considered children. Several references illustrate the fact that really young children were grouped together (Ps 8:3; Lam 2:11; Joel 2:6). They were seen as dependent and vulnerable (Is 65:20; Lam 4:4) (Deist 2000:262).

Despite the fact that children were seen to be children until puberty they still had a part to play in the survival of the family. Meyers (1997:27) states that, *“As early as five or six, both boys and girls might be assigned tasks of fuel gathering, caring for younger children, picking and watering garden vegetables, and assisting in food preparation. For the most part, children of that age eased the burden of female labour, which probably consumed more hours per day than did the male-specific tasks. By the age of thirteen children typically reached nearly full adult labour input in farm households, with workloads easily exceeding nine hours per day. These older children normally worked with same-sex adults, insofar as their adult tasks by then had become gender specific. Children under thirteen worked proportionately less; by age seven or eight, they may have laboured up to four hours a day.*

*Clearly the labour value of children soon exceeded whatever cost in caloric intake they represented."*

Work probably began at an early age, seven or eight and increased with adolescence and adulthood. The labour required to keep food on the table all year round took up all the daylight hours. Women, men and children all carried this burden (Hopkins 1994:219).

Infants and small children were dependent on parents and other adult members of the household but the household also depended on children as soon as they began to be involved in the labour tasks of the family. If a man had no children then his property was distributed according to the defined succession of male heirs within his household and larger kinship structure (Lot, who as Abraham's nephew, was the probable heir to his uncle in Genesis 11:27-32). An heir could be produced by a surrogate mother (Gen 16:1-4). If adoption was practised an adopted son may have been allowed to inherit a childless father's patrimony (Gen 15:1-3). Parents were responsible for the religious (Deut 6:7; 11:19) and moral (Prov 1:8) instruction of their children, they nurtured and sustained them (Deut 1:31; Hos 11:1-3) and loved and showed them compassion (2 Sam 18:33; Ps 103:13).

Blenkinsopp (1997:78) argues that, *"In the inevitable round of tensions, power plays, and trade-offs within the small world of the household, the woman had leverage primarily over as mother of her children, especially her male children. Her role in childrearing meant that she was the one most responsible for the internalisation of the group ethos and for what passed for education in general; hence the frequent allusions in the aphoristic and didactic literature to the mother's instruction (e.g. Prov 1:8; 6:20; 23:22-25; 31:1-9). In our sources, the topos of the mother-son bond occurs with some frequency and lets us see how this special relationship could be exploited to counter, in some measure, the authority of the paterfamilias"*. Examples of this would be Rebekah and Jacob (Gen 27) and Bathsheba tirelessly promoting

Solomon's very weak claim to the throne (2 Sam 11; 1 Ki 1-2). The influence of a wife and mother was so great that it was feared that if a woman outside of the kinship group married in to the family then she would introduce any alien religion that she subscribed to and would influence any children from the marriage to accept the alien religion that she brought with her. This is one of the reasons why the Israelites were discouraged from marrying anyone outside of their kinship community. This frequently became an issue in Israelite history (Ex 34:16; Deut 7:3-4; Prov 1-9).

Children's status according to Deist (2000:262) was in belonging to "*an honourable, disciplined and well-run household*". The rites of passage that signified their moving from one group to another were for males, circumcision, marriage and perhaps later in Judaism some puberty rite, which later became the *bar-mitzvah*. For females the rites of passage were menstruation and marriage and a legal transfer from the father to her husband and if she lost her husband her son or brother (Deist 2000:262).

### **3.5.1. The importance of the eldest son**

During the father's lifetime the eldest son took precedence over his brothers and enjoyed certain privileges (Gen 43:33). On his father's death he received a double share of the inheritance and became head of the family (Deut 21:17). With twins the first to see the light was reckoned to be the elder (Gen 25:24-26; 38:27-30). The eldest could lose his right to primogeniture for a grave offence as did Reuben by his incest (Gen 35:22; 49:3-4) or he could surrender it as did Esau by selling his birth-right to Jacob (Gen 25:29-34). The eldest son was protected against favouritism on the part of the father (Deut 21:15-17) (De Vaux 1961:42).

The first born as already mentioned became head of the family when the father died and then wielded authority but as soon as the economic

system changes as it does when cities are formed this falls away (Deist 2000:265).

In ancient Israel the firstborn, because he was the first fruit of marriage, belonged to God. The firstborn of a flock was sacrificed, but those of mankind were redeemed (Ex 13:11-15; 22:28; 34:20) because God abhorred the sacrifice of children (Lev 20:2-5). Instead the Levites were consecrated to God as substitutes for the firstborn of the people (Num 3:12-13; 8:16-18) (De Vaux 1961:42).

The displacing of the elder son by the younger is a theme that often reoccurs in the Old Testament. Jacob and Esau, Peres and Zerah, Ishmael and Isaac, Joseph and later Benjamin, Ephraim and Manasseh and even Solomon are all examples where a younger brother received the inheritance (De Vaux 1961:42).

Other advantages according to Bendor (1996:179) included that he was the first of the sons to be active on the farmstead, he was the first to learn from his father, he was accustomed to assuming authority over those who were younger than him and he was the first to establish his own family unit. Deist (2000:265) highlights the fact that the firstborn is also the one who carries the 'name' of the family forward (Deist 2000:265).

1 Kings 15:27-28 and 16:9-10 suggests according to Deist (2000:282) that Israel did not practice hereditary succession of the king. It was therefore not a foregone conclusion that the eldest son of the king would be the next monarch.

### **3.5.2. Sons**

The eldest son usually enjoyed the highest status among the children and the younger unmarried sons might do various tasks for the older siblings as David did for his brothers (1 Sam 17:17-18) (Avalos 1995:625).

There is no doubt that males enjoyed superior status. Given the patriarchal, patrilocal and patrilineal society along with hostile environment and manual labour that required manpower there was no option. Deist (2000:363) expresses it as, "*Men did not have to acquire status. They own it and only lose it temporarily through uncustomary conduct*". Some men enjoyed higher status than others by having more property or larger households or being a brave warrior or behaving wisely. As long as boys grew up into men in a well-ordered household there was no question that they would have status.

Boys were generally pampered from birth. Women did this whenever they had a chance. At puberty the boys moved from the warm and loving environment of women into the world of men, which was harsh and hierarchical. They often tried to return to the world of women but were unable. Men were pictured as stern, severe and authoritarian by comparison. Boys fourteen to sixteen were often physically punished to help them to endure physical pain (Pilch 1993:130).

There were basic activities of ploughing, planting, harvesting, threshing and winnowing, raising cereal crops such as wheat, barley and millet and legumes, tending and harvesting fruit bearing trees including grapevines and olives. Hunting and fishing would also need to be learnt to supplement the diet (Blenkinsopp 1997:56-57). These were all activities that boys had to engage in and learn from their fathers. Another one of the skills boys learned was herding sheep (Deist 2000:262).

### **3.5.3. Daughters**

The status of women was often misunderstood (Deist 2000:263) and therefore it follows that girl's social status also was misunderstood. Some people viewed girls as posing a life-long problem. Sirach advises fathers not to indulge them (7:24-25) and to keep an eye on them. According to him a daughter "*is a secret anxiety to her father, and the*

*worry of her keeps him awake at night, when she is young, for fear she may grow too old to marry, and when she is married, for fear she may lose her husband's love; when she is a virgin, for fear she may be seduced and become pregnant in her father's house; when she has a husband, for fear she may misbehave; and after marriage, for fear she may be barren (42:9-10).*

Daughters had an economic value which was related to the *mohar* that the family would be given at her marriage. It was therefore important to protect the daughter from any situation, which would jeopardise her value. This would include any sexual relations prior to marriage. If a husband made false accusations about her virginity the father had to be compensated. A father could sell his daughter as a maidservant or as a concubine or as a slave if they were extremely poor. Their economic value as property was therefore when they were devalued or when extreme poverty forced the parents to use them as assets (Wright 1992:767).

The family on behalf of their daughter chose the marriage partner. This was the most important transaction that took place between families (Blenkinsopp 1997:99).

Most young women received education to be good housewives and to help in the fields (Meyers 1997:36). Girls assisted their older sisters in their tasks (Deist 2000:262).

There were a few professions open for girls. They could become nurses and midwives (Ex 1:21), cooks or weavers (1 Sam 8:13), perfumers (1 Sam 8:13) and mourners (Jer 9:19), was taught by the mothers to their daughters (Meyers 1997:36, 37). The profession of mourning was not as simple as we would think. There were fixed forms of mourning and a stock number of themes, which the wailers then applied to the individual. The mourners praised the quality of the dead person and bewailed their fate but there never was any religious content to the



wailing. (De Vaux 1961: 53). There were also singers (1 Sam 19:36), necromancers (1 Sam 28:7) or prostitutes (1 Ki 3:16) – the last two were not approved of but were none the less practiced. Proverbs 31:10-31 is an acrostic poem of a capable wife. The woman is portrayed as very active in and about the home and this writing could have served as a guide to young women from wealthier homes to teach them all about home economics (Lemaire 1992: 311).

It was possible that there was a school for upper class women in Jerusalem. Seals have been discovered of women who could obviously read and write. There is also Hulda who was considered a prophet and consulted by high officials from the court and the reason for this could be that she was well educated.

“Daughters left the family unit at a marriageable age and thus were not present to contest the authority of their mothers. And daughters-in-law entering the family household, as newcomers, were unlikely to question managerial decisions of the senior female—unless, of course, the older female lived well beyond the usual lifespan and impinged on the growing competence and experience, to say nothing of the greater energy, of a mature, younger woman. Even if daughters-in-law maintained respect for the husband’s mothers—a value strongly present in the book of Ruth—their position as outsiders, at least in the early years of marriage, may have made life difficult at times” (Meyers 1997:36, 37).

#### **4. Customs and rites that impacted the lives of children**

##### **4.1. Consecration or redemption of the firstborn son**

Wright (1992:765) states that one of the times when family teaching takes place is when the firstborn son is consecrated and with the sacrifice or redemption of all firstborn animals. The rite was a link between family life in Israel and the Israelites’ relationship with Yahweh. Firstly it symbolised the Israelites complete belonging to Yahweh and secondly was also a reminder that the firstborn had been spared while

the firstborn in Egypt had been slain. It was a reminder to them that those that Yahweh had spared from death belonged completely to God. They were the first fruits, which represented the whole of which they were a part. By claiming the first fruit God was claiming the whole of the succeeding generation as his own. The birth of the first son ensured the continuity of that family into the next generation.

Wright (1992:765) highlights the fact that, *“The consecration of the son to Yahweh symbolically ensured the continuation of the covenant relationship into that generation also. As the psalmists delight to recall Yahweh is Israel’s God “from generation to generation.” Like the Passover, to which it is closely related in the text it is to serve as a constant memorial of the foundational redemptive events of the Exodus. And also like the Passover, it was within the family that this memorial and sign was to be perpetuated”*.

#### **4.2. Succession and inheritance**

In ancient Israel there was no such thing as a written will or testament. Before a father died he gave verbal instructions about the distribution of his property (Deut 21:16; Si 14:13; 33:24). The law and the customs when distributing his property bound the father. There are only two legislative texts that refer to inheritance, Deuteronomy 21:15-17 and Numbers 27:1-11 in conjunction with Numbers 38:6-9. These have to do with specific cases (De Vaux 1961: 53).

The rule about inheritance was that only sons could inherit and the eldest received a double share (Deut 21:17; 2 Ki 2:9). This was the same in Assyrian law. The eldest double inheritance was safeguarded from any favouritism to the other sons (Deut 21:15-17). Exceptions to this were Isaac’s inheritance over Ishmael and Solomon to Adonias (1 Ki 1:17; 2:15). The house with the ancestral holdings was generally allotted to the eldest so that the inheritance would stay in tact and this would explain Deuteronomy 25:5 (De Vaux 1961: 53).

The sons of concubines did not usually inherit but were often given gifts unless there was a prior agreement that the children would be recognised. Sarah went back on her word after promising to recognise Ishmael as her own child (Gen 16:2). In the case of the sons of the slave women Bilhah and Zilpah, they were given equal rank with those of Rachel and Leah's children (Gen 49:1-28) (De Vaux 1961: 53).

Daughters did not inherit except when there were no male heirs (Num 27:1-8). They had to find husbands from their father's clan. The exception that we know of was Job's daughters who received an inheritance along with their brothers. This may represent a later custom. There were several possible reasons. It may have shown the freedom the fathers had at a certain time to distribute their wealth or it may have shown the enormous wealth that Job possessed (De Vaux 1961:54).

Gruber (1995:647) quotes from two documents from Emar where men who had daughters but no sons resorted to the legal fiction of declaring their daughters 'both male and female' so that they could inherit.

If a man died without children the inheritance was given to the closest male on the father's side (Num 27:9-11). His widow did not receive the inheritance. This kept the property in the family otherwise if the widow married again the family would lose the property to the new husband. This law differed from Babylonian law where the widow did have a share in the inheritance and at the very least was able to keep what she had contributed to the marriage. A childless widow either returned to her father's family or remained a member of her husband's family in a levirate marriage. If a widow had grown up children they provided for her support. If the children were still young she may have managed the property left to them as a trustee (2 Ki 3:3-6)(De Vaux 1961: 54).

Meyers (1997:35) argues that it was highly likely that there was conflict between heirs regarding inheritance. This became more prevalent

when the population increased and land was more and more difficult to acquire. Israelite's law favoured the oldest sons as they received double what the second son received (Deut 21:17). The eldest brother had seniority over the younger brothers and sisters and this did produce conflict. One of the solutions was for one or more of the brothers to join the militia units or later the army. This helped to reduce the tension in the family over land issues (Meyers1997:35).

Stager (1985:25) also points out that as the pieces of land which the sons inherited grew smaller and smaller with each inheritance and there was no more land for expansion, because the borders were drawn, younger sons had difficulty establishing themselves as heads of household with sufficient land and wealth. These young unmarried males then took careers not only in the military but also in the government and priesthood (Stager 1985:25).

#### **4.3. Blessing of children**

Blessings are an important part of Israelite religion. Grassi (92:905) highlights the fact that the Bible attaches special importance to the blessing of children. This is especially so before the death of parents as in Genesis 27, 48 and 49. Urbrock (1992:757) points out that blessings are fitting when one generation is about to die and wishes to pass on favour to the next. The best-known blessings are those given by Isaac and Jacob to their sons. The ancient Jewish customs of blessing children follows the rituals of these texts. The priestly blessing in Numbers 6:24-26 is also used for them (Grassi 92:905).

#### **4.4. Circumcision**

Circumcision had special religious significance for Israel. Reisenberger (1988:93) points out that when a father circumcised his son he entered him into the covenant, *brit*, between God and Israel and joined him with the community of Israel and the Jewish faith.

The operation of circumcision was the removal of the foreskin. In Genesis 17:12 which is the priestly account of the covenant with Abraham mentions circumcision and that it needed to be performed on the eighth day after birth. This practice was followed with Isaac when he was circumcised according to Genesis 21:4. The use of flint knives, which was mentioned in Exodus 4:25 and Joshua 5:2-3 shows how early this custom began. At a later stage metal instruments were used (De Vaux 1961:45).

Blenkinsopp (1997:68) argues that although priestly law called for circumcision on the eighth day after birth (Lev 12:3) that particular time frame was probably introduced during the Babylonian diaspora to make the Israelites distinctive from the practices around them. Blenkinsopp (1997:68) maintains that, "*In its original form, circumcision was essentially an atropaic and initiatory prenuptial ritual*". He uses as his argument some of the early narratives where there were alliances formed through marriage as in the case of the Shechemites (Gen 34) and the incident involving Moses, Zipporah and their son in the wilderness (Ex 4:24-26).

According to De Vaux (1961:45) the father carried out the circumcision operation (Gen 21:4). Only in exceptional circumstances did the mother perform the operation as in the case of Zipporah (Ex 4:25). There was no particular place where the ceremony had to be performed but circumcision was never to be performed in the sanctuary by the priest. By performing the rite of circumcision the covenant was renewed from one generation to the next and had a particular religious significance. De Vaux (1961:48) argues that it appears that the Israelites adopted the custom when they settled in Canaan. Circumcision lost its meaning as a practice that made a man fit for normal sexual life, as an initiation into marriage. It gained ground gradually as a religious practice. To begin with it was hardly mentioned but later during the Exile circumcision became a distinctive mark of a man who belonged to Israel and to Yahweh. The exiles lived among people who did not

practise it but the custom was gradually being dropped among the nations of Palestine. Josephus states that during the first century the Jews were the only inhabitants of Palestine that were circumcised.

The importance of circumcision as a sign of the covenant with God became all the more strongly emphasised during New Testament times. Proselytes to Judaism were obliged to accept it (Acts 15:5) (De Vaux 1961:48).

#### **4.5. Death and funeral rites**

Although it was the duty of children to bury their parents because of the high infant mortality rate one can conclude that often parents had to bury their children. The chief funeral ceremony was the lamentation for the dead. It was generally a sharp repeated cry. A father would call his son by name (2 Sam 19:1-5). For the death of an only son the lament was particularly heart-rending (Jer 6:26; Am 8:10; Zech 12:10). Women and men in separate groups cried out the phrases they repeated during mourning (Zech 12:11-14) (De Vaux 1961: 60).

These ceremonies were considered to be a duty to be paid to the dead, as an act of piety, which was their due. For children these rites formed part of the duty to their parents enjoined in the Decalogue. The fifth commandment stated, "honour thy father and thy mother" (Ex 20:12). Stager (1985:23) states that it was part of the duty of the family to provide appropriate funerary or memorial rites. We conclude that the dead were honoured in a religious spirit but there was no cult to the dead in Israel (De Vaux 1961: 61).

#### **5. Legal rights of children and young adults**

Practically no provision was made for the legal protection of minors. The laws and norms that speak of children generally refer to young adults according to Blenkinsopp (1997:66-67).

Scholars agree that the law in ancient Israel was of enormous importance. So much so that the law influenced the whole life and way of thinking of people in the Old Testament times. The law even influenced theological concepts. Quell (1964:174) expressed this concept of law in the Old Testament when he said that, "... *law is the basis of the view of God in the Old Testament in so far as it is theologically developed, and conversely the endowment of legal concepts with religious meaning contributed to an ethicising of law*".

Boecker (1980:28-29) maintains that because the Israelites began as nomads, law had its roots in the extended family or house and in the clan. The head of it was the father or paterfamilias. In ancient times he had unrestricted authority. The paterfamilias decided disputes within the family authoritatively and absolutely. The narrative sections of the Old Testament do not mention this form of jurisdiction very often. One case that is mentioned is that of Hagar and her son Ishmael in Genesis 16:5-6. Sarah appeals to the paterfamilias, who is the guardian of the legal interests of the family. "*I have been wronged and you must answer for it*".

The story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38 is another example and shows how Judah exercised authority over the women in the family. He pronounced the sentence on her as she was accused of being a prostitute. He ordered that she be brought out and be burned (Boecker 1980:30).

By the time Deuteronomy was written the power of the paterfamilias had diminished. This can be seen in the passage found in Deuteronomy 21:18-21. Boecker (1980:30) states that by this time the nomadic jurisdiction of the family gave way to the jurisdiction of the local community, which consisted of permanent settlers. Children along with women, slaves and aliens were excluded from taking part in legal trials. Old Testament laws stress the duty that these people be given their

legal rights. *"You shall not deprive aliens and orphans of justice nor take a widow's cloak in pledge"* (Deut 24:17).

In the Old Testament there is no reference to legislation being introduced by the king. It was considered that the God of Israel, Yahweh was the sole legislator. This differed from other Ancient Near Eastern countries (Boecker 1980:41).

## **5.1. During Pregnancy and Birth**

### **5.1.1. In the event of a Miscarriage or Abortion**

Children were considered a valuable resource. The high infant mortality rate meant that there were not as many children in a family as the parents would like to have had. This is the argument that Blenkinsopp (1997:69) puts forward for the fact that there is no record of abortion taking place or that infanticide was practised. Legal writings from the ancient Near East including the Sumerian cities, Babylon, the Hittites, the Assyrians and the Israelites all contain laws saying what should be done if women are injured during pregnancy and as a result miscarry. The Covenant Code in Exodus 21:22-23 is translated in this way:

*"When men fight and injure a pregnant woman so that her children come out but there is no serious harm, he [the one responsible] shall be fined according as the woman's husband imposes on him, and he shall pay as the assessors determine. But if serious harm follows, you shall give a life for a life"* (Blenkinsopp 1997:69).

In this particular scenario it is assumed that what happened was an accident and it is therefore considered to be a civil case rather than a criminal case. In the Near Eastern laws that deal with similar incidents the laws deal with the deliberate blow given by one person rather than the injury sustained. Blenkinsopp (1997:69) argues that, *"The offending party, significantly, is never the woman's husband. In each case the one responsible must compensate for the loss of the fetus, not because the latter was thought to enjoy legal rights but because children were a*



*valuable economic resource*". The Hittite law is the only one that fixes the penalty according to the stages reached in the pregnancy, which apparently was ten shekels for the tenth month and five shekels for the fifth. Blenkinsopp (1997:70) also points out, "*The "serious harm" ('asôn) referred to in the Israelite law presumably means the death of the woman; in this case the penalty, in all the relevant laws, is much more severe, involving application of the lex talionis. It is interesting to note that the old Greek version (LXX) translates the obscure 'asôn with exeikonismenon [paidion] meaning "fully formed [child]," representing a certain shift of focus from mother to fetus*".

Avalos (1985 628) argues that the fact that the person responsible for the loss of the child is only fined shows that the life of the unborn child was not considered equal to the life of an adult. Similar views are found in other eastern law codes.

## **5.2. During childhood**

Practically no legal provision was made for children. The laws and norms that speak of children generally refer to young adults, and the same is true of most of the admonitions regarding intergenerational, familial relations in proverbial literature (Blenkinsopp 1997:67).

Blenkinsopp (1997:69) points out that there is very little Near Eastern legislation that protects the interests of small children. There are laws for the payment of nurses caring for small children and the prosecuting of nurses should something go wrong while they are under their care. There is also provision made for small children in exceptional circumstances like if the father becomes a prisoner of war and would then not be able to provide for his children over an extended period of time. Blenkinsopp highlights some issues regarding children in the Code of Hammurabi where there is no Israelite laws that are equivalent. He says, "*The code of Hammurabi sets restrictions on the father's freedom to disinherit children, requires explicit acknowledgement of paternity in certain cases, and has a sense of laws of adoption,*

*including the penalties for the rejection of adoptive parents, presumably by a somewhat older child. Practically none of this is replicated in Israelite legislation”.*

From the time of the oldest documents Israel is patriarchal. The husband was ‘master’, *ba’al*, of his wife. The father had absolute authority over his children, even over his married sons. In early times these even included the power over life and death (De Vaux 1961:20). By the 8<sup>th</sup> century BC the authority of the head of the family was no longer limited. A father could no longer put his son to death. Judgement was reserved for the ‘elders’ of the town. Even in David’s day the member of a clan had a right of appeal from the judgement of the clan to the king himself (2 Sam 14:4-11) (De Vaux 1961:23).

As the authority of the head of the family diminished the principle of individual responsibility developed. The duty of mutual assistance began to be neglected by relatives and the prophets had to plead the case of the widow and the orphan (Isa 1:17; Jer 7:6; 22:3) (De Vaux 1961:23).

Most laws and admonitions dealing with children are concerned with young adults who are members of the household and still under the authority of the senior parents, who had great, though not absolute authority. Children could be sold into debt service or slavery, although this likely only occurred in extreme cases of hardship. This extreme act may have been necessitated by the threat of insolvency. Parents could present an ungovernable son to the elders of the clan to be executed for disrupting the order of the household but this court alone had the right to determine guilt and carry out the sentence. Child sacrifice is mentioned on occasions but traditional Israelite religion came to regard the practice as repugnant and prohibited (Lev 20:2-5). Exodus 13:11-15; 22-28 and 34:20 provided for the redemption of the firstborn through sacrifice. The Levites eventually came to substitute for this sacrifice (Num 3:12-13; 8:14-19) (Perdue 1997:190, 191).

### 5.3. Sexual offences

These offences included rape, incest, homosexuality and bestiality, most of which were punishable by death. Rape was seen as an infringement on the property rights of the father and not as a violation of the victim's body according to Avalos (1995: 629). Punishment for the offender depended on whether the girl was marriageable or betrothed and whether there was consent. If a girl was raped in a field then it was debatable as to whether she had consented. The rapist would then be punished by death. If a man raped a betrothed girl and there was a forced marriage then the husband did not have the right to divorce her and he had to pay the fixed bride's price. A betrothed girl was considered legally married and her sexuality was protected on pain of death (Deut 22:23-29).

### 5.4. Inheritance

There is extensive treatment of the right of inheritance in Babylonian law and very little in Old Testament law. The laws that there are deal with particular cases. The fundamental principles of inheritance were that only sons could inherit, normally speaking and that the eldest son received a double share. It was the eldest son's responsibility to provide for his mother and the female members of the family. The firstborn had a special position in the family (Boecker 1980:118-119).

There are only two legislative texts that refer to inheritance, Deuteronomy 21:15-17 and Numbers 27:1-11 in conjunction with Numbers 38:6-9. These have to do with specific cases (De Vaux 1961: 53).

Bendor (1996:173-176) uses Genesis 48:5-6, "*And now your two sons... Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine... And the offspring born to you after them shall be yours; they shall be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance*", to argue that the brothers born after the first two did not inherit in their own right but were called by the

of their brothers. The nuclear unit of the third or fourth brother would have a place to live, small cattle and grazing rights but would not have their own vineyard and field. This brother during time of census was not called by his own name but by the name of his brother. This was done to prevent fragmentation of the family property.

### **5.5. Adoption**

It is very surprising that not even the narrative sections of the Old Testament refer to adoption. The texts, which are often referred to include Genesis 30:1-13: 48:15, 12; 50:23 but none of these cases refer strictly to adoption. Several explanations of this have been suggested. One reason is that the allowance of polygamy reduced the likelihood of childlessness. This reason has flaws, as polygamy was not widely practised because of economic reasons. A further suggestion is the practice of levirate marriage. If a man died childless it was the duty of the brother to be husband to his brother's wife and to provide an heir for his brother (Deut 25:5-10). The eldest son of the union had the right of inheritance. There are only three texts in the Old Testament where the levirate played a part, which suggests that it was not widely practised but this reason alone cannot explain the absence of adoption (Boecker 1980:121).

Boecker (1980:121) quotes Hempel and argues that the reason is more likely to be, "*that the Israelite family was fundamentally a blood-community*" and because of this adoption was not allowed. The reason was more theological because having descendants was a sign and an expression of God's blessing in the Old Testament. Adoption was seen as trying to force God's hand and regarded as unlawful.

The notion of adoption in the juridical sense was known in the Old Testament times, but had little influence on daily life; it was unknown in later Jewish law although it was practised in Mesopotamia from very early times (De Vaux 1961:52).

There is the example of Rachel adopting the children of Bilhah when she could not have her own children and bearing 'a child on her knees' (Gen 30:3-8). In all the cases cited in the Old Testament 'the child was laid on or before the knees' of the man or woman who adopted it. These adoptions all take place within the family and are not as far reaching as a proper adoption (De Vaux 1961:51).

The metaphors used of Yahweh as a father and Israel as a son can hardly be used to designate adoption apart from Psalm 2:7 which states 'Thou art my son; to-day I have begotten thee' which seems to be a formula used for adoption (De Vaux 1961:52). This text refers to the coronation in Jerusalem at which the God of Israel declares the new king to be his son and installs him in office (Boecker 1980:121-122).

## **5.6. Orphans**

Deist (2000:266) points out that social status could be obtained through age, sex, economic, or legal position. The orphan and the widow and the slave were in this category.

Orphans are placed in a group with widows and the poor when it comes to Old Testament social problems. Psalm 82: 3-4 gives some insight into the position of the orphan, the widow and the poor. Because of their weakness those with power can threaten them. The God of Israel is regarded as the only true judge and protector of the weak (Fensham 1991:184-185).

The orphan, widow and the poor according to Fensham (1991:188) had, *"little or no legal rights and no legal personalities. They were almost outlaws. Anyone could oppress them without danger that legal connections might endanger his position. To restore the balance of society these people must be protected. Therefore it was necessary to sanction their protection by direct command of the god and to make it the virtue of kings"*.

The Covenant Code makes a distinct pronouncement on justice to the orphan and widow. Oppression of the orphan and widow is forbidden in Exodus 22:21-24 and the result of oppression is a severe punishment. The style is apodictic as it is a direct command of God to his people. There is also a special interest in the fate of the orphan and widow in Deuteronomy. Several passages (Deut 10:18; 14:28-29; 16:11, 14; 24:17-22; 27:19) refer to them and how they should be treated. The protection of the group is linked with Yahweh, they should be allowed to take part in all the feasts, their rights should not be abused, food must be left on the land for them and those who abused their rights should be cursed (Fensham 1991:194).

This policy of protection of the orphan, widow and poor was commonly practised in Mesopotamia and Egypt and was inherited from their forbears who came from Mesopotamia and Egypt or who had grown up in the Canaanite world. Fensham (1991:189) concludes by saying that, *"In the Israelite community this policy was extended through the encouragement of the high ethical religion of Yahweh to become a definite part of their religion, later to be inherited by Christians and Muslims"*.

### **5.7. During young adulthood**

The majority of legal stipulations, norms and admonitions that have to do with children in the Old Testament are actually aimed at young adults. Young adults were still under the jurisdiction of the father who was head of the family. The father exercised extensive but not absolute authority over his children. The law in Exodus 21:7 discusses the case of a father who because of extreme poverty sells his daughter into slavery. In this case the daughter's work would pay off the debts while she was in service to the debtor. Blenkinsopp (1997:70) points out that this happened on occasions over several centuries. The case that was addressed to Nehemiah in Nehemiah 5:1-5 shows that social abuses continued to occur in extreme circumstances such as drought. The case cited in Genesis 38:24 where Judah's daughter is condemned to

death for getting pregnant cannot, according to Blenkinsopp (1997:70), be used as the legal norm. There is no known penalty of death by burning for sexual transgression. As soon as central government was introduced with its judicial system the power of the paterfamilias was greatly reduced. An example of this limiting of the power of the father would be in the case of the ungovernable son in Deuteronomy 21:18-21. The Deuteronomic law specified that any young adult who did not respond to his father's discipline and disrupted the order of the household be brought before the town's elders. There had to be two witnesses and both the parents had to be present according to Deuteronomy 21:18-21. Blenkinsopp (1997:70) argues that it is unlikely that the law was ever put into effect and that a delinquent son was ever stoned.

In the Decalogue there is a command for children to honour their fathers and their mothers (Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16). Blenkinsopp (1997:70) argues that this should be taken along with its negative counterpart that condemns cursing, that is the renouncing of parents (Ex 21:17; Lev 20:9; Deut 27:16). Blenkinsopp (1997:71) argues that what was actually behind this was the maintenance of order and well being to help the family to survive.

In the same vein in the didactic literature of Proverbs children were encouraged to honour their parents. *"Not very different in form are the exhortations and denunciations addressed to the same category and age group in the didactic literature. Among the worst offence was the violent abuse of aged parents, robbing them, or worse, putting them out in the cold (Prov 19:26; 20:20; 28:24). But the honouring of parents involves the good estate of the household and clan at a deeper and more religious level"* (Blenkinsopp 1997:71).

*"Deuteronomic legislation undermined the traditional lineage system. Several laws limited matters concerning inheritance and the disciplining of children"* (Blenkinsopp 1997:89).

*The Deuteronomic covenant features a curse on those who deprive widows and their children of their rights (Deut 27:19), but it is not clear what these rights were (Blenkinsopp 1997:91).*

*It would be simplistic to conclude that the disintegration of the household when faced with the invasive power of state institutions was entirely a bad thing. Especially in its judicial capacity, the state provided a balance and corrective to the potentially arbitrary exercise of patriarchal domination within the extended and multiple family unit (Blenkinsopp 1997:91).*

### **5.8. Marriage**

Marriages were normally an arrangement between families and were categorized as part of family law. Marriage usually took place within the clan (Lev 18; 20). The exception would be if rape had occurred outside of the clan (Ex 22:16) or when taking a wife during war (Deut 21:10-14). There was an exchange of gifts between the two families to cement the relationship between the two families. This was known as the *mohar*. The exact origin of this word is not known. To translate the term as bride-price gives the idea that the marriage was a matter of purchase. This was definitely not so. It is highly unlikely when a study is made of the laws and narratives about wives in the Old Testament (Wright 1992:766).

During early Christian times girls were normally married young, in their early teens. Jewish men were expected to marry at eighteen. The dividing line between childhood and adulthood for a girl was marriage for a girl (Ferguson 1993:68-70).

Divorce was permitted in ancient Israel. Wright (1992:766) argues that the law of Deuteronomy 24:1-4 was there for regulating the protection of the woman in the event of a divorce. Although it was permitted it was discouraged as something Yahweh hates (Mal 2:13-16).



## **6. How Old Testament theology used children and the family to portray theological concepts**

### **6.1. Divine blessing and reproduction**

In Old Testament theology reproduction of the family and even the animals that belonged to them were as a result of God's blessing. As a result it was imperative that the household be faithful and obedient to God. God gave the command to Adam and Eve in the garden, "*Be fruitful and multiply, and fill the earth, and subdue it; and have dominion*" (Gen 1:28; 9:1). Perdue (1997:226-227) argues that divine blessing and reproduction are "*Grounded in the divine ordering of creation*". The Yahwists believed that the fundamental purpose of human creation (Gen 2:21-24) was achieved when a man married and established his own household. In the narratives when God spoke to Abram (Gen 12:1-4; 13:14-17; 15:1-6) and promised that he would bless him and his children the family's "*reproductive commission*" was implied. In the book of Deuteronomy (28:4) divine blessing and reproduction are codified within the law and the covenant. The worst possible curse that could happen to anyone was to be sterile and not be able to have children (Deut 28:18).

Perdue (1997:227) notes that in the Hebrew scriptures God is viewed as the father who creates life (Ps 139:13-16; Prov 8:22). He is pictured as the father who accepts the newborn on his knees signifying that he accepts the child as his offspring and then goes on to teach the child to walk (Hos 11:1-3). Not only is God the father but he is the mother also. God conceives the life in the womb, provides nourishment during all the stages in the womb and then gives birth to the baby (e.g. Deut 32:18). God is the creator and sustainer of the child and according to Perdue is seen to, "*Form the destiny of the child even before conception and provides, like a parent, sustenance and care throughout life*" (Jer 1:5).

## 6.2. Israel as son

Perdue (1997:231) highlights the fact that there is a dual naming of the children of Israel. They are not only Israel's sons or the nation of Israel (Gen 42:5, 21; Ex 1:1, 7; etc), but they are also metaphorically to fulfil the role of being Yahweh's son. Hosea refers to Israel as the dearly loved son of Yahweh who was summoned from Egypt (Hos 11). Hosea expands on his original statement contrasting the love, compassion and faithfulness of Yahweh for his son with Israel's disobedience and apostasy in following Baal and other gods. Yahweh is pictured as the father of Ephraim who taught him to walk and sees the need to judge and exile his son but as the compassionate father he brings his child home from exile.

Jeremiah (2-6) often uses the images and themes of Hosea in his preaching. Perdue (1997:232) points out that the sermon that Jeremiah gives on repentance (3:1-4; 4) uses the images of Israel as the son or sons of Yahweh. Other examples in Jeremiah 3 include "*Return, O faithless children, says the Lord*" (Jer 3:14). "*I thought how I would set you among my children, and give you a pleasant land*" (Jer 3:19). "*And I thought how you would call me, My Father* (Jer 3:19)." Despite the fact that Israel was considered as the son of God, given an inheritance they turned their back on Yahweh and became faithless (Jer 3:19, 22).

## 6.3. Jerusalem/Zion and Israel as daughter

Another image used in relation to children in the Old Testament theology is that of Jerusalem or Zion being the daughter of Israel. Jerusalem or Zion is personified as a daughter. On several occasions Isaiah (1:8; 10:32; 16:1; 62:11) refers to daughter Zion in connection with the destruction that the Assyrians brought. This is probably during Sennacherib's invasion in 701 B.C.E. or an earlier one during the reign of Tiglathpileser III in 734-733 B.C.E.. The devastation that they caused to Israel left daughter Zion "*like a booth in a vineyard* (Isa 1:8)." Everything was taken, nothing of value remained. As a result of this devastation the imagery of daughter Zion is that of a woman in labour,

who is screaming in pain when she gives birth to her first child (Jer 4:31; 6:2, 23; Zeph 3:14; Zech 2:14: 9:9) (Perdue 1997:232).

There are several Old Testament passages that refer to Judah as "*the daughter of my people*". This is most often used in prophetic oracles or judgement when an enemy invades Judah (Is 22:4; Jer 4:11; 6:14; 26; 8:11, 19, 21, 22-23). Another image that is used in a judgement oracle is that of a mother mourning and lamenting the death of her only daughter in Jeremiah 6:16-30 (Perdue 1997:232).

#### **6.4. Covenant and children**

According to Grassi (1992:904), "*God's greatest gift and guarantee of the covenant with Israel was that of children*". This statement highlights the importance of children in relation to the covenant. The importance of children and the covenant can also be seen in Abraham's reaction to not having children. He felt at a complete loss (Gen 15:1-3). God's promise to Abraham and Sarah of children was at the root of the biblical covenant.

There are five important covenantal relationships with God expressed in the Old Testament. These were God's relationship with the ancestors, Israel and its households, the house of David, the priesthood of Aaron, and creation. The covenant between God and the households of Israel is presented often in the narrative discourse of the traditions of the ancestors and their families (Perdue 1997:241).

The covenant between Yahweh and Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is made in Genesis 15. In Genesis 17 this covenant is renewed. The promise of an heir and many descendants is repeated in Genesis 17:7. Later these founding ancestral households of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob have the language of their original covenant extended to also include the households of Israel. The covenant then includes all the descendants, all the children, of the ancestors of Israel (Perdue 1997:241).

### **6.5. Go'el**

The members of an Israelite family had an obligation to help and to protect one another. The concept of the *go'el* has as its meaning to 'buy back or to redeem', 'to lay claim to', but fundamentally its meaning is 'to protect'. The *go'el* was therefore a redeemer, a protector, a defender of the interests of the individual and the group. The *go'el* was one of the nearest relatives to the person who had to sell himself into slavery because of debt or of one who had to sell his patrimony. It was the *go'el's* right and duty to buy the land himself, to prevent the family property from being sold. The law is found in Leviticus 25:25. The story of Ruth and Naomi is an illustration of this custom. In this case Boaz was a *go'el* of Naomi and Ruth (De Vaux 1961:21).

This *go'el* was therefore the redeemer, the protector and the defender of the family group but also of the children who would inherit because by exercising his right as the 'protector' he protected the family lineage and inheritance for that family's children (De Vaux 1961:21).

### **6.6. The way the Bible acts through children**

In contrast to human ways, the Bible presents God as acting in a surprising way through children and young people. Wisdom is a special gift from God (Prov 2:6-7) granted even to little ones. God gives the young Joseph the gift of interpreting dreams and ruling the land of Egypt (Gen 41:38). The young Solomon asks God for wisdom through the gift of a listening heart (1 Ki 3:5-9). The book of wisdom expands on this story and describes Solomon as asking for wisdom as a child and pursuing it throughout his youth as if searching for a bride (Wis 6:3-7 chap 7, 8). In regard to creation, the Psalmist declares that even little children are able to perceive and praise the wonders of God's universe (Psalm 8:2) (Grassi 1992:905).

As if to turn the tables on ordinary human expectations the Bible focuses on examples where God works through the young and little

ones. He favours not Cain the first-born son of the human race but the younger Abel (Gen 4:4-5). When Rebekah, Jacob's mother, consults the Lord, she receives the answer that the elder shall serve the younger (Gen 25:23). Before death, Jacob blesses his eleven sons but gives a double blessing to the youngest, Joseph (Gen 48:1-22; 49:22-26). Joseph in turn desires Jacob's special blessing for his older son Manasseh; instead it is granted to the younger, Ephraim (Gen 49:13-20). When the prophet Samuel searches for a new king to replace Saul he meets Jesse and his seven sons at their home. However God tells him that despite their impressive strength and appearance none will be the anointed one. Instead it will be David, a "little one" and shepherd out in the fields doing the work often allotted to children (1 Sam 16:1-13). God enables David, too young even for battle, to overcome the Phillistine champion Goliath (1 Sam 17) (Grassi 1992:905).

Isaiah describes the future in terms of idyllic return to the childlike innocence of the garden of Eden (11:8-9). The prophet Zechariah has a vision of the messianic era as a time of peace and joy when "*the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in them*" (8:3) (Grassi 1992:905).

### **6.7. The Messiah as a child**

One of the most important images of a child in the Old Testament is that of messiah. The prophet Isaiah announces, "*Therefore the Lord himself will give you a sign. Look, the young woman is with child and shall bear a son, and shall name him Immanuel*" (Isa 7:14). This child from David's line would be the hope of Israel despite much suffering. (7:14, 16; 9:16) (Grassi 1992:905). Isaiah also tells of a future with an idyllic return to childlike innocence in the garden of Eden (11:8-9). Zechariah has a vision of a messianic era when, "*the streets of the city shall be full of boys and girls playing in the streets*" (Zech 8:5).

## **7. Conclusion**

A cursory look at children as portrayed in the Old Testament would lead one to believe that because they were at the bottom rung of the social status ladder that they were not valued, they had no legal rights and they were powerless. A closer look shows that they were highly valued in Old Testament society and that they played a pivotal role in the family, in religion, in the economy and in every aspect of daily life.

Children brought hope to the family. They were considered a gift and a blessing from God and a promise for future redemption. The firstborn son had the highest status. Boys also enjoyed a higher status than girls although the status of girls, like that of women, is often misconstrued. Children were important to carry on the lineage, for preserving the inherited property and carrying on the ancestral name. Children were also important to their parents, as they would care for them in their old age.

Despite the fact that children had few legal rights the solidarity experienced in the Old Testament society was a protection because this protected children from exploitation, injustice and poverty.

A family could not function without children. Because the economy was a subsistence economy it was essential to have children so that a family could survive economically. The more children there were the more hands there were to help with the work. They were however not just viewed as an economic commodity.

There is no record of abortions or infanticide being carried out in ancient Israel even though this was the practice in some of the neighbouring countries. This is another reason we can conclude that children were highly valued.

Wright (1992:768) argues that one needs to give an accurate assessment of the status of children in relation to their parents and in

particular to the father. Although there is a belief that children were the property of their father who had power over them, even life or death, the conclusion is incorrect. While children were subject to their parents authority and that they legally belonged to the father in reality circumstances were not as harsh as is portrayed. There is enough information to indicate that there was love, joy, care and honour in the Israelite home (Wright 1992:768).

There is a tendency today to transfer Biblical understandings of the family and children. Perdue (1997:245) argues that these cannot be transferred, without critical engagement, to the contemporary culture. Rogerson (1996:29) also argues that a superficial reading of the Old Testament is not adequate when one wishes to justify a view of how we can organise society in the West today on a biblical model. *“That reading simply gives us a picture of ruling, polygamous, families that were more often than not the setting for rivalry and inadequacy, for all that there are also positive aspects in the ideals of support and protection”*.

Children in the Old Testament were central not only to the survival of the family, tribe and clan but also to the religion of ancient Israel. They were valued because they brought hope for the future so that their religion could be passed from one generation to the next.

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## CHAPTER TWO

### The transmission of social values to children in Old Testament times.

#### 1. Introduction to Education in Ancient Israel

James Crenshaw's opening remarks in his book, *Education in Ancient Israel* (1998:1-2) describes the ideals of education in ancient Israel. "*In the Bible, education originated with the desire for order and continuity. To combat the powerful and seductive lure of chaos in various forms, societal or personal, older and more experienced individuals tried their best to prevent the younger generation from falling in to the pitfalls confronting them in the nooks and crannies of daily life. Parents personalised this struggle for survival, heightening both intimacy and passion. Whereas leaders within a community raised their voices as a means of protecting the general well-being, mothers and fathers sought to ensure the integrity of the family.*

*The aim of this instruction was moral formation, the building of character. Having embodied the teachings themselves, elders praised the virtues of self-control, restraint, eloquence, and honesty".*

Later Crenshaw (1998:71-72) elaborates by stating that silence required that a person not give way to passion in hasty outbursts but controls the emotion and does not allow that passion to dominate the thinking. Eloquence helps sages to persuade people and communicate effectively. Timeliness allows the person to say what needs to be said at the right moment or to keep quiet when necessary. Modesty is the characteristic that helps a wise person realise that despite all their knowledge there are some things that never will be understood.

The challenge that faces us when dealing with the topic of how values were transferred from one generation to the next in ancient Israel is that much of the information is drawn from inferences. "*We should praise*

*Israel for his education (paideias) and wisdom (sophias).*” This sentence from the prologue to Ecclesiastes shows how highly valued Israelite education was toward the end of the biblical period. However, the Bible does not present any systematic description of this education and we must try to piece together the various sources at our disposal (Lemaire 1992: 305).

The first mention of formal schooling is not until the early second century B.C.E. where the Book of Sirach refers to, “my house of instruction” which is a metaphor for the Book of Sirach (Crenshaw 1998:viii). There is also a missing voice, that of the children and youth who were at the receiving end of the education. This means that there is only one point of view being given, that of the adults, there is no opinion or feedback being given by the youth, they were silent partners (Crenshaw 1998:2).

As the primary caregivers were the parents, it follows that the first and primary place where education took place was in the extended family. Some of the education took the form of moral instruction but much of it was vocational.

Williams (1990:121) points out that, “*Intellectual (and therefore literary) phenomena in ancient Israel are closely linked to sociopolitical-economic-technical changes in a social organization of that community. Or to put it more succinctly, economics and epistemology are closely related to each other and decisively influence each other*”.

### **1.1. Terminology**

Lemaire (1992:305) states that the main source of information about education in ancient Israel is found in the Bible itself. The most comprehensive references are mainly in the wisdom books, which contain several references to education. Other references are very sparse. Lemaire (1992:305) states that the Hebrew word *mûsôr* is probably the best word to clarify “education” since it has been generally

translated in Greek by *paideia* in the LXX; *paideia* appears 36 times in Ecclesiastes and 5 times in the Wisdom of Solomon, while *mûsôr* appears mostly in Proverbs (30 times), Jeremiah (8 times), and Job (5 times), and is often associated with *hokmâ*, wisdom (Prov 1:2,7; 23:23; 8:33; 13:1; 15:33; 19:20). However *mûsôr* also has the specific meaning of “discipline”, “punishment.” If we want to understand Israelite education more generally, we must take into account many other references connected with other roots such as *hnk*, “initiate”, “start” (Prov 22:6) *yrh*, “to show”, “to teach”; and *lmd*, “to learn,” “to teach”. This last root is mainly attested in Deuteronomy (4:1, 5, 10, 14; 5:1, 28; 6:1, 11:19; 14:23; 17:19; 18:9; 31:12, 13, 19, 22) where it may have been used by one of the last redactors instead of the old word “to repeat,” “to teach” (Deut 6:7; 28:37; 32:41); *lmd* is also well known in Isaiah (1:17; 2:4; 8:16; 26:9, 10:29:13, 24; 40:14; 48:17b 50:4; 54:13), Jeremiah (2:24, 33; 9:4, 13, 19; 10:2; 12:16; 13:21, 23; 31:18, 34; 32:33) and Psalms (mainly Ps 119:7, 12, 26, 64, 66, 68, 71, 73, 99, 108, 124, 135, 171). The root *yrh* (Gen 46:28; Ex 4:12, 15 ; 15:25; 24:12; 35:34) is also well known by the nouns *môrêh*, “teaching teacher” (2 Ki 17:28; Isa 9:14; 30:20; Hab 2:18; Prov 5:13; 6:13; Job 36:22; 2 Chron 15:3) and *tôrâ* (Ex 12:49; Lev 7:7, 37); this last word is often translated “law” but its first meaning is “instruction”.

## 1.2. Methodological Issues

Lemaire (1992:305-306) highlights the fact that in studying Israelite education one must also take into account the fact that it probably underwent changes during Israel’s long history. This is especially true of the educational institutions, which were probably affected by changes in political history. From the time of the Judges to the time of the Maccabees one can expect that there would be extensive changes. The Maccabees most likely were influenced by the Hellenistic education, which was widespread at the time. Another point that Lemaire raises is that education probably differed through the different strata of society. We have to be aware of the differences in educational background between the inhabitants of a farm as compared to a small

village or a town like Jerusalem, as well as the differences existing among Palestinian Jews or among Diaspora Jews.

Lemaire (1992:306) argues that the general historical and sociological context of the Ancient Near East provides some help in understanding Israelite education. Education in Egypt, Syria and Mesopotamia as well as the situation in Greece for later periods can be compared to what is known about education in ancient Israel. One can then see where the one has influenced the other. Lemaire (1992:306) refers to the generally accepted fact that Proverbs contains some adaptation of part of an Egyptian book, namely the Instruction of Amenemopet (Prov 22:17-24:22 and Pritchard 1950:421-425) and two small Transjordanian collections (Prov 30:1; 31:1). At the beginning of the second century BC, the influence of Hellenistic education was so strong in Jerusalem (2 Macc 4:12) that the Jewish tradition was actually in danger of disappearing. Knowledge of the educational practices among Israel's neighbours is helpful when trying to come to grips with various aspects of the history of Israelite education.

Lemaire (1992:306) cites examples of Hebrew and Aramaic epigraphy in Palestine and in the Jewish communities of the Diaspora that give a clearer understanding of Israelite education. Lemaire (1986a) also states that, *"Even if some of the texts are fragmentary they give us some direct evidence. For example, the various ostraca with "abecedaries" and "schoolboys" exercises found in the latter half of the First Temple period, (ca. 800-587 B.C.) reveal that reading and writing were taught not only in the capital city but also in small towns and fortresses. The Aramaic documents from the 5<sup>th</sup> century B.C. found mainly Aramaic education there, as well as probably in other communities of the Diaspora. In Palestine, the Dead Sea Scrolls have revealed the teaching of an Essene community in the first centuries B.C. and A.D. In the teaching of their community, biblical books, and commentaries held a prominent place"*.

### 1.3. Parental Responsibility

Education in the Bible according to Crenshaw (1998:1) originated with the desire for order and continuity. Older, more experienced adults were there to help prevent the younger generation from making mistakes in their daily living and from falling prey to chaos. *“Parents personalised this struggle for survival, heightening both the intimacy and passion. Whereas leaders within a community raised their voices as a means of protecting the general well-being, mothers and fathers sought to ensure the integrity of the family. The aim of this instruction was moral formation, the building of character”.*

The education that a child needed to receive would include technical skills, social skills as well as cultural values and norms. Both parents shared in this function. Interestingly enough there is no Biblical word for parents. The term “father” or “mother” is used in Proverbs to refer to parents (Meyers 1988:150).

In several passages in Proverbs where advice is being given to the child and both parents are mentioned it probably shows that the parent’s contribution to the socialization of the child was complimentary. In the absence of a word for both the parents it was the only way to express combined maternal and paternal responsibility (Meyers1988:151).

Education of children as in most cultures appears to have been first and foremost the parent’s responsibility. “Attend, my son, to your Father’s education and do not reject the instruction of your mother” (Prov 1:8; 6:20; 23:22). Because of this responsibility, the child had to respect his parents: “Honour your father and your mother” (Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16; Prov 15:20; Sir 3:1-16; 7:28) (Lemaire 92: 306).

Crenshaw (1998:86-87) argues that most of the training given in the home was oral. The older generation had the responsibility of passing on the insights that they had gained through their wide experience.



None of the training the parents gave required reading and writing. There was a simple method of record keeping prior to written texts and people learned to function without using writing particularly in small villages.

### **1.3.1. The mother**

During his early years the child was left to the care of his mother or nurse even after he had been weaned (2 Sam 4:4) and was learning to walk (Hos 11:3). Most Israelite children spent their time playing with children of their own age in the streets or squares (Jer 6:11; 9:20; Zech 8:5; Matt 11:16). They sang and danced, or played with clay models, samples of which have been found in excavations; little girls would have played with dolls (De Vaux 1961:48, 49).

It was the mother who gave the children the first rudiments of education, especially their moral education (Prov 1:8; 6:20). She might continue to advise children even into adolescence (Prov 31:1) (De Vaux 1961:49).

As the primary caretakers of children in a household centred society, it was the mother's responsibility to introduce the children to the tasks, modes of behaviour, cultural forms, and norms and values of Israelite society. The role of mother in the Proverbs is not as the one who gives birth to the child but as the one who nurtures and educates the child (Meyers 1988:150).

For girls, education from the mother included learning all the household tasks that were a mother's responsibility although children of both sexes were probably exposed to all the tasks that a woman needed to master in the line of food preparation, preservation and technology (Meyers 1988:151).

Meyers (1988:152) points out that the idea that wisdom is not associated with the masculine but the word is female in gender in the

Hebrew may indicate the broad role of women in the education and socialisation of children. Proverbs 8 in particular is linked with woman Wisdom, who is linked with God as a source of truth, righteousness, instruction, and knowledge.

### **1.3.2. The father**

Although the mother took an important part in the education of her children even when they were teenagers the father is often mentioned in the education of the sons as soon as they moved from toddlers into more independent boys (Prov 29:17) (Lemaire 1992: 306).

All the tasks and responsibilities that fell to the father had to be passed on to the sons. It was unlikely that girls learned any of these tasks (Meyer 1988:151). Not only were tasks and responsibilities passed on but also it was the father's responsibility to guide the son away from the corrupting influences of "ungodly men" (Sol 1:16-2:24). In fact there was urgency in this task because in a single generation everything the father held as sacred could die out if the son did not accept the father's instruction. It was important that there be an unbroken chain of tradition (Crenshaw 1998:162-163).

As the boys grew up to manhood they were entrusted to their father. One of the most sacred duties of the father was to teach his son the truths of religion (Ex 10:2; 12:26; 13:8; Deut 4:9; 6:7, 20; 32:7, 46). He also had to give him a general education (Prov 1:8; 6:20) (De Vaux 1961: 49).

The father was encouraged not to be hesitant in disciplining his sons or in using the rod. The whip and the rod played their part in this training (Prov 13:24; 22:15; 29:15, 17; Deut 8:5; 2 Sam 7:14; Prov 3:12; Si 30:1) (De Vaux 1961:49).

The father was considered responsible for his son's behaviour and was reproved for being too evil. The law of Deut 21:18-21 shows the official

procedure to follow in the case of a disobedient son. This extreme case was probably very rare. It is not known whether this law was ever implemented, but this borderline case shows clearly the limits of the authority of the parents. In Ancient Israel the parent did not have the power of life and death over the children even in an extreme case. Death could only be the result of an official procedure. The case of a young female prostitute is not very clear but can only be interpreted in the same way. The rebellious child could only be put to death after an official judgement (Lemaire 1992:306).

Blenkinsopp (1997:83) highlights the fact that great emphasis was placed on, "*control, hierarchy, and subordination to authority*". Children of all ages were obligated by convention to be docile to parents. In training children to take their place in society, parents were encouraged to use strict discipline. "*If I strike you, my son, you will not die,*" the father reassures this offspring as he thrashes him, echoing a common topos in this kind of literature" (Prov 23:13).

Deist (2000:291) argues that the extent of the authority of heads of households and clans was reduced after a centralized authority was introduced but the, "*mechanisms of internal and informal social control remained in place in these smaller units ... 'Internalised social control' means that members of a society are educated to take personal responsibility for their own conduct and to expect some form of punishment should they transgress against what they know is right*".

'Honour' and 'shame' also belong to the mechanisms of social control. Deist (2000:293) highlights the fact that Biblical Hebrew has quite a number of words and expressions for 'shame' or 'shaming' as well as for 'honour' or 'honouring'. Shame or honour is something that is done or given by the community to people who deserve this treatment. Shaming would involve being ostracized, gossiped about and even jeered. Crenshaw (1998:166) argues that the basis for the notion of

shame was built on the fact that personal reputation was of high priority.

#### **1.4. Wisdom literature as an integral part of education in Ancient Israel**

##### **1.4.1. Wisdom and wisdom literature in the Old Testament**

Murphy (1992:920) defines "wisdom" as a term, "*That can be used to refer to certain books, which deal with biblical wisdom or it can refer to a movement in the ancient world associated with "teachers" or sages, and it can also suggest a particular understanding of reality which presents some contrasts with other biblical books*".

Wisdom literature in Ancient Israel generally refers to the books of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes and certain of the Psalms. The books of the Apocrypha, Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon are also included. All of these books are distinctive in that they are primarily concerned with man and his world and the potential and limitations of the individual (Clements 1989:227).

The term wisdom is *hokmâ* in Hebrew and *sophia* in Greek. Fox (2000:29) draws attention to the fact that there is not always the exact meaning of a Hebrew word in English. In the case of wisdom there are two meanings. There is a weaker meaning, which is prudence or good judgement. In the stronger sense wisdom is always "*prudential, conducive to the individual's well-being, but it weighs the effect of an action on others as well*". Rice (1958:2) describes wisdom in Western philosophy this way. "*Wisdom was an ideal of twenty-two centuries. It describes the highest knowledge men were capable of and the most desirable patterns of human behaviour. It mirrored man's conceptions of himself, of the world, and of God... Word and definition remain static; the idea itself is transformed by the changing needs and aspirations of successive epochs, centuries and even generations*".

Whybray (1989:227) defines wisdom as a human attribute as *“the ability to discern the best way to achieve the best things in life: success, prosperity, happiness, longevity.”* This ability was viewed as a gift from God who himself was all-wise, and it was only in obedience to the will of God that wisdom could be attained. Crenshaw (1998:64-65) points out that the basic themes of wisdom literature are religion and knowledge. Sages concentrated on the creative act that made life possible. Divine justice encompassed reward and punishment. The ultimate goal of instruction was wisdom, not knowledge. Knowledge helped a person search for ways to cope in every day circumstances. The Israelite view was that God gives wisdom to those who pray for it. Therefore all knowledge is sacred (Crenshaw 1998:152).

Murphy (1998:924) argues that, *“Israel’s fundamental experience focuses on God as saviour. This is then expanded to include creation and other areas of life. Creation is seen as fitting in to God’s blessing upon all divine handiwork. Blessing is the continuous, unobtrusive, working of God which is different from the once-for-all saving actions”*. Zimmerli (1963) in Murphy (1992:924) equates wisdom theology with creation theology. Murphy concurs pointing out that wisdom theology works in the sphere of creation theology rather than in covenant tradition. Murphy (1998:924) points out that the studies of Von Rad, Westermann and Zimmerli show that wisdom and creation are mirror images of each other.

During the past century various hypotheses have been given as to how literary wisdom originated. The theories which would have been most influential in impacting education in Israel would be the existence of folk wisdom, or tribal wisdom and how it influenced wisdom literature, analogies with oral literature in the modern world and wisdom literature and institutional education (Fox 2000:17).

Westermann (1995:4) argues the case that proverbial wisdom in the Old Testament was connected with orally transmitted folk wisdom.

Golka (1983:257-270) agrees arguing that the use of proverbs had their "*heyday in preliterate cultures*".

There are two main genres of Wisdom books. They are didactic wisdom and critical wisdom (Fox 2000:17). Wisdom literature according to Fontaine (1993:99) has a distinctive tradition of literature and of language; it was also a social movement within ancient Israel. Those who belonged to this group held a particular worldview and expressed it through special vocabulary and literary forms. Blenkinsopp (1993:74) notes that wisdom literature contained a body of knowledge that included literary, social, theological and ethical features that are distinctive. The various forms in which these were expressed included proverb, beatitude, riddle, question, numerical saying, prohibition, and admonition, instructions, poems. There were also dialogues and didactic narratives. These forms are commonly used in teaching and were probably developed within both the formal and informal teaching situation, which would have included the family. The sages were therefore not only teachers and scribes in formal institutions like the court and the temple but also parents involved in educating their own children.

Ancient Israelite literature derives from several different social contexts. The authors of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes and Sirach all came from distinct social settings, and if one looks at a single book like Proverbs it also has several social settings (Crenshaw 1998:62).

The authorship of two whole books Ecclesiastes and the Wisdom of Solomon are attributed to king Solomon as well as the Wisdom of Solomon (Crenshaw 1998:64),

Murphy argues that the "authorship" is more in terms of patronage as is the case of the Davidic "authorship" of Psalms (Murphy 1992:920).

Whybray (1989:234) disputes the argument by some scholars that wisdom literature was generally composed in textbooks in schools and that in the case of Israel the wisdom literature was composed in royal schools. Lemaire also argues that after the Exile there were many schools. These were not only in Jerusalem but also in other cities and villages as well. Murphy (1992:921) also argues in favour stating that this idea has been widely held because of the similarities to Egyptian wisdom, which was the work of a royal or scribal class but adds another dimension maintaining that there is also the origin in family and tribal wisdom that must be considered.

Fontaine (1990:155) states that, *"The location of the family and tribe as possible life-settings for the origin, use, and preservation of wisdom in Israel is well attested in the work of scholars, even when textual support is less than overwhelming"*. Crenshaw (1998:62) disagrees with Fontaine and Murphy that the tribe is a possible setting. He argues that the sayings revolve around life in small villages and mostly the nuclear family therefore the theory that they originated in clan wisdom is undermined.

One of the characteristics of wisdom literature is the identification of the righteous with wise people. They were also divided into wise and foolish and just and unjust. This is particularly clear in Proverbs 10-15, Job and Sirach. Murphy (1992:926) states that, *"Morality and wisdom cannot be separated, although biblical wisdom is not to be reduced to a moral code"*.

Murphy (1992:922) commenting on the thought world of wisdom says, *"The most striking characteristic is the absence of elements generally considered to be typically Israelite: the promises to the patriarchs, the Exodus experience, the Sinai covenant etc"*. Salvation history appears to be absent from the wisdom writings. This dilemma can be explained in terms of the fact that biblical wisdom is basically religious and not secular. There is no distinction between religious and secular,

sacred and profane in the Israelite culture as there is in today's culture. Von Rad (1972:62-63) states that, "*Thus here, in proverbial wisdom, there is faith in the stability of the elementary relationships between man and man, faith in the similarity of men and their reactions, faith in the reliability of the orders which support human life and thus, implicitly or explicitly, faith in God, who put these orders into operation*".

One of the dilemmas that produced a crisis in wisdom thinking in Mesopotamia, Egypt and Israel was in their thinking on reward and punishment. There was a commonly held belief that evil people were punished and that good people prospered. Because of the reality that bad things do happen to good people, people's thinking was challenged in the struggle between creed and reality. The author of Job investigates this dilemma (Crenshaw 1998:125). Murphy (1992:926) points out that it is remarkable that this problem with retribution becomes the problem of the sages. The books of Job and Ecclesiastes are the main examples where the "crises of wisdom" as Crenshaw (1985:381) is dealt with at length.

#### **1.4.2. Wisdom in Proverbs and its use in the family and the tribe**

The definition of the term "proverb" is difficult. The Hebrew term *māsāl*, has a variety of meanings. It appears that the term "proverb" should be used for sayings that have come into popular use. The basic wisdom sayings usually are composed of two lines in parallelism. There is a juxtaposition style that is used. There is synonymous or antithetic parallelism (Murphy 1992:921).

Proverbs is considered the oldest of the wisdom books. It is a book with several different parts, which include poems and a collection of proverbs that uses catchwords, mnemonics and wordplay (Perdue 1993:99).

*"Proverbs introduces a novel principle: wisdom. Wisdom, as conceived in Proverbs as a whole, is not just a set of pre-packaged traditional truth*



*or wise teachings. It is the power of the human mind, both in its intellectual faculties and in the knowledge it can gain, hold, and transmit. Wisdom both transcends the individual mind and resides within it. God possesses it and, we are taught, it can be ours as well” (Fox 2000:3).*

There is on-going debate between scholars as to where the setting of Proverbs should be placed. Should it be in the school or in the family and tribe or even in the royal court? Some scholars like Hermisson (1968:97-136) locate the setting of Proverbs with literature in schools connected with the royal court. Fox (2000:7) argues that although proverbs may not have been written for the schools it was certainly used in schools that trained children from the upper class for work in the royal bureaucracy. Crenshaw (1998:62) adds his argument that the Instructions are directed towards young urban men, possibly potential court officials but agrees with Hermisson (1968:97-136) that because of the court's minor role in the sayings and instructions that they eventually played an important role in the scribal school.

Fox (2000:9) argues that, *“The father to son setting is maintained in Proverbs, at least as a fiction, consistently in chapters 1-9 and occasionally elsewhere (19:27; 23:15; 19, 26, 24:13, 21; 27:11; 31:1-2).”*

The father's reminiscence in Proverbs 4:3 of the education he received from his own father places education in the family, not the school. The impressions are reinforced by the mention of the mother's teaching in Proverbs 1:8 and 6:20, since “mother” can hardly mean schoolmistress. Education, which is the goal of Wisdom Literature, is not identical or synonymous with schooling (Fox 2000:9).

On the other side, Westermann (1995:27) holds that the older collections of Proverbs (chapters 10-29) comprise mainly oral folk sayings, which originated in the daily life of the farm villages, among the

smallholding farmers, craftsmen, labourers, slaves, and housewives in pre-exilic times. Related to this trend is Fontaine's (1993:99-114) emphasis on the oral origins of wisdom and on the family as the setting of instruction, which was shared by mother and father. This does not deny the subsequent formulation of this wisdom within schools. This places most of the proverbs among the ordinary people in small agrarian villages at a preliterate stage of culture. Extrapolating from Proverbs (or proverb parts) that he considers folk sayings, Fox (2000:9) states that, "*He paints an idyllic picture of village society – a "modest, staid, bourgeois world. The communitarian, egalitarian ethic of the proverbs is their way of life"*". Fox argues against this pointing out that, "*While most scholars recognize that many, perhaps most, of the sayings in Proverbs are in origin oral folk sayings, some of which may have originated in small villages, the setting does not dominate the book. The folk literature approach tends to slight the diversity of sources by overlooking clues to an urban setting, such as references to goldsmithery (17:3; 27:21), fine jewellery (25:11, 12), and messengers (10:26; 22:21; 25:13), which have no role in the small village. Many of these adages address well to do landowners rather than smallholders; e.g. As for him who withholds grain – the nation will curse him; but blessings come upon him who distributes food (11:26)" (Fox 2000:9). He also argues that there are a number of proverbs that point to a court setting where kings and governors give advice to those in their employ. Some proverbs also give the view of those who have to deal with the king (Fox 2000:10).*

Crenshaw (1998:132) maintains that, "*The usual speakers in the book of Proverbs are parents, both father and mother. They teach their children in the privacy of the home, although the explicit audience is restricted to boys"*. Parents would share their insights gained over a number of years of experience with their children. This they would do in order to shape their character. They would also use the instructions to exhort, warn, promise and threaten their children.

One of the arguments in favour of Proverbs being used in teaching in the home and tribe setting are the number of proverbs that have 'instructions' in a family setting (Prov 1:1-19; 2:1-22; 3:1-12, 21-35; 7:1-27; 22:17-24; 31:1-9) (Perdue 1993:101-102).

There is an important group of texts that speak of the relationship between children and their parents. They are particularly interested in upbringing. "A wise son brings joy to a father, but a foolish son brings sorrow to his mother" (10:1). "A wise son brings joy to a father, but a foolish man despises his mother" (15:20). "A foolish son brings grief to his father and bitterness to the one who bore him" (17:25). "A foolish son is his father's ruin, and a quarrelsome wife is like a constant dripping" (19:13). "To have a fool for a son brings grief; there is no joy for the father of a fool" (17:21). "The father of the righteous has great joy; he who has a wise son delights in him. Let your father and mother be glad; let her who bore you rejoice" (23:24-25). "A man who loves wisdom brings joy to his father, but a companion of harlots squanders his substance" (29:3). "He who keeps the law is an intelligent son, but a companion of gluttons shames his father" (28:7). Proverbs 15:5 and 13:1 also belong to this group of proverbs (Westermann 1995:26).

It is clear from the repetition in these sayings there is a concern from the parents as to whether their children will be wise or foolish and whether they will bring joy or sorrow. Westermann (1995:27) argues that, *"All of these sayings are implicit admonitions to school age children that, as a result of their exposure to wisdom, they behave in such a way to be a cause for joy and not worry to their parents. Teachers authorized by the parents are instructing young people through these sayings and thereby carry on the instruction of the parents"*.

Bearing this in mind Westermann (1995:27) points out that punishment using the rod is justified several times in Proverbs. "Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline drives it far from him"

(22:15). "Strike a scoffer, and the simple will learn prudence; correct a man of understanding, and he will gain knowledge" (19:25). "The one who spares the rod hates his son, but the one who loves him is diligent to discipline him" (13:24). "The rod and reproof give wisdom, but a child left to himself brings shame to his mother" (29:15). "Discipline your son, and he will give you rest; he will bring delight to your soul" (29:17).

The general explanation of these texts is that the parents are encouraged to give their children a strict upbringing and because of this they should use the rod. Westermann (1995:27) argues that it is hardly imaginable that parents need to be encouraged to use the rod, as parents do not need the motivation to do this. He maintains that in the light of the verses that he has quoted that the teachers are justifying their occasional use of corporal punishment to the parents. The proverb, "A rebuke goes deeper into a man of understanding than one hundred blows into a fool" (Prov 17:10) shows that there is critical opposition to the rod. It is not excluded or condemned but the implication is obvious that words are capable of achieving more than the rod. The rod should not be used indiscriminately.

Westermann (1995:27-28) points out another interesting insight found in Proverbs 22:11, "Even children make themselves known by their acts, by whether what they do is pure and right". This proverb is insightful when considering the education of children. This proverb points to the fact that a child's personality can be recognised at an early age and needs to be taken into account when raising a child.

The speaker in Proverbs 1-9 is a father speaking to his son. The parallels between the father and the mother's teaching show that she is the mother and not a schoolteacher in a school. Proverbs 4:3 shows family education. The speaker is the biological father of the listener. Most wisdom books are addressed to the author's son or sons. The sons are the biological sons and not pupils in a school (Fox 2000:80).

Fontaine (1990:155-164) (Perdue 1993:102) argues that, "*The imprint of the father's and mother's authority as sources of wisdom is found throughout the book; in motivations for heeding the wisdom found in the instructions (1:8; 6:20), in the occurrence together as a word-pair in the proverbial sayings (10:1; 15:20; 23:25); a curse against ones parents extinguishes one's "lamp", invoking the inevitable correspondence between evil acts and wretched consequences so believed in by the wisdom thinkers*" (20:20). Other examples of the home setting is that of the capable wife found in 31:10-31 who "*opens her mouth with wisdom, and the teaching of kindness is on her tongue*" (v. 26). This of course all takes place while she is performing many other tasks. "*Given the basic importance of the family as the primary economic unit in agrarian societies, it is not surprising that a book such as Proverbs, which is so identified with the teaching of the parents, should concern itself with matters of importance to the survival of the family*". This includes subjects such as finding a good wife (12:4; 14:1; 18:22; 19:13, 14; 21:9, 19); the discipline of children and slaves (19:18; 20:20; 22:6, 15); care for one's family and land (5:10; 6:31; 12:11; 14:4; 15:6; 21:20; 24:27; 28:19); regulating one's relationship with neighbours (3:29; 6:3, 29; 14:20-21; 24:28; 25:8, 9, 17, 18; 26:19; 27:10, 14; 29:5). One of the social movements that gave rise to the concept of wisdom in Proverbs occurred, within the day to day lives of the extended family. The parents needed to teach their children and to help them with the management of family resources (Perdue 1993:103).

Regarding the debate as to the setting of Proverbs Crenshaw (1990:205) argues that, "*No adequate analysis of the sage in Proverbs, will ignore these competing groups. Indeed, diversity in viewpoint, style, genre, and intention confirms suspicion that education in ancient Israel occurred in various settings and had multiple goals*".

Wisdom is personified as a woman in Proverbs as well as Sirach and the Wisdom of Solomon. Woman Wisdom appears in several poems in Proverbs (1-9; 1:20-33; 2:1-11; 3:13-18; 4:5-9; 7:1-5; 8:1-36; 9:1-6).

The mother appears repeatedly alongside the father instructing her offspring in the wisdom of avoiding violent men, strange woman, and intemperate imbibing. As counsellor to her lover-husband, Woman Wisdom protects him against several threats. Camp (1990:192) suggests that these could be adultery, foreign worship, alienation from the community, which would all be possible threats at the time. Murphy (1992:927) states that, "*Lady Wisdom is a complex figure, whose traits accumulate as one goes through wisdom literature*".

#### **1.4.3. Wisdom in the Psalms and its use in family and tribe**

Ceresko (1990:218) argues that if some of the psalms are associated with the wisdom movement in Ancient Israel there is an implied connection between teaching and learning. This poses a problem, as the psalms are principally prayers, which are associated with the temple and worship rather than the school. However liturgy also provides an opportunity for teaching. It is the teaching side of the Psalms that provides a link with wisdom. When there is either 'testimony' or 'confession' an opportunity is provided to give some admonition to the congregation to trust in God's help.

Ceresko (1990:218-219) also points out that the psalms and the wisdom movement also have what he terms 'world-building' in common. The socialization process that takes place in every culture and society took place in ancient Israel through the family, clan and school. The 'world-building' and socialization of the young into the world of the adults so that they would accept their values and world as meaningful was an important feature of the wisdom movement and the psalms. The psalms and the wisdom movement also impacted on the role of the individual in society and that person's place in the world.

#### **1.4.4. Wisdom in Job and its use in family and tribe**

Crenshaw (1998:63) agrees with Albertz's (1981: 349-372) theory where he states that there are three social groups in the discussion in the book of Job. There are two wealthy groups vying for supremacy and

the poor. One of the wealthy groups objects to taking advantage of the poor the other uses the poor for their own ends.

Whybray (1974:65) asserts that, "*the dialogue in Job is represented as taking place not between 'learned men' belonging to a professional class, but between a (once) wealthy landowner and his friends, that is, between educated farmers*".

Job is an example of how the main function of sages is the educational function. They advise, teach, transmit knowledge, give guidance, educate and instruct. A wise person wishes to help and ought to offer help and guidance to those who find themselves in difficult circumstances. This is found in all the Israelite wisdom literature. This ideal is found not only in the book of Job but, in the other wisdom literature of the Old Testament. It does however receive special emphasis in the book of Job (Albertz 1990:249).

Crenshaw (1998:133) states that Job's friends offer wise counsel to someone they admired as an example of virtue but whose impatience makes them change their mind. The teaching that takes place in Job takes place because of a situation of extreme adversity. Satan convinces God to allow Job to be subjected to unbearable suffering.

#### **1.4.5. Wisdom in Ecclesiastes and its use in family and tribe**

According to Wright (1968:313-314; 1980:38-51) Ecclesiastes is a difficult book. Its structure is highly disputed and its literary forms are difficult to explain. There are several sayings that are obvious. The author uses reflections from different turns in life (Murphy 1992:921).

#### **1.4.6. The use of wisdom literature in the school**

Demsky (1971: 395-396) maintains that the book of Proverbs, "*may be the closest thing to an actual school text from the biblical period. Its explicit pedagogic goal, as well as its employment of mnemonic devices, supports this connection. The centrality of secular, royal*

*figures (Solomon, Hezekiah, King Lemuel of Massa, "The Wise") and its affinities to non-Israelite wisdom literature further argue for its role in the education of the officialdom".*

#### **1.4.7. The statuses and roles of sages in the family and tribe**

Initially the role of the sage was educational. Albertz (1990:249) maintains that they were to advise, teach, transmit knowledge, give guidance and instruct.

Fontaine (1990:157) expands on this maintaining that the role of sages was fourfold. It included firstly teaching (Prov 1:2-6). Secondly counselling (Prov 12:15, 15:22; 19:20; 20:18; 24:6; 25:15; 2 Sam 14-17; Job 29:21). Thirdly planning in the sense of managing economic resources (Prov 19:15; 21:5, 22; 24:30-34; 27:23-27; 31:10-31; Qoh 2:4-8; Isa 28:23-29). Fourthly the settling of disputes through the use of language and discernment (Prov 11:9, 16:23; 20:5; 24:23-26; 31:8-9, Job 29:7-17; 31:13), which was also important.

As the head of the home and as the authority figure the father assumed the role of the sage in the home. The father was obliged to instruct his son in the religious traditions as well as in preparation for a trade. The parent-child imagery was so often used to describe the relationship between father and son. The father passed on to his son, within the family context, everything he learnt. The son in turn could then lead a full life and pass whatever he learned on to his offspring (Fontaine 1990:159).

There is considerable textual support for the mother as sage. Women played a pivotal role in the work they did in the home and in the kinship ties that formed the glue of that society. The mother's role as sage is rooted in her authority over children. The early education and socialization of children of both sexes belonged to the mother. There were close bonds between mother and children in a society where children were weaned after three or four years. It was from the mother



that children learned and experienced trust. Fontaine (1990:161) points out that, "*Considering the primal, natal tie it becomes less astonishing that wisdom itself, like Torah, should become personified as female. Likewise, the occurrence of the father/mother word pair in numerous proverbs should occasion no surprise, given both parents' share in the venture of raising and teaching children*".

2 Samuel 14 and 20 tell the story of two wise woman, one from Tekoa and one from Abel who had leadership qualities. From these stories Camp (1990:187) argues that the term "wise woman" was used in such a way that it suggests that it was nothing out of the ordinary. Geographically the woman came from different areas, one from the north and one from the south, which suggests that the north and the south had a common experience. Even though the imagery used is metaphorical the mother imagery highlights the fact that the authority of the wise woman was based in the primary social role of education of children and managing the affairs of the patriarchal home. Young woman were often the bond between two family groups. They were "*to function as interfamilial diplomats*" according to Boulding (1976:52-56). In this way women contributed to the survival of the community – it would also have expanded the scope of her authority. I would also like to suggest that the young woman had the opportunity to learn wisdom not only in the home in which she was raised but also in that of her husband's home. These women used proverbs with skill and accomplishment as part of their negotiating strategy. This shows that they had a significant degree of training and experience in leadership. Camp (1990:188) argues that, "*The stories about the wise women provide two of the clearest representatives of what has been called clan or family wisdom. Their performance suggest that the distinction between the educative wisdom of the familial patriarchs and matriarchs and the political wisdom of diplomats is not absolute, nor is politics the exclusive domain of sages in the royal court.*"

### 1.5. Moral and religious training of children

The motivation for moral and religious devotion was a “*sense of awe and obligation directed toward the creator, who was thought to sustain the universe and to assure that good conduct was rewarded and that misdeeds were punished*” (Crenshaw 1998:2). Virtues that were held in high esteem were self-control, restraint, eloquence and honesty. The idea that the creator rewarded the good and punished the bad was questioned over a period of time as people noted more and more exceptions, which resulted in scepticism and even the challenge in divine justice.

The parents were crucial in the religious education of their children. It was their responsibility to pass on their religious beliefs and traditions to their children. The religious traditions had to be handed down from one generation to the next. The parents had to tell their children and grandchildren. It was the father’s duty to explain the meaning of the religious rites and to teach the commandments of the Lord. The principal aim of this education was to help the children and young adults become wise people. This goal could only be reached through a religious education. The essence of wisdom is the fear of the Lord (Ps 111:10; Prov 1:7) (Lemaire 1992:306).

The Passover was a family festival kept in every home (Ex 12: 3-4, 46). Samuel is an example in the Old Testament of a child who year-by-year was taken by his father along with the whole family on a pilgrimage to Shiloh for the Passover (1Sam 1:3) (De Vaux 1961:21).

Very few biblical texts show men involved in raising and educating their children. Sometimes they are shown to be inadequate as in the case of Jacob and Joseph and David and Adonijah. In legal-homiletic texts the father is required to interpret sacred objects, rites, and laws in response to the children’s questions (Ex 12:26-27; 13:8, 14-15; Josh 4:6-7, 21-22) (Fox 2000:81). In Deuteronomy 6:6-7, teaching one’s children about God’s commands is enjoined as an ongoing duty: “*And these words,*

*which I command you today, shall be upon your heart. And you shall teach them to your children and you shall speak of them, when you sit in your house, when you walk in the way, when you lie down, and when you rise up*". The desire and love for children can be found throughout the whole of the Old Testament. What may seem to us as harsh disciplinary measures were not at all thought to be incompatible with love (Lemaire 1992:306).

Several passages in Proverbs speak of paternal discipline and chastisement (13:24; 22:15; 29:15, 17). Proverbs 22:6 emphasises how important it is to shape a child's character when they are young. "*Educate a child according to his way and when he is old he will not depart from it*" (Fox 2000:82).

In Proverbs the father identifies the instruction he is about to give as that of his and his wife's even though his wife never speaks. Although the mother provides a parallel term to the father and she never speaks she is considered to be in authority in the home and a teacher (Fox 2000:82).

Very little is mentioned in the Bible about the crucial role of mothers in instructing children in moral religious matters. In the home the Israelite mother had a high status by virtue of her role as mother. In the Decalogue, God commands obedience to one's mother as well as one's father (Ex 20:12; Deut 5:16) (Fox 2000:82).

Mothers would give advice to their son's as does Lemuel's mother in Proverbs 31:1-9. The importance of the women in the household is clear from Proverbs 31:10-31. How she goes about teaching her children as is mentioned in 31:26 is not elaborated on (Fox 2000:82-83).

Murphy (1998:926) points out that there is an overlap between wisdom literature and the Decalogue, which provided guidelines for the

Israelites' conduct. Wisdom literature provided many of the sayings that dealt with areas of living that were not as clear-cut as, "*Thou shalt not commit adultery*". It dealt with forming character and integrity of action. The sages developed specific motivations to help a person anticipate temptation.

### **1.5.1. The role of the priests**

The priests were guardians and teachers of the Law. The meaning of the word 'Torah' was that of 'directive' and 'instruction'. Some didactic teaching was given at an early date in the centres of worship: Samuel is an example of someone who was entrusted to the priest Eli for instruction (1 Sam 2:21, 26). The priest Jehoiada instructed the king Jehoash and "*Jehoash did what was right in the sight of the Lord all his days*" because of Jehoiada's instruction (2 Ki 12:3) (De Vaux 1961:50).

### **1.5.2. The role of the prophets**

It was the work of the prophet to instruct the people as much as it was to foretell the future. Under the monarchy the prophets were the religious and moral teachers of the people (De Vaux 1961:50).

Prophets like Elijah, Elisha and Isaiah gathered loyal followers together in loose groups, which were referred to as schools. They did not teach reading and writing but according to Crenshaw (1998:98-99) "*these schools preserved the oracles of their mentors until the revered tradition was eventually compiled into written texts*". Others like the prophet Jeremiah were able to use the services of a scribe (Baruch) to write his text.

According to Hubbard (1982:1258) prophets like Amos, Isaiah and Jeremiah sometimes used the forms, techniques and teachings of wisdom literature to enrich and reinforce their oracles. Although "*Israel's sages confessed that true wisdom stemmed from God (Job 28) the impact of Israel's prophets on her sages cannot be ignored*".

### **1.5.3. The role of wise men or women**

Prophets differed from sages or wise men or women in that they insisted their utterances were of divine origin (Crenshaw 1998:241) whereas sages were considered to be wise people who did not receive divine oracles.

This special class of men or woman (2 Sam 14:2) seems to have developed during the monarchy. According to Hubbard (1982:1256) by Jeremiah's time "*they had taken their place beside prophets and priests as a major religious and social influence*". There are differing opinions as to whether they were a professional class or they were just people of uncommon intelligence.

'Wise men' also taught the people how to live good lives. Their influence was especially felt after the exile and the term was interchangeably used with that of scribes. Then moral education and the study of the Law was combined. Their teaching was handed down in the gatherings of the elders (Si 6:34) particularly at festive meals (Si 9:16), in the open air, at the city gates, in the streets and crossroads (Prov 1:20; 8:2). They expressed their teaching in epigrams, which were preserved in oral tradition and later preserved in written collections (Prov 10:1; 22:17; 25:1). They also gathered pupils around them for more continuous training. It is probable that schools existed in the two capitals where civil servants were trained similar to those that existed in Mesopotamia, in Egypt and among the Hittites. The first proof of organised schools only appears much later in Sirach 51:23. According to Jewish tradition it was only in 63 A.D. that the high priest agreed that every town and village should have a school where all children would attend from the age of seven (De Vaux 1961:50).

### **1.5.4. The role of teachers**

There is much debate over the status of teachers. There seemed to have been double standards because although they were highly spoken of in some circles they were also poorly paid. They also

seemed to have been the object of scorn in certain quarters. Unmarried men were not allowed to be teachers because this would put them into daily contact with the mother's who brought their children to school and this was thought to be inappropriate (Crenshaw 1998:10).

In the Ancient Near East tradition the role of the teacher in relation to the pupil was considered to be that of a father to a son. This has sometimes caused confusion and caused misinterpretation as if the biological father was directly responsible. Lemaire (1992:311) considers that most of the references to father in the wisdom books are references from a teacher to a pupil. The three possible settings particularly for Proverbs continue to be contested.

Genesis 12:6 and Judges 7:1 appear to show a time when Israel tried through teachers to find out God's plan for the future by means of divination. Belief in God as teacher appears in a number of texts but Job 35:11 and Isaiah 28:26 and 30:20 particularly reinforce this idea (Crenshaw 1998:207).

Teachers within Israelite society would include almost everyone because teaching could be intentional or unintentional and be both positive and negative. They could be sages, priests, parents, prophets and specialists of all kinds (Crenshaw 1998:208).

#### **1.5.5. The role of scribes**

The books of the canon were passed down from one generation to the next by specialized guilds of trained scribes. The scribes probably received their training within the setting of their family that belonged to a guild of scribes and jealously guarded their art (Crenshaw 1998:237). According to De Vaux (1961:50) after the exile the term wise men and scribes became identical terms and moral education was combined with study of the Law.

## **1.6. Vocational Instruction**

The parents usually taught the children their profession. Living at home with his father, the son would naturally watch and help his father at work and learned his father's profession (1 Sam 16:11; 2 Ki 4:18). The book of Proverbs several times insists on the usefulness of good work (12:24, 27; 14:23; 18:9; 20:13; 22:29), especially agricultural work, the profession the most often mentioned (Prov 12:11; 24:27, 30-34; 27:18, 23-27; 28:19) (Lemaire 1992: 306).

Girls learned household activities with their mother, in particular baking (2 Sam 13:8), spinning and weaving (Ex 35:25-26). Proverbs 31:10-31 seems to present the picture of the ideal woman as a model for the girls' education (Crook 1954). Young girls could also work in the fields (Gen 29:6; Ex 2:16; Prov 31:16). According to Sirach 42:9-11, in Ancient Israel a father was more concerned and anxious about the education of his daughter than for his son. In later Judaism, the parent's responsibility in teaching a profession to their children was underlined by the maxim: "He who does not teach a profession to his son teaches him brigandage" (Lemaire 1992: 307).

According to Gruber (1995:635) families who practised a particular craft lived in a specific neighbourhood in the larger cities. Isaiah 7:3 (eighth century) refers to, "Fuller's Field" in Jerusalem. Jeremiah (late seventh century) mentions Jerusalem's "Way of the Potsherd Gate," where the potters lived and carried on their craft (Jer 19:1), as well as the "Baker's Street" (Jer 37:21). There were also merchants, temple servants, goldsmiths and specific industries like scribal art and dyeing found in specific areas. Crenshaw (1998:86) states that these training centres were under the supervision of the heads of families. The students were the sons from their own families.

## **1.7. The stages of education**

Pfeiffer (1972: 341-347) states that a young child first lived with his mother, who breastfed him until he was weaned. The day of his

weaning was probably celebrated as a feast with a sacrifice (Gen 21:8; 1 Sam 1:23-25). The date of the weaning is difficult to specify and varied with the mother. However according to 2 Maccabees 7:27, Josephus, and Mesopotamian and Egyptian traditions (Pritchard 1950: 420), it was generally celebrated when the child was three years old (Lemaire 1992:307).

In the prominent families, a wet nurse (Heb *mêneqet*) could take the place of the mother (Gen 24:59; 35:8; Isa 49:23); this was especially prevalent among the royal families of Jerusalem (2 Ki 11:2; 2 Chron 22:11) or of Egypt (Ex 2:7). Later on, and at least until age five or older, the child would be under the care of a dry nurse or governess (2 Sam 4:4). This last job was sometimes assumed by the grandmother (Ruth 4:16) or even by a male (Num 11:12; Isa 49:23; Esth 2:7). Male guardians were especially connected with sons of the king (2 Ki 10:1, 5), like the *paidagogos* ("family tutor") in Greece. From about five to seven years of age the child could go to school or in some cases start to work with his father, who introduced the child to a profession like farming or the craft the father practised (Lemaire 1992: 307).

In later Jewish tradition a boy was generally considered to be an adult, at least from the religious point of view as soon as he reached puberty, probably when he was twelve to fourteen years old. So according to Rabbi Yehuda ben Tema:

*At five years, one is fit for the Scripture,*

*At ten years for the Mishnah,*

*At thirteen for the commandments,*

*At fifteen for the Talmud,*

*At eighteen for the bride-chamber,*

*At twenty for pursuing (a calling),*

*At thirty for authority.*

(Lemaire 1992: 307)



These descriptions of the stages of life occur in Egyptian literature according to approximately the same time frame (Crenshaw 1998:7). These approximate stages of life seem to be confirmed by the personal stories of Jesus (Luke 2:42; 3:23) and of Josephus (Life 9) but the Old Testament does not clarify them. According to Genesis 37:2, "Joseph was a boy of seventeen when he worked with his brothers in the fields and started his adventures; he was probably considered an adult at that time. Leviticus 27:3-7 presents an estimation of the worth of a man according to the various stages of life: "Between a month and five years old," he is still considered a small child; accordingly his value is one tenth of an adult. "Between five years old and twenty," the child can already help and work accordingly his value is one third or about two fifths of an adult. "Between twenty and sixty years old," the person is an adult. "Over sixty," the person cannot do so much work and thus his value is only about one third of an adult (Lemaire 1992: 307).

Lemaire (1992:307) states that these verses indicate that age twenty was generally considered the approximate age for full efficiency at work, that is for assuming full responsibility in one's job. However, other traditions indicate that the age thirty was considered the usual age to assume an official position with responsibility. It was at this age that Joseph became pharaoh's prime minister (Gen 41:42-46). David was made king (2 Sam 5:4), and the Levites became servants of the temples near the altar (Num 4:3, 23, 30, 35, 43, 47). Of course the information concerns the upper class of Israelite society, namely the members of the royal family or of the priestly families, that is, high functionaries and leading citizens. Information about the lower class (farmers, craftsmen) is lacking.

## **1.8. Educational Institutions**

### **1.8.1. The Family**

If parents were the ones initially responsible for the education of their children, other members of their family naturally could take part in this education as well, especially the grandparents as in the case of Naomi

and Ruth (Ruth 4:16). Esther is a case where her paternal uncle or her cousin Mordecai is mentioned as being the guardian (Esth 2:7). Actually, amid this large family, the child received not only a general education but also teaching about the national traditions, especially during the family celebrations (1 Sam 20:6) such as Passover, where children played an active part asking questions (Ex 10:2; 12:26) (Lemaire 1992:307).

Perdue (1997:206-207) states that, *“The oral tradition of the household would have included narratives involving the ancestral founding of the family; the original gift of the family’s land; the history of the family; the kinship relationships of the family to clan, tribe, and greater Israel; and the religion, mores, wisdom, and laws of the family passed down through time”*.

*“Thus household religion legitimated the family’s social customs and laws, which defined the relationship of people to one another and to the ancestral deity. Family religion focused not on the individual piety but rather on the family’s communal relationship to other households and the ancestral deity. The social reality of Israel as a cluster of families held together by kinship, tradition, custom, law, and religion was never abandoned, even when one of the household, that of David, established a royal state that competed with and attempted to restrict a society and religion based on the family household.”*

Education in the family sphere (teaching stories, taking part in family feasts etc) occurred within the household through the oral transmission of knowledge and skills related to household tasks, social customs, and religious tradition. *“Small children and girls were taught by the mother (Prov 1:8; 6:20), while the father assumed responsibility for teaching boys—especially at the time of transition to manhood—and young men (Ex 10:2; 12:26; 13:8; Deut 4:9; 6:7, 20-25; 32:7, 46, Prov 1:8; 6:20; Sir 30:1-13)”* (Perdue 1997:172).

According to Perdue (1997:172) *"In the household boys and young men were taught the body of knowledge and skills required for farming, while girls and young woman received instruction in parenting, food preparation and preservation, tending gardens, and producing textiles. Yet education went beyond the pragmatic necessities of labour to include social customs, moral values, and religious beliefs and rituals"*.

As far as teaching and education was concerned Perdue (1997:172-173) states that, *"The titles for the student ("son") and the teacher ("father") or ("mother") in wisdom literature may reflect this household ethos of parents instructing children (Prov 1:8; 10, 15, 2:1; 3:1; 11, 21 and 3:1). It was not only the father who taught the law (Deut 6:7; 11:19; 32; 46-47), traditions of morality and religion, the knowledge and skills associated with economic roles, and social customs (Ex 12:26-27; 13:14-16; Deut 4:9; 6:7, 20-25; Josh 4:6-7; 21-23); it was also the mother (Prov 1:8; 6:20; 30:17; 31:1-9). Proverbs frequently mentions the authority and instruction of both the father and the mother within the same saying (Prov 10:1; 15:20; 20:20; 23:22, 25; 28:24; 30:11, 17) and points to the firm discipline of parents (13:24; 19:18; 23:13-14; 29:15, 17)".* Family traditions would have included the stories, laws, and customs concerning the household's patrimony and relationships with other families, clans, and tribes. The stories and instructions also transmitted the household's religious knowledge, which was the foundation and legitimated family life (Perdue 1997:173).

### **1.8.2. Religion**

Besides the family celebrations at home, the child would accompany his parents on pilgrimages to sanctuaries (1 Sam 1:24). In the early period this meant a trip to the local sanctuary, but later, after the Deuteronomic reform, the pilgrimage was to the Jerusalem temple: *"Three times a year all your males shall come into the presence of the Lord your God at the place which he will choose, namely at the place of pilgrimage of the Unleavened bread, of Weeks, and of Tabernacles"* (Deut 16:16) (Lemaire 1992: 307).

During these religious pilgrimages the children would be able to learn not only about the sacrifices that were made but they also heard the Torah being read and prayer being offered. This would make them aware of the liturgy that was used in their community of faith and become part of their thinking. The Torah was to read publicly once every seven years during the feast of the Tabernacles. "*Assemble the people, men, women and children together with the aliens who live your cities, so that they may listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and observe all the words of this instruction with care*" (Deut 31:12). Parts of the instruction or similar texts were probably also read publicly at each feast, especially during the renewal of the covenant (Ex 24:7) (Lemaire 1992:307).

All this teaching was memorized not only by means of hearing but also through repetition and singing. Psalms played an important role in this regard, especially the psalms of meditation on history or on the instruction (Torah). The psalms were good pedagogical means for learning about the nation's past and its foundational principles. "*Listen to my instruction (Torah), O my people, pick up your ears to the words of my mouth. I will open my mouth for sentences, I will expound the riddles of the past which we have heard and know, and our ancestors narrated to us*" (Ps 78:1-3). This kind of didactic and historical meditation is well attested in several psalms (44; 105; 106; 114; 136), while other psalms insist more on moral education (Ps 15; 19; 50; 119) (Lemaire 1992:307-308).

Lemaire (1992:308) also makes mention of the fact that the regular religious feast would have been an ideal time to give the children religious instruction and inculcate a concept of national identity. In the early period this would have included every new and every full moon. After the promulgation of the Law by Ezra, every Sabbath day was also to be used for the moral and religious education of not only children but also adults.

### 1.8.3. Schools

#### 1.8.3.1. Schools in ancient Israel

There are totally opposite explanations about the timing of the existence of schools because of the total silence about them in Hebrew literature. One group says no schools existed; the other groups say that they were so prevalent that no one thought to mention them (Crenshaw 1998:74). There has been considerable debate over the existence of schools in Israel from the beginning of the First Temple Period. One school of thought like Meyers (1988:152) maintains that there is no conclusive evidence that schools where young people went for instruction by a paid teacher existed in Ancient Israel before the Hellenistic period. A study done by Crenshaw in 1985 suggests that schools are not mentioned because none existed. Lemaire (1990:171) argues that the virtual silence about schools is not because they did not exist but rather because they were so common that no one thought it necessary to mention because they were so obvious. Heaton (1975: 108) points out that this was the case in Egyptian literature as well. Literacy on the other hand was probably more common than people might imagine.

Crenshaw (1985:614) takes a conservative stance arguing that the bulk of education took place in the family setting. Though he recognises that *"it seems unwise to insist that all education occurred in the home, despite the paucity of evidence for royal schools"* and concedes that *"in all probability"* Israelite education was far richer than his minimal perspective.

Millard (1984:308) notes that, *"While far from the Babylonian evidence in scope and quantity, the West Semitic abecedaries and related epigraphs make the presence of schools in the first half of the first millennium B.C. somewhat less hypothetical than has been asserted"*. Crenshaw (1998:62-63) argues that the inscriptional evidence that has been found which includes abecedaries, exercise tablets, crude

drawings and foreign language text does not strengthen the argument for a vast educational network. It can be explained without it. Literacy in the ancient world rarely exceeded ten percent and was usually much lower.

Lemaire (1990:167) cites several scholars including Klostermann, Riessler, Herner, Hermisson who have come to more positive conclusions. Lemaire supports the presence of schools in ancient Israel by the First Temple period. De Vaux (1961:50) as speculating that, "*it is probable that schools for scribes existed at an early date*" in the capitals of Judah and Israel for the training of civil servants"(Gruber 1995:644).

According to Jewish tradition, Joshua ben Gamala, the high priest (63-65 C.E.) or Simeon ben Shetah (second century B.C.E.) began compulsory education (Crenshaw 1998:5). Apparently Gamala decided that school teachers should be appointed in every province and in every town, and that children of six or seven years be brought to them. However this decree was certainly not the start of the first schools in Ancient Israel. It was only a reform or a means of ensuring that there were primary schools everywhere in Israel. There were primary schools and other types of schools long before the decree was made (Lemaire 1992:308). There was also some sort of large-scale education during the time of Ezra (fifth century B.C.E.) when the reading of the Torah was followed by interpretation (Neh 8:7-8). There are several other references including that of the Mosaic Law in Deuteronomy 31:12-13.

Schools existed in Mesopotamia and in Egypt from 3<sup>rd</sup> millennium BC. Various schoolboys' exercises discovered from the First Temple period show that schools already existed during the time of the monarchy. The schools differed to the schools of today. They did not have furnishings, the master taught the pupils sitting around him, often in the open air or in the corner of the courtyard, similar to the traditional Quranic schools (Lemaire 1992:308).

Perdue argues (1997:209-210) that the problems associated with the establishment of the monarchy included the exploitation of farm families. This led to a steady decline in the traditional household. It also included the undercutting of the educational, economic, care, law and protection systems. In the religious system the rituals and traditions that strengthened and legitimised the family and gave it identity and solidarity were also undermined. This can be seen from the warning found in 1 Samuel 8:10-18. Once a king was appointed there was need for finances to support the monarchy. These funds would be placed in a royal treasury. The coffers of the treasury would be supplied from taxes, spoils of war, offerings to the temple and the control the monarchy would have over the markets. This new economic system placed tremendous wealth and power at the disposal of the king. From these funds wisdom schools could be financed to train and educate the scribes to administer the kingdom and fill the posts needed for the bureaucracy of running a monarchy from a central place. With the establishment of a monarchy it would be necessary to find ways to reinforce the authority and power of the monarch. With the wealth and power at his disposal the king was able to divert the loyalty of the poor from the household to the monarchy (Perdue1997:209-210).

Some scholars argue that Israel had a complex system of formal education that began sometime between Solomon and Hezekiah's time. These formal places of learning served the wishes of the royal administration. They trained scribes for a variety of services including political propaganda, record keeping, epistolary correspondence, and artistic representation. Some of the more gifted scribes served as courtiers. More mundane tasks of scribes included wills, marriage contracts, divorces, and land purchase agreements (Crenshaw 1998:87-88).

If the scribes needed to know the more complex languages then the training they needed to undergo had to be a lot more extensive. Besides Hebrew there was Aramaic and if it included Akkadian and

Egyptian then that would take even longer to learn (Crenshaw 1998:88).

There are some who advance the idea that elementary education took place in small villages, secondary education in larger towns and advanced training in capital cities. To date no material evidence has emerged to support the idea that royal scribal schools existed in Jerusalem (Crenshaw 1998:89).

Biblical authors never mention schools. The only texts which suggest formal schools, can also be explained without referring to a formal institution (Crenshaw 1998:90).

The religious traditions and practices that strengthened families were restricted and at times even prohibited by royal design. A case in point would be the family just before the fall of Jerusalem in 586 BCE. At this time families and villages had largely come under the control of the nearest towns, cities, royal districts, the kingdom, and ultimately the king himself. Without the abrupt end of the monarchy in the Babylonian conquest Perdue (1997:211-212) maintains that the family household in its described form likely would not have survived.

Lemaire (1990:167-168) points out that *“One has to remember that schools in ancient Israel were not like modern schools. They were closer to the tradition of the traditional Koranic or Jewish schools or the classical Greek or Latin schools. The teaching could take place in many different places. The school could be a room in a private home or a public building, a place like a city gate, portico or marketplace or even in an open place. Wisdom was only one of the subjects taught. Family, tutoring and school were not exclusive of one another and could be used simultaneously for teaching (Lemaire 1990:167-168).* Crenshaw (1998:74) highlights the fact that ancient learning did not take place in an ivory tower but at the centre of daily activity.



### **1.8.3.2. Schools in the Greco-Roman period**

Although large numbers of Jews allowed their children to be taught in Hellenistic schools there were some Jews who preferred a Hebrew education. Jewish Hebrew schools were only established after the Hellenistic schools. The first record of a secondary school being established is in 2 BCE and the primary school in 1 CE. The reason for this is because their parents taught most children at home. The children learned well enough to read the Jewish synagogue services. There is evidence the Jewish girls were also taught to read the Torah. There are records of a debate on the value of this in the Mishnah (Townsend 1992:316). The New Testament story of Jesus going forward to read from Isaiah corroborates the premise that people learned to read (Crenshaw 1998:6).

Elements of Hellenistic education can be found in Jewish education and even in rabbinic schools. Hebrew and Greek teachers used similar methods to teach the alphabet and rabbinic principles of scriptural interpretation (Townsend 1992:316).

The scribe was the teacher in the Hebrew primary school. Hebrew was used in place of Latin or Greek and the Bible in place of Homer and the other classics. They began with the alphabet and then rabbinic methods of interpretation. There was no need to learn syllables because Hebrew had no written vowels (Townsend 1992:316). Students learned to write the alphabet backwards and forwards like the Greeks. Judah Goldin in Crenshaw (1998:9-10) states that the boys first studied the Shema (Deut 6:4-9) and Tefillah, Scripture and prayer, together with the blessings spoken at meals. Formal education of boys began between the ages of five and seven. The boys may have spent five years on the Scriptures and then began learning the Mishnah at age ten. At fifteen boys began to study the teachings that gave rise to the Talmud.

Secondary schools studied the oral Torah. This was passed on orally from one generation to the next. After this there was a choice to continue with advanced scriptural interpretation and juridical learning (Townsend 1992:316).

Although little is known about the origins of the Pharisees they were a movement for the education of the people in the knowledge and practice of the Jewish law. The Pharisees did have their own fellowship groups but they did not try to isolate themselves (Rogerson 1989:62). They came from all the different social classes including priests and scribes but they did not represent any single or social interest. (Rogerson 1989:340).

Another group during this time period was the Essenes who followed a more intense study of the Torah in their general education as can be seen by the Dead Sea Scrolls (Townsend 1992:316).

Fathers were obligated by the Torah to provide vocational training to their sons. Jewish thought differed from the Greek attitude by regarding manual labour and higher learning as being compatible. This is why Paul's tent making along with his preaching was considered as desirable (Townsend 1992:316).

The major difference between Jewish education and education in the Greek world was that Jewish education focused on the study of Scripture and that of Hellenistic education on language, music and athletics (Crenshaw 1998:11).

There was considerable debate as to which students were suitable for instruction. The school of Shammai restricted education to the talented, the meek, people of well thought of ancestry and the rich. Hillel's and Simeon ben Yohai's school was open to any boys. The expense was however still an inhibiting factor (Crenshaw 1998:9).

Scholars preached in Jewish synagogues during Sabbath and holidays. The homilies that were given were an informal method of study. These teachers were more popular and exercised more influence (Townsend 1992:316).

Secondary schools studied the oral Torah. This was passed on orally from one generation to the next. After this there was a choice to continue with advanced scriptural interpretation and juridical learning (Townsend 1992:316).

Although it is not known if Greek was taught as a subject in Jewish schools it was never banned from use and a level of proficiency was required in order to survive as the Greek language was the lingua franca of Greco-Roman world (Townsend 1992:317).

### **1.9. Literacy**

There is divided opinion among scholars as to at what stage the Israelites can be considered literate. Linked to this is the controversy over when schools were introduced and became accessible on a large scale. Crenshaw (1998:39) points out that there were three factors, which affected literacy. They were environmental, political and social. A subsistence economy did not provide any encouragement to the ordinary people to have formal education. The demands of daily living, herding, cultivating the land and caring for the olive groves and vineyards mitigated against formal schooling. The poor payment of scribes and lack of advancement for them also affected this situation. Families could not spare their sons to go away to school when they were needed for labour intensive activities on farms which meant the difference between them having food or not. As scribes belonged to guilds they probably guarded their skills.

Demsky (1985:350) points out that, *"In discussing a 'literate society', it is necessary to differentiate between reading ability, which is passive, and writing, which one learns because of a need and demands some*

*practice. It is quite plausible that more people could read their own name, a simple letter or some official announcement than were able to write such texts. It is this ability to read which defines the broadest form of literacy in ancient Israel."*

We do know that the languages of the Sumerians, Akkadians, Egyptians and Ugaritic were complex. To learn to read or write them required the memorization of hundreds of pictographic or cuneiform signs. Those who learnt were from wealthy homes, which could afford the time and money to learn to become scribes. Hebrew in contrast was alphabetic and had only twenty-two letters that had to be mastered. This allowed for, as Meyers (1988:153) puts it, "*the democratisation of learning*" allowing many more people to be able to learn it. When Israel began to exist as a nation the alphabetic script was already streamlined. There are epigraphic remains that date from the Iron Age I period. Crenshaw (1998:39) argues that the simplicity of the Hebrew alphabet may have encouraged literacy but there has been no correlation established between a simple script and mass literacy.

Meyers (1988:153) considers Albright overenthusiastic in his estimation of the development of widespread literacy as early as the time of the Judges in the history of Israel. She does think that he was to a certain extent right in that there was at least limited popular literacy during the formative period.

One of the arguments given by both Meyer (1988:153) and De Vaux (1961:49) is that Judges 8:14 shows that a young man apprehended by Gideon was able to write down some vital information that Gideon needed in his war against Midian. Perdue (1997:214) argues that in his opinion, even if this were a historical incident, this random capture would not support the existence of either widespread literacy or public education in reading and writing during the pre-state period.

De Vaux (1961:49) also favours the theory that writing was in common use at an early date. Besides the professional scribes, like those employed at the courts for administration (2 Sam 8:17; 20:25; 1 Ki 4:3) there were also secretaries like Baruch (Jer 36:4). Members of the ruling class could write according to the stories of Jezebel (1 Kings 21:8 and of Isaiah 8:1). There is also the commandment of Deuteronomy 6:9, 11 that presumed that every head of family could write.

Perdue (1997:173) is much more conservative in his dating and favours the theory that it is most likely that members of farming households were illiterate. During the early period before the formation of a state there appears to have been some literacy in the towns. Later, during the period of the first temple, literacy flourished among the court officials in the court and the temple — some could read but others could not (Isa 29:12). It is logical to assume that most instruction in the scribal arts of reading and writing developed during the monarchy (2 Sam 8:17) and would have occurred in the contexts of the court and temple schools in Jerusalem and Samaria, and perhaps in local schools in the towns throughout Israel. However explicit archaeological and literary evidence for schools not only in the capitals in Jerusalem and Samaria but also in local towns is extremely sparse.

Perdue (1997:173) argues further that while there is limited epigraphic evidence for the geographic expansion of literacy throughout Israel during the First Temple Period, it is probable that most households would have been without any members who were capable of reading and writing, even at the very basic level. Perhaps there were scribal households, located presumably in the large royal cities, where the literary arts were transmitted in the manner of guilds, but this would have been true of ordinary village households, largely engaged in agricultural work.

Lemaire (1990:170) however states that there were numerous paleo-Hebrew ostraca, seals and bullas that show evidence of the spread of

literacy in the Judean kingdom 600 BCE. Millard (1985:308) states that, “*Few places will have been without someone who could write, and few Israelites will have been unaware of writing*”. This could not have happened only through those who were professional scribes. There must have been schools as well.

### **1.10. Writing**

Deist (2000:226) argues for a distinction to be made between when writing was introduced and when literacy was introduced. He points out that this could be several centuries apart. It is feasible that the majority of people had the opportunity to learn to write. The question is when did this take place? Weippert (1988:579-584) and Millard (1985:301-312) argue that it was around the late eighth century BCE. Even when there were many people who were literate the ability to write generally reinforced class distinctions and social status and signified that the person was from the upper classes. Scribes were considered to be powerful people (2 Ki 18:18; 19:2; 22:3; Neh 8:1; Ezek 9:2). Demsky (1985:350) distinguishes between two categories in ancient societies when it came to the ability to write. There were the class of the professional scribes and then the widespread literacy, which permeated through all classes of society.

*“The technology of writing has not only deeply and profoundly influenced ancient Israelite society, it also made the production of the Hebrew Bible itself possible”* (Deist 2000:231-232). Deist uses as an argument a text, which shows that everyone reading the text could read and write: *“Hear, O Israel; The Lord is our God, the Lord alone... Keep these words (the book of Deuteronomy) that I am commanding you today in your heart... bind them (in written form) as a sign on your hand, fix them (in written form) as an emblem on your forehead, and write them on the door-posts of your house and on your gates (Deut: 6:5-9).*

There are some biblical books that take writing for granted even though the references are not specific as to who actually does the writing. The author of Deuteronomy expects that those who are planning to get divorced be able to write or be able to secure the services of a scribe. Symbolic terms for writing were also used in the passage where the hearers are urged to write divine instruction on the tables of the heart. In Deuteronomy there is also the youth from Succoth who writes down the names of seventy-seven people, there is an incident where Queen Jezebel sends letters to ensure Naboth's death and David is associated with the death of Bathsheba's husband Uriah through a letter to his commander, Joab (Crenshaw 1998:35).

There is a biblical account of Jeremiah sending letters to exiled Judaeans in Babylonia during the time Deuteromistic history was composed and also drew up contracts to purchase land. He also employs an amanuensis (scribe) to write down his oracles and later dictates an extended version to the scribe Baruch. Over a century before this Isaiah acknowledges that some people were illiterate (Isa 29:12) (Crenshaw 1998:36).

Scribes must have written many of the ancient texts that have been found. They served the kings, officials and upper class. Some may argue that they were sent in to the outlying towns and cities from the capital to write the ostraca. Millard (1985:303) argues that considering some of the content it would be highly unlikely that such an important official would take the time to travel such long distances in order to write something that was only of local consequence. It is therefore highly likely that there were scribes outside of Jerusalem and Samaria. There are fifteen different sites where ostraca have been found and some of these sites are relatively small settlements and forts. Millard argues that there are two options, either there were scribes operating at each place or military or government employees or even private citizens who were able to write them.

In Israel as elsewhere evidence shows the normal writing material was papyrus. Ostraca were not written to be stored for any record purposes. Millard maintains that, *"With the physical evidence before our eyes, there can be no question that writing was possible in Israel throughout the period of the Monarchy. Equally beyond dispute is the wide spread of writing; courtiers could see Hebrew on monuments in Samaria and Jerusalem, peasants could see it on seal impressions, jars and jugs in country towns, even in such remote farmsteads as those in the Buqei ah Valley... The Hebrew documents are all mundane survivors from daily life apart from the monumental inscriptions, and with one exception. They reflect writing as primarily a utilitarian skill, which was the position when it was invented"* (Millard 1985:304).

It was important that when messages were sent that the sender authorise those messages. In Ancient Israel messages were authenticated as coming from a certain person by the use of a seal. The seal was an impression on a piece of clay and this clay seal was then attached to the written document. Jezebel had a seal for her letters (1 Ki 21:8). When Esther wrote to the kingdom about the treatment of the Jews the king's seal ring was used (Esth 8:8). Sometimes illiterate people were dependent on others to interpret the intention of the author. An example of this would be when the Levites needed to interpret the Law which Ezra read (Neh 8:8) when the men were made to divorce their non-Israelite wives (Deist 2000:227).

Lemaire (1990:170) cites a few paleo-Hebrew inscriptions, which have schoolboy exercises of the First Temple Period. These include abecedaries, words written twice and lists of proper names, formulas of blessings at the beginning of a letter, lists of months, lists of numerals and various units of weights and measures, and drawings. Millard argues that, *"While far from the Babylonian evidence in scope and quantity, the West Semitic abecedaries and related epigraphs make the presence of schools in the first half of the first millennium B.C. somewhat less hypothetical than has been asserted"*. Lemaire also



points out that scholars need to take into account that advanced exercises were written on perishable papyrus and leather and therefore the lack of material evidence.

Crenshaw (1998:34) maintains that although there is a great deal of evidence that writing flourished in Israel during the last one hundred and fifty years of the monarchy, just before the collapse of Samaria in 722 and Jerusalem in 587, there is substantial written evidence from earlier times.

Millard (1985:308) concludes that, *“Ancient Hebrew documents, recovered by archaeology, demonstrate both that there were readers and writers in ancient Israel, and that they were by no means rare. Few places will have been without someone who could write, and few Israelites will have been unaware of writing”*.

Biblical texts refer to a variety of writing materials that were used. These included a scroll, either made from leather or papyrus, a stone and a wooden tablet. Papyrus was widely used though very few of them have survived, only the seal impressions that were used on them. The papyrus found at Wadi Murabba'at is one of the few that have survived. Parchment was used for Old Testament texts as in the case of the Dead Sea Scrolls. One of the texts was also written on copper, which was even more precious than parchment (Crenshaw 1998:37).

Schoolboys used wooden tablets as well as tablets with a smooth wax surface. Slate and ivory were used at times. Broken pieces of pottery or limestone flakes were also used for first draft copies. Scribes also wrote on the rims and handles of wine and grain containers (Crenshaw 1998:37-38).

### **1.11. History**

During the LB age the Israelites could use hieroglyphics, Akkadian (El-Amarna letters), cuneiform (Beth-Shemesh tablets) and linear

alphabetic script (inscriptions in Palestine and Lachish). The use of these scripts shows that there must have been some kind of scribal training in Palestine during this period but there is no certainty as to where it took place (Lemaire 1992:308).

Further inscriptions from the 10<sup>th</sup>-12<sup>th</sup> centuries BC point to the fact that the linear script was the only one that continued to be used in Palestine and that it was also used by the Israelites from the Canaanite tradition. From the biblical text one can assume that most of the tradition was transmitted orally in the 12<sup>th</sup>-11<sup>th</sup> century B.C. near the sanctuary of Shiloh, Shechem, Gilgal, Bethel, Hebron, and Beersheba. The case for Shiloh is the clearest. Samuel (1 Sam 2:12) can be seen to be some kind of an apprentice who received cultic instruction at the sanctuary, perhaps even at the same time as Eli's sons although of course they must have been older than him according to the biblical account (Lemaire 1992: 308).

During the time of David and Solomon Israel had grown in size and influence. There was a need for the organization of a royal school to fill administrative posts in the bureaucracy of the monarchy. As Solomon married pharaoh's daughter it is possible that there was a strong Egyptian influence and that Israel used the Egyptian model where reading, writing, calculation, administration, history, geography etc was taught to the 'sons of the king' and to the son's of the friends of the king or leading citizens who might then become royal advisers (1 Ki 12:8, 10) "*the young men who had grown up with him and who stood before him*". (Lemaire 1992: 308).

These royal schools were probably also established in the Northern Kingdom in Shechem, Tirzah, and Samaria although the reference in 2 Kings 10 is an unclear reference to either a royal school or to private teachers (Lemaire 1992: 309).

Not only royal schools but also the Temple in Jerusalem needed trained personnel who needed education in reading, writing, singing, music, rites, feasts, calendar, national religious traditions etc. Lemaire (1992:309) suggests that this instruction was probably given at or near the temple under the instruction of the high priest. Under special circumstances the priest could be responsible for the education of the young king (2 Ki 12:3).

There was an improvement in the development of writing from the 8<sup>th</sup> century onward, which could not have taken place without the establishment of schools on a more widespread level. This can be seen from paleo-Hebrew epigraphy, inscriptions and seals as well as from biblical texts, which include the books of Amos, Hosea, Micah, and Isaiah. The important reform development in the schools referred to in 2 Chronicles 17:7-9 was probably under the supervision of royal functionaries, priests and Levites. The fact that "abecedaries" and schoolboy exercises were found as far afield as Lachish, Arad, Aroer, Kadesh-Barnea, Kuntillet-Ajrud at the end of the First Temple period show that writing was not only learnt in the great cities but in the villages and small fortresses. Deuteronomy 6:9; and Deuteronomy 11:20 expect that everyone could write and this could not be done without the establishment of local schools (Lemaire 1992: 309).

In 598 and 587 when the Israelites went into exile the people were well educated and knew some Aramaic (2 Ki 18:26) possibly as early as 701B.C. Because of their knowledge the exiles prospered and some even were given official positions in Babylon. Some of the children may have been educated in the royal Babylonian schools (Dan 1:3-5) (Lemaire 1992: 309).

Bullae and seals from a Judean archive according to Avigad (1976) in Lemaire (1992:309) seem to suggest that the governors of the Judean province appointed by the Persian authorities were all Jews. Laperrousaz (1982: 93-96) also supports this. Some of the Jews who

came from Babylonia spoke Aramaic as their primary language. In fact all the administrative ostraca found in this period in Palestine are written in Aramaic. All the temple services however took place in Hebrew and all the teaching in the schools was in Hebrew. It follows then that the functionaries were specially taught Aramaic (Lemaire 1992: 309).

During the Hellenistic period, the nationalistic revolt by the Maccabees succeeded in preserving Jewish culture despite the strength of the Greek culture and language. Qoheleth and Ecclesiastes are good examples of Jewish teaching in the Hellenistic period based on the study of the Law, the Prophets, and other writings. The text was translated into Greek to be used in Egypt (Lemaire 1992: 309).

The Pharisees, Sadducees and Essenes from the end of the 2<sup>nd</sup> century had their own interpretation of the law as well as their own teachers and schools to support their beliefs. The Essenes are well known because of the Dead Sea Scrolls. The Pharisees were famous for their teaching in the local schools as well as in Jerusalem (Acts 5:35; 22:3; 23:6). The Talmud and the Mishnah were well known as part of the later written rabbinic tradition. Little is known about the Sadducees because of a lack of material remains. As Christianity came into being there were 480 synagogues in Jerusalem and each one had a school for the Talmud and the Mishnah (Lemaire 1992: 309).

## **1.12. Teaching methods**

### **1.12.1. Formal learning**

There were two methods used to help students remember, the first was oral repetition and the second was punishment by the use of a rod if they didn't learn. This was general practice in the Ancient Near East.

Most teaching was done by word of mouth where the teacher would tell a story, give an explanation and ask questions (Ex 13:8; Deut 6:7, 20; Ps 78:3-4). This method of teaching was used under the Rabbis and

even in the Koranic schools today. Children were also taught literary passages, such as David's lament over Jonathan and Saul, (2 Sam 1:18) which was still being recited in the days of the Maccabees (1 Mac 9:20-21) (De Vaux 1961:49).

Reading was taught by repeating aloud the sounds of the letters and the syllables. There is a hint of this in Isaiah 28:9, 10. Lemaire (1992:309) maintains that, *"Reading' was essentially to proclaim, to read in a loud voice as is still done in Quranic schools today"*. It was almost a chant to help them memorize the text. This repetition of words is also referred to in the text of Deuteronomy 6:6, 7. *"These words which I command you today will be on your heart. You shall repeat them to your sons and speak of them indoors and out-of-doors, when you lie down and when you rise"*.

Mnemonic devices were used in teaching such as numerical sayings (Ps 62:12; Job 5:19; Prov 6:16) and acrostic alphabet poems (Psalm 9-10) parallelism, key words and alliteration were used to make memorisation easier.

The content of the teaching probably varied according to the ages of the person the schools and the time period. Young boys used to go to school after weaning (cf. 1 Sam 1:24; Isa 28:9-10), probably when they were five (cf Lev 27:6; 2 Sam 4:4). The Egyptian custom was seven. Children learnt to read by first identifying the 22 characters of the alphabet in the traditional order (paleo-Hebrew and square Hebrew "abecedaries"); then they copied the same word twice, complete sentences (e.g. proverbs, lists of names and months, greeting formulas at the beginning of a letter, and even models of short messages or letters). Then children were trained in writing ciphers and abbreviations of the unit of measurement, in calculation, and in drawing. Children probably used classical Hebrew texts to learn to read and probably at the beginning of the Christian era used the Hebrew Old Testament (Lemaire 1992:310).

Later the student would begin writing on papyrus and leather. As a future scribe, he was probably trained to write deeds of sale, marriage contracts, bills of divorce and court pleas. This required the student to study Israelite law and administrative texts. During the first temple period most of the scribes would be employed in the royal administration and would therefore have had some guild, which they belonged to. The most important scribe would be the official king's scribe who served more like a chancellor or secretary of state (Lemaire 1992:310).

Those who became royal functionaries received their training in Jerusalem at the school for the scribes. They would have been taught along with the sons of the king. This practice also happened in Egypt. The students had to learn Israelite law, geography, history and Aramaic, which was the diplomatic language. They were taught by senior officials and retired royal functionaries. The students were probably teenagers who were the sons of royal functionaries. Several books in the Bible could reflect the teaching of the royal school including Samuel, Kings and Proverbs (Lemaire 1992:310).

Priests were taught in much the same way for their general training but were taught more specific subjects like rites and sacrifices, the calendar, the Temple, distinctions between clean and unclean, the singing of psalms and the playing of sacred music. Chapters in Leviticus and Exodus could have been used as a reference work in the priestly school in Jerusalem. There was probably a learning centre in the temple complex, which had some kind of library, as was the case in Egypt (Lemaire 1992:310).

Lemaire (1992:310) suggests that although some of the prophets may have originally been trained in a priestly or scribal school they tended to gather their own disciples and begin their own schools as in the time of Elisha.

The schools of the prophets differed in several ways from the scribal schools and the priestly schools. Teenagers as well as adults attended. They also tended to be more philosophical, in line with the Greek schools. The methods of teaching varied. This depended on the prophets who were in charge of them. It was at these schools that the prophet's story and teaching was recorded for the future (Lemaire 1992:310).

At the beginning of the Hellenistic period the teaching in Jerusalem was traditional and innovative. Examples of this can be gleaned from Qoheleth and Jesus ben Sira. At the beginning of the Christian era the teaching of people like Gamaliel and Bannus used the traditional and philosophical teaching method. John the Baptist and Jesus' approach was more in line with that of the schools of the prophets where they gathered disciples together (Lemaire 1992:311).

The term instructor, prophet or teacher, are terms, which were used for a wisdom teacher who was generally considered a wise man. This person was considered a person of experience. It is not clear as to whether the terms of respect given to the person according to their degree of knowledge or experience differed. The student had to pay the teacher for the teacher's services. That is why most of the students came from wealthy families of high functionaries or leading citizens (Lemaire 1992: 311).

The educational role of the father explains why the priest, whose mission was to teach, was called 'father' (Judg 17:10; 18:19). Similarly the relationship of the teacher and pupil was that of 'father' and 'son' (2 Ki 2:12; 2 Ki 2:3) (De Vaux 1961:49).

The Bible alludes to the fact that teaching and education are not always easy and that the rod has to be used to reprimand. "*Do not withhold discipline from a boy. If you beat him with a rod he will not die. When*

*you beat him with a rod you will save him from death*" (Prov 23:13, 14; Prov 10:13). The use of the rod in Israel confirms what is known about schools in Egypt and Mesopotamia (Lemaire 1992: 310).

In the Ancient Near East teachers used several ways to help their students gain knowledge. They beat them whenever it was thought necessary and they encouraged lively debate. They also used suggestive language. They were able to do this, as the students were all males. This can be seen from the way they use Wisdom depicted as a beautiful bride and folly as depicted as a harlot (Crenshaw 1998:117-118).

Two of the teaching methods used by teachers were counterproductive for learning. One was memorization and the other the copying of texts. This became very apparent in the Egyptian education as many texts were copied incorrectly because the meanings of the texts were obviously not grasped (Crenshaw 1998:119).

Crenshaw (1998:119) states that "*these teachers never forgot that wisdom (hearing) was a stage beyond knowledge (teaching) and that it meant far more than the accumulation of information. Wisdom, the capacity to use information for human good, includes virtue. By virtue these teachers meant generosity and humility.*" Crenshaw (1998:120) quotes a biblical proverb to make his point.

*Three things are too wonderful for me;  
Four I do not understand:  
the way of an eagle in the sky,  
the way of a serpent on a rock,  
the way of a ship on the high seas,  
and the way of a man with a maiden.*

Proverbs 30:18-19



Crenshaw's (1998:120) view of this text is that, "*Life's abundant mysteries evoke gratitude and reverence before the author of wisdom and truth*" (Crenshaw 1998:120). Truth was arrived at in three different ways. People observed nature and drew conclusions by using analogies and they listened to people who gave reports on insights that they had gained in the creed versus reality situation. There were also those who acquired knowledge through a direct encounter with the divine. For Israel's sages revelation occurred at creation (Crenshaw 1998:120-130).

Teachers used rhetorical strategies in wisdom literature to convince students of the truth of what they were saying. They used logos, ethos and pathos. A teacher relied on logical arguments to convince his students. This was known as logos. The strategy of ethos was when the knowledge of the character of the speaker was used to convince the hearer as in the case of Job and Bildad and Eliphaz (Job 8:8-10). This knowledge would include a system of beliefs, values and customs. Ethos would also gain credibility from the age and experience of the person. Pathos is used in wisdom literature to convince the audience by appealing to their emotions. The speaker hoped to whip up the passion of the audience sufficiently for them to be motivated to act. The emotions most often used were fear and wonder (Job 33:14-18) (Crenshaw 1998:130-136).

Israel's parents and teachers also used stylistic devices to make an impact on unwilling learners. Besides instructions and maxims they used existential statements. An example of this would be, "*There is a way that seems right to a man, but its end is the way to death*" (Prov 14:12). Graded numerical sayings also put the point across, "*Three things stately in their tread; four are stately in their stride; the lion... the strutting cock, the he-goat, and a king striding before his people*" (Prov 30:29-31). There are actually four examples given but the lower number provides a balance for the higher number and heads up to it. Those giving instruction taught their students to evaluate situations and make

judgements. When a sentence began with a word of comparison like, "*Better is a handful of quietness than two handfuls of toil and a striving after wind*" (Eccl 4:6). Other styles that were used included poems, hymns and lists (Crenshaw 1998:137).

According to Crenshaw (1998:137), "*This combination of rhetoric and literary devices demonstrates the care with which Israel's teachers, whether in an official capacity or not, went about their task. Their sensitivity to the demands of rhetoric suggests that they realized the extraordinary appeal of alternative lifestyles to that endorsed by their instructors. They also understood the danger posed by a life of folly, and they strongly urged young men to gain mastery over their passions*".

Crenshaw (1998:216-217) points out an interesting cognitive analytic process found in Job 28. "*By the hearing of an ear I heard about you, but now my eye sees you ... God sees her way and knows her place, for he looks to the ends of the earth and sees under all the heavens. The sovereign of wind and ocean, rain and lightning, saw Wisdom, discussed it, established it, and probed it deeply (Job 28:27)*".

There are four distinct stages in the intellectual process. The first stage comprises of first hand observation and experience. Secondly it involves discussion where the observation is articulated and communicated to others. Insights are then shared with others so that the insight is no longer private knowledge. The third stage is establishing your hypotheses and reaching temporary conclusions. The last stage is the analytic assessment by investigating every part of the idea. The four verbs – *rā'āh*, *sāfār*, *kûn*, *hāqār* describe this cognitive analytic process (Crenshaw 1998:217).

### **1.12.2. Informal Learning**

Informal learning took place in many different settings. Children could have learned as their father's talked to the leaders of the caravans or at

the wells as the men talked of the 'justices of Yahweh'. The elders and men debated the different cases at the village gate whether they were lawsuits or commercial transactions.

The child also accompanied their parents to the sanctuary (1 Sam 1:4; 21) or to the temple in Jerusalem (Luke 2:41), where the children would hear the chanting of the Psalms and the recounting of historical episodes connected with each of the festivals. This religious liturgy was a powerful medium of instruction (De Vaux 1961:50).

Every now and then we get a glimpse in the Old Testament of childhood training and teaching. With regards to the affirmation of faith in the Shema in Deuteronomy 6:4-5 it is followed by instructions for Israel to keep God's commandments in their hearts and to repeat them to their children. Joy (1986: 6-7) points out that, "*the instruction was to be in the form of speaking both indoors and outdoors, visual reminders bound to foreheads and wrists, and written text on the doorposts of the houses and the gates. Such education was comprehensive in scope and made virtually all of life a school. It acknowledged that children are immersed in a total curriculum of experience, and it detailed fundamental teaching learning modes as contemporary as Jerome Bruner's "action, and language" forms of representation*".

Deuteronomy 6:7 implies teaching children informally at all times, "*Recite them to your children and talk about them when you are at home and when you are away, when you lie down and when you rise*".

### **1.13. Specific training**

#### **1.13.1. For boys**

Most instruction was very general. The father handed on to his son the national traditions, which were also the religious traditions and which they had been commanded to pass on by their forefathers (Ex 10:2). The father also gave professional education as trades were hereditary and crafts were handed down in the family workshop. A rabbi was

credited with saying: *'He who does not teach his son a useful trade is bringing him up to be a thief'* (De Vaux 1961:49).

Specific training was generally a profession that was passed on from father to son. So when a boy helped his father with shepherding (1 Sam 16:11) he learned shepherding skills. When a son helped his father with the farming (2 Ki 4:18) he learned farming skills. Certain crafts could be learned outside of the home environment. Craftsmen were organised in guilds (Neh 3:8; 11-32; 1 Chron 4:14, 21-23). Apprentices could be trained as specific craftsmen (Lemaire 1992:308).

Lemaire (1992:308) states that members of the immediate family or tribe gave military training (Judg 3:2). Here again a boy gained some experience by accompanying his father (Judg 8:20-21) or his brothers (1 Sam 17:13) to war. Military training took the form of general training in physical exercise to learn steadiness and agility (2 Sam 22: 34, 37) but also involved training in the handling of weapons, including the sling, bow, sword and spear. An example of this would be the tribe of Benjamin who was famous for their ambidextrous use of the sword (Judges 3:15-16) and of the sling (Judg 20:16), while other young men were trained to use the bow (1 Sam 20:20-22; 2 Sam 1:18). Young men were also trained in hand-to-hand combat (2 Sam 2:14-16). This specialized training was probably supplemented by learning about the heroic exploits of the past (Judg 5:14-16; 2 Sam 21:15-22) and particularly of tactical tricks (Josh 8:3); while passed mistakes were recalled in order that they may not be repeated (Judg 9:50-54; 2 Sam 11:20-21). Later military training was given under the supervision of professional officers of the king who supplied the required weapons (1 Chron 27:16-22; 2 Chron 17:13-18; 26:11-15; 2 Ki 25:19). Other specific training for the king's sons, scribes, and high royal functionaries were generally given in the context of schools (Lemaire 1992:308).

### **1.13.2. For girls**

Young women were trained to be good housewives and to work in the fields. There were some other professions that women were trained in which included nurses and midwives (Ex 1:21), cooks, weavers, (! Sam 8:13) perfumers, (1 Sam 8:13) mourners, (Jer 9:19) singers, (1 Sam 28:7) necromancers (1 Sam 28:7) or prostitutes (1 Ki 3:16). Although the practice of prostitution and witchcraft was frowned on nevertheless they still took place. The woman described in Proverbs 31:10-31 could well have been used as a role model for younger women who came from upper class homes in teaching home economics (Lemaire 1992:311). The way in which girls learned was generally by observing and working with their mothers in the home or even in the fields. Midwives were trained almost in the same way as apprentices by working with older women and learning their skills (Lemaire 1992:308).

There is a strong possibility that there was some kind of school and teaching for upper class young women, particularly the daughters of kings. Seals have been found that belong to the daughter's or wives' of kings. One of them had a lyre on it as an emblem. Other's thought to belong to Queen Jezebel, the wife of King Ahab and also that of Zerubabel, governor of Judah's, daughter. This meant that these women could sign official documents that included letters and deeds with their own seals and they could read and write. If there was a certain education for upper class women it would explain why Hulda was considered an official prophet and was consulted at home by officials from the king (2 Ki 22:14:15) (Lemaire 1992:211).

### **1.14. The role of the child in the education process**

The voice of the boys being taught is missing in wisdom literature. The saying that children should be seen and not heard was obviously practised by the sages. None of the Israelite wisdom literature allows the student to vocalise his thoughts. This also occurs in Mesopotamian and Egyptian wisdom literature. The only exception is the *Instruction of Anii*. In these writings the son Khonshotep enters into a debate with his

father Ani about how difficult it was to live up to expectations. His argument however disintegrates before the authority of his father (Crenshaw 1998:268). The only other possible mention is in the book of Job. Crenshaw suggests that Elihu in Job belongs to the stage between youth and adult. His lack of self-control identifies him as one who has not yet achieved wisdom and points to his immaturity (Crenshaw 1998: 191).

Whybray (1990) proposes that the instructions given in Proverbs 1-9 suggest that the boys who were being taught were members of the lower classes of society because of their laziness, which is alluded to.

It appears that the students were reluctant learners. One of the reasons was the physical beating they received. Crenshaw (1998:149) states that, "*Apparently teachers believed that learning travelled to students' ears by way of their backs*".

Hearing was one of the responses required of young pupils. Verses like those found in Proverbs 1:8 where the son is admonished, "*Hear, my son, your father's instruction, and reject not your mother's teaching*".

They were also expected to reply to questions with proof that they had been attentive and had understanding. These discussions were to help them process an idea from its inception through to its conclusion. Buccellati (1981:43) in Crenshaw (1998:151) explains the dialogue by saying that, "*The intended effect is to bring about, through a dynamic rendering of a process of mental acquisition, the natural birth of an idea: the reader, or listener, identifies so fully with the process that the resulting conclusion is already internalised in its premises*".

## **2. Education in Mesopotamia**

Civil (1992:301) states that one of the main purposes for education was to train scribes. A general idea of these schools has been indirectly reconstructed. This can be done because of the pupil exercises that

have survived and from the descriptions of schools and some literary references to scribal knowledge and training. Some material remains have also contributed. According to Civil (1992:301), "*There are no preferred theoretical treatises on educational methods and goals, and none is expected given the intellectual outlook of Mesopotamian culture, which was not given to the formulation of abstract principles and rules*". The teaching methods used in Mesopotamia were linked to the fact that cuneiform writing was used and the medium of writing was clay tablets. One also has to take into consideration that it was a bilingual society. Another unique characteristic of Mesopotamian education is the uniformity of teaching materials and methods and the use of cuneiform over a very long period of time. This has historical and political implications. The areas were widespread reaching as far as Anatolia and Egypt. The most reliable sources are found in the OB period.

## **2.1. Schools**

There is evidence that schools existed in ancient Sumer as early as 2500 B.C.E. Clay tablets have been found that have documented Mesopotamian culture (Crenshaw 1998:15).

Because of the complex writing systems in Mesopotamia and Egypt scribal training took place in official schools and sometimes the schools were associated with temples. According to Crenshaw (1998:85-86) the complex writing systems "*required long training with emphasis on rote-learning and reverence for the past, and the combination of tradition, didacticism, and repeatable sentiment encouraged the use of proverbs and rules for successful or ethical behaviour.*" As a result of this particular emphasis instructional literature was written that could be identified as a form of wisdom literature in Egypt. There is definite proof of schools in Egypt and Ugarit.

## **2.1.1. Teaching Materials**

### **2.1.1. 1. Word Lists**

Most of the knowledge, whether scientific or technical, is known by us today because of extensive word lists and paradigms written on clay tablets in cuneiform. There is limited information from manuals on how to follow procedures. An example of this is "Instructions to a Farmer" which gives advice on how to grow barley. There are also hundreds of school exercises with word lists, which have been found in archaeological excavations. These lists were found at the same sites where the earliest examples of cuneiform writing were found from the Uruk III-IV period ca. 2,700 B.C. Twelve of these lists focus on a single subject e.g. birds, fish, trees and wooden objects. These lists including some from Fara, Abu-Salabikh and Ebla were used until the third millennium B.C. in Southern Mesopotamia, as well as from Susa to Ebla. Later lists included practical vocabularies of words that were frequently used in everyday life and lists of cuneiform signs. More recent lists, which can be identified by their common opening lines were introduced in the second millennium B.C. These lists continued to be used until cuneiform was no longer used around the beginning of Christianity (Civil 1992:301-302).

There are a few commentaries, which have been found which preserve the oral teaching of some of the Mesopotamian masters. These have etymologies, illustrative quotations and astrological and religious speculations (Civil 1992:302).

### **2.1.1.2. Clay Tablets**

Various types of clay tablets were used in school in OB times. They include the common one, which is a round planoconvex tablet, which the students could easily hold in their hand. It had a flat side with some lines of model text written in Sumerian by the instructor and which the students had to copy. Sometimes the convex sides had syllabic spelling as aid to the students when reading a Sumerian or Akkadian translation (Civil 1992:302).



### 2.1.2. School Regulations

There is a Sumerian text from the OB period, although not well preserved, that gives rules and regulations for school activities and student discipline. It is also interesting to note that students were cross-questioned on their knowledge of the rules and regulations. Some examples of the better preserved passages read: *“If a pupil, after he has laid down the cloth on his sitting place, strikes another pupil, after misbehaving he will not be beaten, he will be expelled.”* And: *“After the instructor has collected the tablets, he will inspect them. He will correct the places where the wedges are not right. If the student is found to be deficient and could not recite his exercise tablet and his word list, the instructor and the master will strike his face. After the inspection is finished, when the “water man” says “take the jars!” and “idiot, your jar!” they will take the jars and fill them from the canal in the center of the city”* (Civil 1992:303).

### 2.1.3. School Dialogues

Tablets preserve dialogue between schoolchildren. Dialogue has been a traditional teaching tool through the millennia. OB dialogues contain ironical descriptions of school life and verbal fights between pupils and were used to learn Sumerian, the prestige language, which by then was extinct as a commonly used subject (Civil 1992: 303).

### 2.1.4. School Buildings

The Sumerian term for school means, “tablet house”. The term is also the normal designation for an administrative centre or archive, of which there could be several in a town. The term could also read “house of the seal” or the “sealed documents”. The ambiguity makes it very difficult to identify references to proper schools in economic texts. School exercises have been found in greater or lesser numbers in practically all archaeological sites but no large building exclusively devoted to teaching can be positively identified. When remains of teaching material have been found they are always in the familial milieu

or in a section of a large building that obviously served many other purposes such as a wedding venue (Civil 1992:303-304). Crenshaw (1998:19) stipulates that schools were not associated with temples.

Scribes destined for an administrative career, were probably trained as apprentices at the administrative centres or in the royal palaces where they would ply their trade. Family teaching on the other hand was more oriented toward the preservation of traditional literary and religious texts. From literary descriptions, it appears that teaching took place in a courtyard covered when needed by an awning with the student sitting on a piece of felted cloth spread on the ground. Crenshaw (1998:19) points out that this could have been part of the headmaster's living quarters. Sand in front of the student was used as some sort of blackboard to sketch models of cuneiform signs but Crenshaw points out that writing tables were required for formal work. A physical feature of the teaching place was a "school well", a basin for the water used to mix with the clay (Civil 1992:303-304).

Because cuneiform signs were so complex it took years for them to be mastered. Students spent from when they were very young until well in to maturity studying (Crenshaw 1998:19).

#### **2.1.5. Curriculum and teaching**

Teaching was based on rote learning by repeated writing a recitation of word lists. Each line of text had to be written and recited repeated times, as many as four times in a day, until well memorized by the student. After being taught how to make tablets, handle a stylus and write elementary exercises of a syllabic nature, the student learnt the repertory of cuneiform signs. Lists of personal names were a frequent writing exercise at this stage. He then memorized thematic lists that formed a sort of cultural encyclopaedia, and various other types of lists, culminating in a list of human occupations and conditions over 800 lines long. Legal formularies, metrological and mathematical tables and problems, as well as the memorization of traditional literary works,

completed the scribes' education. Many, if not all, students learned the musical skills necessary for reciting these literary works. Students spent twenty-four days a month in school, the rest being taken by three days of vacation and three days of sundry festivals. At the time when information about schools is most abundant, the language of the population was certainly Akkadian. Sumerian was then an extinct, prestige language used in administration, law, religious activities, and literature. It can be assumed that teaching was conducted in Sumerian since it is the basic language in school exercises, even though an Akkadian translation, oral or written, was constantly required. One could compare this cultural and linguistic situation to a similar one in the classical world; that of educating the young Romans in Greek for centuries (Civil 1992: 304).

#### **2.1.6. School Personnel**

The headmaster was called the "school father" and belonged to the rank of experts or masters. There is a mention of supervisors but their rank in relation to the masters is unclear (Civil 1992: 304). Preceptors assisted the headmaster with supervising writing and maintaining discipline in the classroom. A senior teacher of the tablet house provided instruction, supervised examinations and gave adult leadership. An overseer was responsible for administration and regulating the student's lives. Specialists were brought in to help with mathematics, music, languages, public service and magic (Crenshaw 1998:15). Helping in teaching tasks as instructor was the "big brother" presumably an advanced student or an aspirant to a teaching career. This arrangement caused a great deal of conflict between the students and instructors (Crenshaw 1998:16). A number of aids and servants were in charge of class discipline and supplies. Their activities can be inferred from a humorous passage and from lexical texts (Civil 1992: 304).

It is unknown how teachers and other personnel were paid. The texts seem to indicate that they had a right to a portion of the food brought in

by the students for their meals, or that they took the food anyway (Civil 1992: 304).

### **2.1.7. Students**

Students were called “school children,” an expression occasionally used to also designate a full-fledged scribe. There is no information about how long the student’s education lasted, nor about what age boys were sent to school. Many scribes were sons of scribes. It appears that even if scribes were not wealthy they seemed to form a class apart. Despite the patron goddess of the scribes being female there was no mention of female students. Females signed three or four lexical tablets. There must have been some female students since female scribes were not unknown, although exceedingly rare (Civil 1992: 304). It is possible that they were the daughters of royalty or wealthy individuals that had private tutoring for their girls (Crenshaw 1998:16).

Students came from elite households who had wealth and influence although there are exceptions. Usually only boys attended schools. Harris (1990:7) states that there is evidence that there were at least ten women who served as scribes in the Mari text. One list mentions nine who received rations alongside others who worked in the harem. She concludes that they must have been slaves and of low status.

Harris (1990:8) states that there is also evidence that female scribes could also be poetesses. Enheduanna was the high priestess of the moon god Nanna. She was the daughter of the Akkadian ruler, Sargon. She was a poetess. Four centuries later Ninshatapada, daughter of the founder of the Uruk dynasty could be placed in the same category. She composed a letter prayer. Women also became physicians. Female physicians are mentioned at Larsa and at Mari. Similar situations also existed in Egypt, where women also occasionally acquired an education.

Despite there being very little evidence of education of females Crenshaw (1998:18) sums up Frymer-Kemsky's (276) view as, "*women mediated between nature and culture, transforming the raw into the edible, grass into baskets, fleece and wax into yarn and clothes, and babies into social beings*". Ben Sira (38:34) commented that those who work with their hands "*keep stable the fabric of the world and their prayer is the practice of their trade*" which added a spiritual dimension to their work.

## **2.2. Wisdom Writing**

The scribes in the schools copied wisdom literature as part of the text that needed to be copied. There are several collections of proverbs in both Sumerian and Akkadian. Examples of this would be the Instructions of Suruppak, which contain the advice of a king to his son. There is also Counsels of Wisdom. The reflective literature can also be compared with Job and Ecclesiastes. Lindenberger (1983:25) argues that the proverbs of Ahiqar when studied show that they are too fragmentary to be able to compare them with any certainty. He says that, "*genuinely close parallels between the Aramaic proverbs and the Bible are few.*"

## **2.3. Literacy**

Lacking reliable population estimates it is impossible to give any idea of the quantitative extent of reading and writing. For the six decades at the end of the second millennium BC for which the archives of Ur III Empire are preserved, the names of no less than 1500 scribes are known. At that time literacy seems to have been common in the upper classes and monarchs often boast of their literary accomplishments (Civil 1992:304).

## **2.4. Social Value of Education**

Good schools were eagerly sought and children were sometimes sent away to another town for their education. The post of a scribe "*who regularly comes and goes in the palace*" was considered an enviable

one, a divine blessing to be preferred to material riches (Civil 1992:305).

### **3.Education in Egypt**

#### **3.1. Schools**

Schools were connected with the temples and were for the priests as early as the third millennium. Much of the writing had to do with magic and incantations particularly those to do with life after death. The three most well known pieces of literature were Pyramid Texts, the Coffin Texts and the book of the Dead (Crenshaw 1998:22).

A large group of educated scribes was needed during the Old Kingdom period (2686-2160). These civil servants were mostly of royal blood. They trained their successors in their own homes initially but at a later time courses were held at the royal court (Williams 1990:19).

The royal administration sponsored a school for bureaucrats. These included secretaries, clerks, paymasters and letter writers. From 1567-1085 B.C.E. during the New Kingdom there were many scribal schools in the temple and the palace (Fox 2000:8). Important individuals sponsored some of the schools (Williams 1990:29).

It is interesting to note that Fox (2000:8) argues that, "*Although wisdom literature was one of the genres of Egyptian schools there is nothing to suggest that they were written for schools or that they were words spoken by teachers to pupils who then had to transcribe the words*" (Fox 2000:8).

Training in the required languages, contract forms, epistolary style and regulations for international commerce probably occurred in schools. Sample examination questions have survived amongst the Egyptian scribal text (Crenshaw 1998:73).

### 3.1.1. Teaching Materials

It is well known that papyrus was the most common writing material used in Egypt. The disadvantage of this material was that it was not as long lasting as the clay tablets used by the priests in Mesopotamia. As a result very few written papyri have survived down to this day. Inevitably the little information that is known has to be pieced together leaving a huge amount that is not known. Quite a number of the texts are of such a poor quality that one can only conclude that the scribes did not know what they were copying. One of the main reasons for this is that there was a change in scripts from hieroglyphics to hieratic and then to demotic and because of this all the mistakes began to creep into the scripts (Crenshaw 1998:22).

### 3.1.2. School Texts

According to Williams (1990:19), *"There were some teachers who prepared "didactic treatises designed to provide pupils with materials for practice in reading and writing and at the same time to inculcate rules for acceptable conduct and habits of speech"*. The earliest text like this was named was by Imhotep but unfortunately it has not survived.

Some texts that have survived show the kind of grammatical exercises that students had to do. They covered grammar and syntax and lists of familiar things. The different forms of the verbs were also given. There is a Greek influence on the ordering principle otherwise they were random (Crenshaw 1998:25). These texts instructed the students on how to cope with professional life, at the court, and economic transactions (Crenshaw 1998:73).

A few texts from Egypt and many more from Mesopotamia consist of zoological and botanical taxonomies listing various species (Crenshaw 1998:75).

Williams (1990:24) states that these didactic texts were studied, copied, and memorized for many centuries. There is evidence that one such text, the "Teaching of Amenemhet," was used between fourteen and seventeen centuries later. Most of the literature produced was anonymous but ascribed to important people to lend authority to the documents.

### **3.1.3. Students**

During the Old Kingdom only children of government officials had access to school education. When the New Kingdom began there was a greater need for more officials and so the schools were opened to all who qualified (Crenshaw 1998:23).

Once the basic training was completed the students that showed the most potential went through an apprenticeship for more specialized training particularly in trades and crafts. Scribes who wanted administrative positions had an even more specialized education. They could pursue a career in medicine, astronomy, sorcery or dream interpretation. This tuition would take place in the palace or temple or from those practising that line (Williams 1990:26).

### **3.2. Wisdom writings**

Egyptians were known for their wisdom. Even biblical writers referred to Egyptian wisdom in later ages (1 Ki 4:30; Acts 7:22). The invention of hieroglyphics before 3000 B.C.E. made the founding of a literary elite possible (Williams 1990:19).

There were two types of wisdom writings in Egypt, sayings and instructions. No collection of sayings survived although there are some scattered throughout the Instructions (Crenshaw 1998:54). The Egyptian wisdom instructions are the closest writings to the Proverbs (1-9) that exist. The way they were written shows that they were not written for schools (Fox 2000:8).



The texts that contain wisdom writings are from a superior to an inferior. They were ascribed to men from a variety of classes and professions. On occasions this included a king to his son or more often a high official of the court instructing his son to succeed him. The expression "my son" was used in the sense of a student similar to the biblical Instructions in Proverbs 7-9. The aim was to build character so that the young men could be educated to fill positions of authority. The superior was usually admonishing or warning the inferior. Sometimes he used maxims to give moral guidance (Crenshaw 1998:23-24). The subject matter included appropriate etiquette, table manners, conduct in the presence of officials, eloquence, restraint, behaviour with respect to women, control of passions and knowing when and when not to speak (Crenshaw 1998:52).

In the Old Kingdom teachers contrasted the passionate or hot headed individual with the silent person who was in control of his passions. In the Old Kingdom there was an emphasis of one being the master of one's destiny, in the Middle Kingdom there was some disillusionment with this idea. The texts from the New Kingdom period showed an emphasis on personal piety in Egypt but later it developed into scepticism (Crenshaw 1998:23-24).

Instructions to begin with consisted of a statement, followed by an observation and an explanation or justification for the comment. In the later Instructions the form changed to that of one line for each saying. It appears that the older Egyptian Instructions influenced Proverbs, the Demotic Instructions Ecclesiastes and Sirach (Crenshaw 1998:54).

Egyptian teachers believed that true wisdom was virtue. These virtues consisted of knowing when to speak, arguing persuasively, exercising self-control and speaking the truth (Crenshaw 1998:119). The model person is the silent one as that person shows self-control.

### 3.3. Scribes

Scribes enjoyed a high status during the New Kingdom. Crenshaw (1998:43) describes them as 'elitist and self-sustaining'. What they did enhanced a king's prestige. In the text, *The Satire of the Trades* a number of professions were compared with that of the scribe and the scribe compared well as he was his own boss. The Egyptian scribes copied a wide variety of texts. These included mortuary texts, Instructions and narratives. Some texts deal with the problems of going to school, which also involved harsh punishment when the teachers' demands were not met. Scribes often stayed in their position for many years. There is record of one family that were scribes for six generations (Crenshaw 1998:23).

Sages were all learned scribes. They had steeped themselves in the wisdom literature, which they taught. Often they were the compilers of wisdom literature. Later generations looked up to them as having the virtues, which they taught. They were also on the cutting edge of the scholarship of the day (Williams 1990:25). Sages were said to be knowledgeable not only of the past and the present but also the future (Williams 1990:28). Sages in the royal courts of Egypt filled the function of sorcerer, magician, interpreter of dreams and adviser to the ruler. They were diplomats, problem solvers, physicians, entertainer, counsellor and even chancellor, architect and of course government official (Williams 1990:95-98).

### 3.4. Literacy

Baines (1983:572) estimates that literacy in Egypt never exceeded more than one percent. He thinks that Egypt was an oral culture more than a literate one. Writing was there mostly for administrative and religious purposes. It reinforced the central government and gave prestige to administrators and priests.

The hieroglyphics, hieratic and demotic scripts were complex. The administration made sure that there were a limited number of scribes.

This was probably tied in with the fact that it supposedly had magical powers. Scribes were limited in what they were allowed to do. Many later scribes could not read hieroglyphics (Crenshaw 1998:41).

Much of what was written was annals and narratives about the exploits of the rulers. They mostly preferred not to be engaged in writing themselves. During the Early Dynastic and Old Kingdom periods the kings and their sons were educated (Crenshaw 1998:43).

#### **4. Education in the Greco-Roman Period**

##### **4.1. General characteristics**

The Greek word for education was *paideia*, which means “training, discipline.” It was translated into Latin as *humanitas*, which means the formation of a human person (Ferguson 1993:100).

There was a single universal education system that was prevalent during Hellenistic times that lasted until the Muslim conquest of the east and the Barbarian conquest of the west. Even the later Latin education system developed out of the Hellenistic system. The Jewish Hebrew schools were influenced by the Hellenistic system. The rabbinic education can be seen as an adaptation of Hellenistic methods and curricula (Townsend 1992:312).

The unity of the Greco-Roman education system was shown in the curriculum, the design and methods. The changes that did take place evolved slowly. When Latin was introduced in the west Greek still was the lingua franca and played a major role. Law became more important as a subject while music and physical education declined in importance (Townsend 1992:313).

Most classical education took place in schools although wealthy families did employ tutors but there was a strong correlation of what was taught (Townsend 1992:313). Schools were not subsidised except in a few Hellenistic cities. Polythrous of Teos donated 34,000 drachmas

to pay teachers an annual salary. It was stipulated that this donation was to provide free education for both boys and girls in Teos. As many girl's married very young they were still excluded from receiving an education (Crenshaw 1998:44).

A contradiction in the Greco-Roman culture was that on the one hand education was held in high esteem but on the other hand schoolteachers were held in contempt by the socially elite that depended on them to educate their children. This discouraged the government from subsidising education and discouraged people from making grants to education (Crenshaw 1998:48-49).

There were three stages of education, primary, secondary and advanced. Girls frequently attended schools along with their brothers. Many slaves were also given education in order to perform their work better (Townsend 1992:313).

## **4.2. Schools**

Most schools were small private ones with a single teacher. The teacher was paid a fee for his services. The teaching profession was looked down on mainly because the teachers had to ask for money and work long hours (Ferguson 1993:100).

Physical education was prominent at all levels of classical education not just for exercise or sport but also for moral training (Ferguson 1993:101).

### **4.2.1. Primary schools**

During the Hellenistic period writing proliferated and every city had a school (Crenshaw 1998:48). Some municipalities sponsored the primary and secondary education for children. They hired and paid the teachers although they were not well paid only slightly more than skilled workers. In other places schools were privately organised and often inadequate. Teachers depended on meagre fees to eek out a living and

were not well thought of socially. Classrooms were often improvised (Townsend 1992:313).

When students began going to school at the age of seven they attended the reading school and the *palaestra* where the physical education took place. The Greek emphasis on physical education was strong even after the time spent on physical education was reduced from all morning to the latter part of the morning (Townsend 1992:313).

One of the interesting features of primary education was the slave who was assigned to accompany the child to school known as the *paidagogos*. This custodian of the child was more like a male nursemaid (Townsend 1992:313).

The reading teachers taught the children to recite the alphabet forwards and backwards. Then the children learned to letter syllables. After that the children were taught to read whole words. Rare words and tongue twisters were particularly practised. Later students were given passages to read from writers such as Homer and Euripedes. When they could read them aloud then they began to memorise them and to recite them (Townsend 1992:313).

All texts were hand copied so it was important for the pupils to begin to write as soon as possible as the school texts that they used depended on it. They began with individual letters. The teacher would also guide the pupil's hand over sample letters. The emphasis was on copying one's own exercises, not grammar or free composition. Simple arithmetic was also taught using the fingers (Townsend 1992:313).

Flogging was used to discipline children and it could be brutal although people like Quintillian disapproved of this. Jewish Hebrew schools also used this method of punishment (Townsend 1992:313).

#### 4.2.2. Secondary schools

Students could choose to attend a grammar school once they had mastered what there was to know in the primary school. Children generally began this phase of their education when they were around age eleven or twelve (Ferguson 1993:101).

The students were taught the classics by a *grammatikos*. There were four disciplines when studying the classics. Textual criticism, reading aloud fluently, then exegetical which involved translation into the common Greek and then evaluative which included moral evaluation. All the subjects that were studied were known as the liberal arts. There was no consensus on what other subjects should be taught besides reading and composition and so the list could include music, mathematics, which included geometry, astronomy and numbers (Townsend 1992:314).

#### 4.2.3. Higher education

Greeks from good families had several options they could choose to round off their education at an *epebeia*. This school was supported by public funds. It was a type of a finishing school for young men. The curriculum involved physical education, rhetoric, philosophy and access to the library at the gymnasium. This usually took place at age eighteen. The *epebeia* had more social than intellectual significance as it gained full social and political acceptance of the student (Ferguson 1993:101).

A young man could choose a profession in rhetoric, philosophy, medicine or law. Different cities had specialization in certain areas and generally there was some kind of an apprenticeship which could last as little as six months (Townsend 1992:315). They would study under a philosopher, doctor or lawyer and learn in the field from them (Ferguson 1993:102).

### **4.3. Wisdom Literature**

*Sophia*, or wisdom was a well-known concept in Greek philosophy and literature. Alexander the Great's conquest of a vast territory along with his strong emphasis on the Greek culture made it possible for many literary works to be spread throughout the empire. The book the Wisdom of Solomon and Ben Sira was written against the background of the Hellenistic culture even though they were both Jewish books (Murphy 1992:930).

### **4.4. Literacy**

Greco-Roman society was mostly rural and even at its height literacy rarely exceeded ten percent. Evidence from papyri found shows the inability of many people to sign their names and therefore it follows that they were also unable to read or write or learn (Crenshaw 1998:44). The masses seldom felt the effects of literacy and as most Greeks were small farmers or artisans with little or no time to spend on learning or to send their sons to school they did not consider it necessary. Another contributing factor was that parents had to pay for schooling. Despite this Plato and Aristotle envision universal compulsory education (Crenshaw 1998:47-48).

In some wealthy households women would could read and keep accounts of their household expenditure and items (Crenshaw 1998:45).

Those in control realised that writing gave them a greater power of writing over the illiterate masses. Religious authorities and politicians and the military realised the power of control that it gave them (Crenshaw 1998:45).

### **4.5. Writing**

According to Aristotle writing was necessary in order to make money, the management of the household, instructions and civic activities.

Diodorous said that education was based on the written word and resulted in the good life (Crenshaw 1998:45).

Crenshaw (1998:46) states that the *Illiad*, *Odyssey* and *the Aeneid* contributed to an entrenchment of knowledge and made the culture more rational, sceptical and logical.

Many citizens could not write as can be seen by records of a vote of 191 people of whom only fourteen could write their names. Writing began being used mostly for commerce and among craftsmen to designate ownership. It increased in the sixth century and by the fifth century legal documents, treaties, inscribed weights and measures, minted coins and vases show evidence of writing being used more frequently. In 496 BC there was evidence of 120 boys who were killed when a roof collapsed while they were studying letters (Crenshaw 1998:46).

#### **4.5.1. Writing materials**

Writing materials such as papyrus were expensive and beyond the reach of the ordinary and vast majority of people. Potsherds were used as a substitute for short pieces of writing. Wooden tablets were widely used and like papyrus could be reused.

### **5. Conclusion**

The socialization and education of Israelite children took place within the household setting in early Israel and throughout Israelite history. Mothers played a critical role in the socialization process. They were not only the nurturers but also instructed the children by word and example in technical skills and behaviour modes essential to household life. If formal education can be associated with the home setting then it was even more significant in the transmission of culture. The instructional wisdom of the woman in early Israel was an integral part of daily life (Meyers 1988:154).



The existence of schools remains a debatable subject. There is epigraphic evidence that shows the existence of schools in the eighth century but what form these schools took, who attended, who controlled the schools is unknown. There is no evidence for public schools supported by the taxpayers. The subsistence economy militated against children of the majority of the population attending school. By the time we read about Jesus in the Gospels it appears to be a given that the son of a carpenter was literate. This would be in line with the rabbinic tradition of the origin of public education (Crenshaw 1998:113).

To what degree the educated Israelites were open to debate with the surrounding countries is unknown. There are those who favour that wisdom literature originated in the royal court and that accounts for the similarities between Egypt, Mesopotamia and Israel. Those who favour that wisdom literature resulted from the experience of ordinary people in small villages will maintain that there was little interaction between Egypt, Mesopotamia and Israel. Two factors show that there was not a strong relationship between Mesopotamia, Egypt and Israel. Firstly there is no evidence of any references to magic in Israelite wisdom literature. Secondly the philosophical, theoretical part of biblical wisdom literature is missing in Egypt and Mesopotamia. There are however similarities which do need to be taken into account and compared (Crenshaw 1998:26).

There is a question as to whether one can compare Egyptian and Mesopotamian cultures with that of Israel and Judah. As Egyptian and Mesopotamian culture was considered older and more advanced Crenshaw (1998:108) argues that they are too diverse to compare. He asks whether one can transfer practices and ideas from one to the other. The fact that Egyptian and Mesopotamian text both mention schools but Israelite texts do not, does not add strength to his argument (Crenshaw 1998:108).

When comparing the wisdom literature of Egypt, Mesopotamia and Israel there are similar features. These similarities are not just in the ideas but also in the verbal expressions. There are eight Egyptian expressions that are the exact equivalent in the Hebrew. When comparing the Mesopotamian wisdom literature to that of the Israelite the comparison goes beyond verbal expressions to themes (Crenshaw 1998:110).

The Hebrew pattern for transmitting values and beliefs consisted of handing on from father to son, from mother to children. This transgenerational communication system is clearly displayed in Psalm 78:5-6 (Joy 1986:7). *“For he established a testimony in Jacob, And he appointed a law in Israel, Which He commanded our fathers, That should teach them to their children; That the generation to come might know, even the children yet to be born.”*

Proverbs 4:1-4 has a similar pattern also in the setting of family life. *“Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father, And give attention that you may gain understanding, For I give you sound teaching; Do not abandon my instruction, When I was a son to my father, Tender and the only son in the sight of my mother, Then he taught me and said to me, “Let your heart hold fast my words; Keep my commandments and live”.*

According to Barclay (1974:11), *“No nation has ever set the child in the midst more deliberately than the Jews did”*. He quotes both Old Testament and early Hebrew writings to make his point. The Midrash commentary on Exodus 25:34 interprets ‘blossoms’ as referring to children: *“And in the lamp stand there shall be four cups shaped like almond blossoms”*. Barclay argues that the Jews, of all people, believed that the child was dearest to God, *“Touch not mine anointed, and do my prophets no harm”* of 1 Chronicles 16:22 was regarded as referring to children, the ‘*anointed*,’ and to their teachers, ‘*my prophets*’. Barclay (1974:12) quotes from an extreme writing where it is suggested that schools were even more important than worship. *“Perish the sanctuary,*

*but let the children go to school". Josephus also underscored early childhood education: "Our chief ambition is for education of our children... We must take pains of all with the instruction of children, and esteem the observations of the laws, and the piety corresponding with them, the most important affair of our whole life" (Barclay 1974:12).*

The centrality of the child is still prevalent among the Hasidic Jews today. Gillespie (2001:27, 28) states that, *"While having dinner with Chaim Potok, the novelist of culturally confrontational books such as "The Chosen" and "My Name is Asher Lev", and other books sharing the tensions that exist when Hasidic Judaism comes in direct contrast to such issues as modernism, aesthetics, and liberalism, I asked this conservative scholar how he was raising his children. His answer surprised me. He comes from a rather liberal philosophical viewpoint yet his lifestyle is exemplary as far as religious commitments are concerned. He said, "We Jews know that if you raise your children at the center of your tradition, there is a better chance that they will stay with it than if they are raised at the edge."*

The concern for education in the Old Testament persisted into New Testament times and Jesus' comments about children and their importance are a continuation of the long-term Jewish attitude toward children, which still persists in many Jewish families today.

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