



The Cultural Life Setting of the Proverbs

John J. Pilch

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Often, readers and commentators read the Proverbs as “timeless” observations and recommendations regarding human nature, valid for all cultures and places. This blunts their cultural relevance, argues John J. Pilch. For example, proverbs regarding the “good wife” and the “quarrelsome wife” take on different meaning in a context where a married couple were rarely in close daily contact, and the predominantly masculine language used in the Proverbs points to the different cultural spheres of men and women and the different child-rearing practices employed with boys and girls. Similar in approach and format to the Social-Science Commentary on the New Testament volumes that he authored with Richard L. Rohrbaugh and Bruce J. Malina, this volume explores and describes the cultural matrix of the Mediterranean world from which the Proverbs come and of which they are descriptive. The biblical text is paired with commentary addressing those proverbs and proverb collections with particular bearing on patterns of social roles and expectations. A list of social-science “scenarios” provides ready reference to particular aspects of the large cultural area of the ancient Mediterranean region and North Africa.

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