

ELITELORE IN THE BIBLE

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Although the word "Elitelore" has been in the literature since the 1970s, U. S. 'printed' dictionaries (which have not kept up the modern Internet world) do not usually include the word. A search of the Internet itself leads to "Elitelore World" at <http://Elitelore.org/index.html> which gives the following Introduction:

"The concept of Elitelore refers generally to the accumulated knowledge, mythology, and tradition of leaders, from national figures to neighborhood caciques. Elitelore concerns leaders' self-perceptions of the past, the present, and the future. These perceptions are integrated into a life-history framework that is crucial to understanding how leaders participate in society. As elites construct a method of viewing the world, they begin to accept as truth many of their own assumptions and ideas; but seldom, even in writing autobiography, do they make explicit this life-history lore....

"Elitelore is witnessed in simple speech traits and physical mannerisms, captured and tested in biographically oriented oral history, and reflected in the complex images of literature and film. Elitelore does not directly involve psychohistory's concern for unconscious influences on leaders although indirectly it can be useful to psycho-historical inquiry. Nor should Elitelore be confused with the concepts of "worldview" or 'ideology.'

"Worldview is essentially a passive term, saying little about creation or impact of the outlook of leaders, and ideology generally refers to active programs of political action which involve party or group loyalty rather than individual rationales for life trajectory.

"Elitelore's concern is not only with the great men and famous events of the past eras of scholarship. The elites considered by the scholars in the essays that make up this volume are neither necessarily governing elites nor males.

"Indeed, **Elitelore's** components include **Popularlore** (short-term lore about non-elites), **Celebritylore** (short-term lore by and about celebrities), as well as **Folklore** (lore about the folk/masses) which stands the test of time and remains relevant (and often enhanced and/or garbled) as it is passed from one generation to the next.

"Just as the folk have their lore, the elite have their lore. The difference is that the elite also know the lore of the folk but the elite do not circulate their [operating lore] by unspoken "rule", Elitelore is secretive) in order to maintain their power, and indeed involves "[inventing]" of Folklore, Celebritylore, **Cinematlore**. **Oprallore**, Militarylore, Policelore,, etc., and **Cartoonlore--**.

"Nor have the persons. . .been exclusively involved in events with a national or international relevance. What emerges in these studies is a set of common themes involving how elites at any level in complex social hierarchies act, justify their actions, relate to other elites, court followers, and influence society. Focus is often on Strategic Elites, for example, all senators are elites but they are led by a Strategic Elite within their Senate." (James W. Wilkie, *Elitelore*, Los Angeles: UCLA Latin American Center Publications, 1973; http://Elitelore.org/Capitulos/Elitelore_book1.pdf and en Español <http://Elitelore.org/Capitulos/Eliteloresp.pdf> as well as see the important book entitled *Elitelore Varieties 17 Views in World Context*. Edited By James W. Wilkie, David E. Lorey,

Olga M. Lazín (Los Angeles: Elitelore Books, 2012) <http://Elitelore.org/book3.html> and, Dimensions of Elitelore: An Oral History Questionnaire (1975) By James W. Wilkie and Edna Monzón Wilkie, as well as, e.g., *Elitelore and Folklore: Theory and a Test Case in One Hundred Years of Solitude* (1978) By James W. Wilkie, Edna Monzón Wilkie and María Herrera-Sobek.

As the Elitelore field developed over time, it moved from a focus on the exegesis of materials in a number of Elitelore genres (literature, film, opera), toward a more explicit focus on the mechanisms by which Elitelore is created and transmitted in society.

Ironically, neither Bible dictionaries nor the Bible encyclopaedia have an entry for "Elitelore," although the concept is in the Bible, beginning with the Hebrew Scriptures, the Old Testament, specifically the Wisdom literature. We will also briefly mention folklore, which is in some Bible reference works.

Proverbs 30 consists of the saying or oracle of Agur, which means "hired hand," so perhaps it is not a name, even though the official Hebrew text, the Masoretic Text of the Middle Ages, when scholars (masoretes) gave the text its vowels, describes him as a warrior, who claims no formal training.¹ Yet he speaks like Job, also a Wisdom book and character. As we read the chapter, it becomes clear that this ancient Piers Plowman is an elite, but not a strategic elite.² Nor is he a governing elite. He contends that wisdom, distinct from knowledge, can be learned (v. 3). He gives us lessons in life.

For wisdom of a ruling elite,³ one must go to the next chapter, Proverbs 31, where we read "The sayings of king Lemuel, an oracle his mother taught him." Here then we not only have Elitelore, but we also have feminine lore, that of the Queen Mother, who pictures a "wife of noble character," for which the chapter is famous, whether Lemuel is yet to marry or is considering whom to add to his harem. This virtuous woman whom he should marry is "worth far more than rubies" because she is industrious, fiscally wise, and diligent; worthy of praise. Above all she fears the LORD.⁴

Next, we come to Ecclesiastes,⁵ also known as Koheleth or the Preacher. For our purposes, it is irrelevant whether Solomon authored Ecclesiastes because the writer claims to be a royal (Eccl. 1:1), although one translation claims the work is autobiographical. Again, as in Proverbs 31, we have royal Elitelore. And here, to some extent, there is self-justifying Elitelore.⁶ Also "Elitelore" tends to deal with ideas rather than easily observed actions."⁷ Hence, Ecclesiastes seeks to explain its writer's life and beliefs. He has tried it all, and all life is futile, even when you obey rulers (ch. 8). Only God-fearing and God-obeying life has meaning (ch.12). All else is futile. Thus, like a good Elitelore interview,⁸ Ecclesiastes reviews its author's life and beliefs and seeks to justify his existence.

Curiously, there is much more Elitelore in the Wisdom books of the Hebrew Bible, than there is folklore, so little in deed, that the subject has been omitted in the *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia* (ISBE), 1979, and Bible dictionaries. One needs to look under "Fables" to find mention of folklore.

We see some folklore in Prov. 6:6-8, the parable of the ant; and returning to Prov. 30:24-31, Lemuel speaks also of ants and coney/badgers. And then there are locusts, lions, and roosters, who exhibit power and stateliness. And the lizard enjoys royal trappings by living in the palace. Being a farmer, we expect Agur to think of animals. Thus, Agur is a Biblical Aesop.

Turning to the New Testament, we see a similar juxtaposition of Elitelore and folklore, urban and rural. In chapters three (urban) and four (rural) of the Gospel According to St. John,⁹ there are two of several of John's encounter scenes, that of Jesus and Nicodemus (ch. 3) and that of Jesus and a Samaritaness (ch. 4). They are both alike and different.

In chapter 3, a Pharisee¹⁰ member of the Jewish ruling council (Sanhedrin) initiates conversation with Jesus. Indeed, he has specifically come to inquire about Jesus' lore. As a member of the Sanhedrin, he is an elite, part of the religious and ruling establishment. Indeed, it is likely that he, Nicodemus, was sent by the Council and he has not come alone. As an elite, Nicodemus attempts to influence society.¹¹ We see this in his encounter with Jesus and his attempt to prevent a confrontation between the Sanhedrin and the crowds following Jesus (John 7:50).

Therefore, chapter three of John's Gospel gives an encounter between two elites; Nicodemus, the strategic elite and Jesus the non-strategic elite, whom the Sanhedrin fears. Both are concerned with controlling values.¹² But of the two, Nicodemus is both a religious and political elite; Jesus only a religious elite.

Wilkie, *Elitelore*, p. 58, says, "The leader will direct the interviews to matters which concern him or her. Ideally, however, the interview should be the product of both leader and scholar." That is not the case in this encounter. While Nicodemus is seen initiating the dialogue, he quickly loses control of it. Indeed, Jesus' Elitelore dominates the meeting, all the while acknowledging Nicodemus' elite status (v. 10). Indeed, we learn nothing of Nicodemus' Elitelore! And much of Jesus'. What we do learn of Nicodemus is that he is a literalist. Jesus' Elitelore is packed in metaphor: one must be born again of God's Spirit, Jesus is Light to dispel Darkness, and apocalyptic (lv. 3,12); and centers on Jesus (w. 15-17).

In John chapter 4, we see an encounter between Jesus' Elitelore and Samaritan folk lore.¹³ It, too, is a lesson in metaphor and symbolism. Here Jesus again takes the lead by asking for water. And because this is a Jewish-Samaritan encounter, we see more tension.

The contrast with the meeting with Nicodemus could not be sharper, because unlike Nicodemus, the woman goes from literal to metaphor to enlightenment (vv. 25-26,32). She then opens the town to Jesus and Jesus' lore.¹⁴

Over the years, James Wilkie and his wife, Edna Monzón Wilkie, have conducted numerous Elitelore interviews with Latin American know their stories. Unfortunately for us, Nicodemus never told his story. Indeed, in John's Gospel, we know more of the woman's story than Nicodemus'. However, that is not the case with Saul of Tarsus, better known to history as the Apostle Paul or St. Paul because he gives his story several times in Luke's second letter, the Book of Acts, and brief auto-biography in his letter to Christians in Galatia, modern-day Turkey,¹⁵ (Gal. 1-2). He also spells out his Elitelore in his letter to Roman Christians. So, using those, let us see what his Elitelore is.

Thanks to Luke, we know a lot about Paul. We know he may have been a junior member of the Sanhedrin and witnessed and approved of the lynching of a Jesus disciple called Stephen. He sought to stamp out the Jesus messianic movement. Yet, later he established a number of Jesus messianic churches among non-Jews, which some of his Jewish, co-religionists did not approve of because he did not require that they be circumcised in order to be messianists. Yet he never left Judaism. He was controversial and more than once had a run-in with the law. He also had a major confrontation with Peter and James who headed the Jerusalem church. Wanting to extend his evangelism to Spain, we

do not know if he got there because Luke's letter ends with him under house arrest in Rome, having appealed his case to Caesar. Acts also gives us the context of Paul's life and work.

But is Paul an elite? Yes and no. If a member of the Sanhedrin, yes. But once outside of Israel, being a member of the Sanhedrin meant little in terms of authority. But once he became a messianist, a follower of Jesus and began to establish congregations of Jesus followers, he was again an elite in the Jesus movement. But even then, he often had problems being accepted as an elite, as his Corinthian correspondence and Galatians show. (In Christian circles, elites were termed "apostles".)

Paul was a Hellenistic diasporan Jew born in Tarsus, Asia Minor (modern Turkey); and being Hellenistic made him somewhat suspect to Judean Jews, even though he was well-educated in Jewish law and Scriptures (Old Testament) and Jerusalem-educated. He was multilingual and educated in Graeco-Roman literature.¹⁶

At Athens, we first learn something of Paul's Elitelore in Acts 17, when he addressed civic officials. There we learn that God does not need a house or anything because God is Creator. We also learn that humanity is one; and that God situates ethnic groups ("nations," Greek *ethne*) geographically and temporarily so that they might seek God (cf. Gen. 10). That is, God controls history.

Luke gives us more of Paul's Elitelore in Acts 22, where he addresses a hostile crowd in Hebrew,¹⁷ which the arresting Roman soldiers do not understand. So, they are at a loss to understand why the situation deteriorates due to what Paul says.

What he says is that he was born in Tarsus, reared and educated in rabbincs in Jerusalem and had once sought to imprison Jesus messianists until Christ personally arrested him and commissioned him to evangelize non-Jews, at which point the crowd wants to lynch him and the soldiers step in only to learn he is a native-born Roman citizen. Similar situations occurred frequently in Paul's life. Thus, for Paul non-Jews could become messianists also.

That is, in Paul's Elitelore, Messiah was not a Jewish Messiah only, an idea some rejected. That he would not circumcise his converts was also irritating to some Jews. (Acts 6:9 records, and Black Sea archaeology shows, that there were synagogues of non-Jewish former slaves and Jesus spoke of Jewish missionaries [Matt.23:15].)

In Acts 23, Paul continues his story by focusing on Jesus' resurrection, which divides his opponents between Pharisees, who believed in the resurrection, and Sadducees, who did not - which resulted in resumed violence (23:6-10)! That led to an appearance before Governor Felix at Caesarea, which resulted in another hearing before a new governor, Festus, two years later (Acts 25), when Paul appealed to Caesar. In chapter 25, we see that Paul believed that the Old Testament prophets predicted Messiah (25:6-7); and that Jesus fulfilled those prophecies. Thus, to this point, we really have little of Paul's Elitelore, but what we do have was controversial.

On his way to Damascus to arrest Christians, he was arrested by the resurrected Jesus, who claimed that Paul was persecuting him. Did this lead Paul to the idea that Christ is the head of the church, a doctrine he develops in his Corinthian correspondence? This, too, is a part of Paul's Elitelore. That encounter eventually turned the persecutor into an evangelist of Jesus, an evangelist to Jews first and then to non-Jews (Gentiles) (cf. Paul's letter to the Romans 1:15; 2:9,10). Again, this underscores

Paul's belief that God's Messiah is for everybody; that He is not just a Jewish Messiah. Yet Paul did not cease being Jewish ("a Hebrew of Hebrews," Philippians 3:5).¹⁸

When we turn to Paul's letter to the Galatians, we learn more Elitelore, and that in his own words, not filtered through a Lucan lens. In Galatians, we learn that he opposed Peter and James over their legalism, despite their agreement in Acts 15, that Gentiles did not need to be circumcised in order to follow Jesus. Peter and James saw non-Jewish messianists as second-class messianists, almost a caste. And like in South Asian castes, they would not eat with them.

Paul favored ethnic unity, not segregation (Gal.2:11-13). He also refused to circumcise his converts, believing that they did not have to lose their cultural identity, they did not have to cease being non-Jews to be followers of Jesus. (Today, the issue is whether Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, Buddhists, have to cease being culturally Jews, Muslims, Hindus, Sikhs, or Buddhists in order to follow Jesus. Paul would say they did not.) They did not need to forsake their cultural identity because Jesus is for everyone. His Elitelore advocated open-set, not bounded-set thinking. Paul thought out of the box. He rejected ethnic bias (cf. Acts 10:34).

In Paul's letter to Christians at Rome, we have a full summary of his beliefs as he seeks to gain Roman Christian support for his planned evangelism of the Western, Latin half of the Roman Empire, all the way to Spain (15:24-28). In Romans, Paul sees himself as a pioneer evangelist, going where no evangelist has gone before. He sees himself as an apostle to non-Jews, yet always strategically beginning his evangelism in the synagogue because there he will find non-Jews who worship Israel's God or who have converted to Judaism (i.e., have been circumcised). These can serve as a bridge into the non-Jewish Graeco-Roman community. Thus, "to the Jew first and then the Gentile" (1 :15, 2:9,10).

He also expresses an indebtedness to Jews for Jesus Messiah (Christ). Yet, the general lack of response by Jews to his message caused Paul pain. Still, he expects that eventually Jews will come to be Jesus messianists.

Finally, for all of Paul's encounters with the law, it would be surprising if he did not have some legal lore. He does. He believes that God puts rulers in office for an orderly society and that we should obey the law and pay taxes and respect authority (Rom. 13:1-7).

In conclusion, we have seen in this brief summary that there is Elitelore in the Bible. It is seen in Proverbs and Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament; and in Acts and Galatians in the New Testament. We have not discussed Jesus' teachings, his Elitelore. We have also seen that Elitelore is not particularly developed in the Bible, although the letters of St. Paul can be mined for his Elitelore. Clearly Bible encyclopedias and dictionaries should consider Elitelore a proper topic for inclusion.

Endnotes

1. Given this information about Agur being a warrior, should "hired hand" be understood as a mercenary?

2. James W. Wilkie, *Elitelore* UCLA Latin American Center, Latin American Studies, Vol. 22, Los Angeles: University of California Press, 1973, p. 16, herein after cited as Wilkie, *Elitelore*; with reference to Suzanne Keller, "Elites," in *International Encyclopedia of the Social Sciences*, 1965, Vol. 5, p. 26.

3. Wilkie, *Elitelore*, p. 15, quoting Vilfredo Pareto and Suzanne Keller.

4. LORD refers to YHWH ("Jehovah") in the Hebrew text.

5. Ecclesiastes is the title in the Greek (LXX) title. It means one who assembles gathering (cf. *ekklesia*, Greek for church and hence in some English translations "preacher").

6. Wilkie, *Elitelore*, p. 23

7. *Ibid.*

8. Wilkie, *Elitelore*, Part VI.

9. John's Gospel was once thought to be very Greek; but thanks to the Dead Sea Scrolls, it is now seen to be very Jewish. It was the last Gospel written and is very different from the other three (synoptic) Gospels.

10. Pharisees were the largest Jewish denomination, but had less authority on the council than did the Sadducees. Like Jesus and Paul, they believed in the resurrection, which the Sadducees did not believe in. Jesus was often critical of them. They were the majority denomination. See Marcel Simon, *Jewish Sects at the Time of Jesus*, chapter 2. St. Paul was a Pharisee.

11. Wilkie, *Elitelore*, p. 16.

12. *Ibid.*

13. Samaritans were outcasts in Jewish society (4:9) who limited their Scripture to the first five books of the Old Testament and had their own temple, which had recently been destroyed before this encounter. They still exist in Israel.

14. Some claim Jesus never claimed to be Messiah ("Christ"). But in John 4:26, Jesus admits to being Messiah, the equivalent to the Samaritan Taheb, the Samaritan "prophet like Moses". *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible* wonders if Islam has influenced modern Samaritanism.

15. For our purpose, it is irrelevant if Galatians is written to ethnic Gauls or to Romans living in the province of Galatia.

16. Paul refers to over a dozen Classical sources in his letters. For whatever reason, neither Luke nor the other Gospel writers, nor Paul, are in any who's who of the classical world, despite the volume, quality, and significance of their writings. This is lamentable because in a post-modern world we cannot assume post-moderns are familiar with them. Paul's letters rank alongside Cicero's; and Luke's Acts alongside Suetonius and Luke's Gospel ranks alongside Plutarch's *Lives*. Indeed, in many ways Jesus and Socrates are parallel lives. Yet the early church fathers are mentioned in some "Who's Who" of antiquity.

17. Although since 1879 most Bible translations read "Aramaic," the Greek text of Acts 21:40 and 22:2, read "Hebrew" and there are no alternate MS readings saying "Aramaic." The Dead Sea Scrolls show that Hebrew was spoken at the time of Paul. See Young's concordance for details. The

soldiers may have spoken Greek, or Paul may have spoken Latin, the language of the army. All of his correspondence, however, is in Greek, the majority language in the eastern empire and in Rome itself at the time. That he wanted to evangelize into Spain also suggests Paul spoke Latin, the primary language of the western empire. Educated Roman citizens were bilingual, speaking Greek and Latin. Thus, Paul likely spoke, Greek, Latin, Aramaic, and Hebrew.

18. The church at Philippi was also faced with this issue. Paul's use of "Hebrew of the Hebrews" reinforces the fact that that Philippian church was primarily non-Jewish, because "Hebrew" was not used in discourse to describe themselves, except when speaking to the "Other," to non-Jews (e.g., Jonah 1:9, in speaking to Gentile sailors, most likely Phoenicians).

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James W. Wilkie, Edna Monzón Wilkie, and María Herrera-Sobek, "[Elitelore and Folklore: Theory and a Test Case in 'One Hundred Years of Solitude,'](#)" *Journal of Latin American Lore* 4:2 (1978), pp. 183-223. Also in Chapter 5 of http://elitelore.org/Capitulos/cap5_elitelore.pdf .

[Frente a la Revolución Mexicana: 17 Protagonistas de la Etapa Constructiva \(4 volúmenes\) Historia Oral](#), por James W. Wilkie y Edna Monzón Wilkie, who focus on Elitelore of the 17.

An alternative link is http://elitelore.org/Oral_History_Book_Series.html

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