Wisdom, Patience, and Nonviolence

The Wisdom books of the Bible frequently contrast brute violence with wise peacefulness and resourceful cleverness. The book of Proverbs opens with warnings to a young man about those who would "entice" you to do violence for the sake of the financial rewards:

My child, if sinners entice you, do not consent
If they say, "Come with us, let us lie in wait for blood;
let us wantonly ambush the innocent; like Sheol let us swallow them alive
and whole, like those who go down to the Pit
We shall find all kinds of costly things; we shall fill our houses with booty
Throw in your lot among us; we will all have one purse"

My child, do not walk in their way; keep your foot from their paths
Proverbs 1:8-12

In contrast to the warrior or the bandit, the ideal Hebrew "Wise One" is calm and self-restrained, and there appears to arise an ethic of nonviolence in Wisdom Literature.

Prov. 16:7 "When the ways of people please the Lord, He causes even their enemies to be at peace with them",

Proverbs 16:32:
"One who is slow to anger is better than the mighty and one whose temper is controlled than one who captures a city".

Proverbs 17:9
"One who forgives an affront fosters friendship, but one who dwells on disputes will alienate a friend"
Prov. 17:13
"Evil will not depart from the house of one who returns evil for good", and Proverbs

Proverbs 17:14:
"The beginning of strife is like letting out water, so stop before the quarrel breaks out"

Proverbs 17:27
"One who spares words is knowledgeable, one who is cool in spirit has understanding".

Prov. 18:10-11
"The name of the Lord is a strong tower, the righteous run into it and are safe, The wealth of the rich is their strong city, in their imagination it is like a high wall".

Proverbs 21:22:
"One wise person went up against a city of warriors and brought down the stronghold in which they trusted".

Proverbs 24:5-6:
Wise warriors are mightier than strong ones
and those who have knowledge than those who have strength
For by wise guidance you can wage your war
and in abundance of counselors there is victory

Prov. 25:15:
"With patience a ruler may be persuaded and a soft tongue can break bones".

Proverbs 25:28:
"Like a city breached, without walls, is one who lacks self-control"
Book of Ecclesiastes, 9:13-18a:

I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. There was a little city with few people in it. A great king came against it and besieged it, building great siege works against it. Now there was found in it a poor wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man. So I said, "Wisdom is better than might; yet the poor man's wisdom is despised, and his words are not heeded". The quiet words of the wise are more to be heeded than the shouting of a ruler among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war...

DANIEL

Daniel embodies precisely this ethic of the "Wise One". Take, for example, the warning to be careful of the King’s anger:

Proverbs 20:2 The dread anger of a king is like the growling of a lion; anyone who provokes him to anger forfeits life itself.

Further, Daniel 1 may draw on advice such as the following:

Proverbs 23:3 Do not desire the ruler’s delicacies, for they are deceptive food.

Finally, Daniel’s persona seems to embody the following:

Proverbs 25:5 take away the wicked from the presence of the king, and his throne will be established in righteousness. 6 Do not put yourself forward in the king's presence or stand in the place of the great; 7 for it is better to be told, "Come up here," than to be put lower in the presence of a noble…
Instruction of Amenemope (also called *Instructions of Amenemopet, Wisdom of Amenemopet*) is a literary work composed in Ancient Egypt, most likely during the Ramesside Period (ca. 1300–1075 BC); it contains thirty chapters of advice for successful living, ostensibly written by the scribe Amenemope son of Kanakht as a legacy for his son. A characteristic product of the New Kingdom “Age of Personal Piety”, the work reflects on the inner qualities, attitudes, and behaviors required for a happy life in the face of increasingly difficult social and economic circumstances. It is widely regarded as one of the masterpieces of ancient Near Eastern wisdom literature and has been of particular interest to modern scholars because of its relationship to the biblical Book of Proverbs.

A number of passages in the *Instruction of Amenemope* have been compared with the Book of Proverbs, including:

(Proverbs 22:17-18): “Incline thine ear, and hear the words of the wise, And apply thine heart to my doctrine; For it is pleasant if thou keep them in thy belly, that they may be established together upon thy lips”

(Amenemope, ch. 1): “Give thine ear, and hear what I say, And apply thine heart to apprehend; It is good for thee to place them in thine heart, let them rest in the casket of thy belly; That they may act as a peg upon thy tongue”

(Proverbs 22:22): “Rob not the poor, for he is poor, neither oppress (or crush) the lowly in the gate.”

(Amenemope, ch. 2): “Beware of robbing the poor, and oppressing the afflicted.”

(Proverbs 22:24-5): “Do not befriend the man of anger, Nor go with a wrathful man, Lest thou learn his ways and take a snare for thy soul.”

(Amenemope, ch. 10): “Associate not with a passionate man, Nor approach him for conversation; Leap not to cleave to such an one; That terror carry thee not away.”

(Proverbs 22:29): “[If you] You see a man quick in his work, before kings will he stand, before cravens, he will not stand.”

(Amenemope, ch. 30): “A scribe who is skillful in his business findeth worthy to be a courtier.”
(Proverbs 23:1): "When thou sittest to eat with a ruler, Consider diligently what is before thee; And put a knife to thy throat, If thou be a man given to appetite. Be not desirous of his dainties, for they are breads of falsehood."

(Amenemope, ch. 23): "Eat not bread in the presence of a ruler, And lunge not forward(?) with thy mouth before a governor(?). When thou art replenished with that to which thou has no right, It is only a delight to thy spittle. Look upon the dish that is before thee, And let that (alone) supply thy need."

(Proverbs 23:4-5): "Toil not to become rich, And cease from dishonest gain; For wealth maketh to itself wings, Like an eagle that fliest heavenwards."

(Amenemope, ch. 7): "Toil not after riches; If stolen goods are brought to thee, they remain not over night with thee. They have made themselves wings like geese. And have flown into the heavens."

(Proverbs 14:7): "Speak not in the hearing of a fool, for he will despise the wisdom of thy words."

(Amenemope, ch. 21): "Empty not thine inmost soul to everyone, nor spoil (thereby) thine influence."

(Proverbs 23:10): "Remove not the widows landmark; And enter not into the field of the fatherless."

(Amenemope, ch. 6): "Remove not the landmark from the bounds of the field...and violate not the widows boundary."

(Proverbs 23:12): "Apply thine heart unto instruction and thine ears to the words of knowledge."

(Amenemope, ch. 1): "Give thine ears, hear the words that are said, give thine heart to interpret them."
COMPARISONS WITH GOSPELS

Don't store up on earth...

Sirach 11:18-19  
18 One becomes rich through diligence and self-denial, and the reward allotted to him is this: 18 when he says, ‘I have found rest, and now I shall feast on my goods!’ he does not know how long it will be until he leaves them to others and dies.

Luke 12:15-21  
16 And he said to them, ‘Take care! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of possessions.’ 17 Then he told them a parable: ‘The land of a rich man produced abundantly. 17 And he thought to himself, ‘What should I do, for I have no place to store my crops?’ 18 Then he said, ‘I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build larger ones, and there I will store all my grain and my goods.’ 19 And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have ample goods laid up for many years; relax, eat, drink, be merry.’ 20 But God said to him, ‘You fool! This very night your life is being demanded of you. And the things you have prepared, whose will they be?’ 21 So it is with those who store up treasures for themselves but are not rich toward God.”

No oaths

Matthew 5:34  
34 But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God,

Sirach 23:9  
9 Do not accustom your mouth to oaths, nor habitually utter the name of the Holy One;

The Greatest will serve others

Sirach 32:1-2  
1 If they make you master of the feast, do not exalt yourself; be among them as one of their number. Take care of them first and then sit down, 2 when you have fulfilled all your duties, take your place, so that you may be merry along with them and receive a wreath for your excellent leadership.

25 But he said to them, ‘The kings of the Gentiles lord it over them; and those in authority over them are called benefactors. 26 But not so with you; rather the greatest among you must become like the youngest, and the leader like one who serves. 27 For who is greater, the one who is at the table or the one who serves? Is it not the one at the table? But I am among you as one who serves.

The YOKE

Sirach 6:19-20  
19 Come to her like one who plows and sows, and wait for her good harvest. For when you cultivate her you will till but little, and soon you will eat of her produce. 20 She seems very harsh to the undisciplined; fools cannot remain with her.

Matthew 11:28-30  
28 "Come to me, all you that are weary and are carrying heavy burdens, and I will give you rest. 29 Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. 30 For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light.”
The Female Wisdom

Proverbs 8:22-34 22 The LORD created me at the beginning of his work, the first of his acts of long ago. 23 Ages ago I was set up, at the first, before the beginning of the earth. 24 When there were no depths I was brought forth, when there were no springs abounding with water. 25 Before the mountains had been shaped, before the hills, I was brought forth— 26 when he had not yet made earth and fields, or the world's first bits of soil. 27 When he established the heavens, I was there, when he drew a circle on the face of the deep, 28 when he made firm the skies above, when he established the fountains of the deep, 29 when he assigned to the sea its limit, so that the waters might not transgress his command, when he marked out the foundations of the earth, 30 then I was beside him, like a master worker, and I was daily his delight, rejoicing before him always. 31 rejoicing in his inhabited world and delighting in the human race. 32 And now, my children, listen to me: happy are those who keep my ways. 33 Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it. 34 Happy is the one who listens to me, watching daily at my gates, waiting beside my doors.

Wisdom 6:22 22 I will tell you what wisdom is and how she came to be, and I will hide no secrets from you, but I will trace her course from the beginning of creation, and make knowledge of her clear, and I will not pass by the truth;

Wisdom 9:1-4 NRS Wisdom 9:1 "O God of my ancestors and Lord of mercy, who have made all things by your word, 2 and by your wisdom have formed humankind to have dominion over the creatures you have made, 3 and rule the world in holiness and righteousness, and pronounce judgment in uprightness of soul, 4 give me the wisdom that sits by your throne, and do not reject me from among your servants.

Strach 24:1, 9 Wisdom praises herself, and tells of her glory in the midst of her people.

Matthew 23:37-39 37 “Jerusalem, Jerusalem, the city that kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to it! How often have I desired to gather your children together as a hen gathers her brood under her wings, and you were not willing! 38 See, your house is left to you, desolate. 39 For I tell you, you will not see me again until you say, ‘Blessed is the one who comes in the name of the Lord.’"

John 1:1-10 John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things came into being through him, and without him no one thing came into being. What has come into being 4 in him was life, and the life was the light of all people. 5 The light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not overcome it. 6 There was a man sent from God, whose name was John. 7 He came as a witness to testify to the light, so that all might believe through him. 8 He himself was not the light, but he came to testify to the light. 9 The true light, which enlightens everyone, was coming into the world. 10 He was in the world, and the world came into being through him; yet the world did not know him.