

CHAPTER SIX:
WISDOM
LITERATURE



OT Interview

For more on Wisdom Literature as a Biblical genre, see the interview with Prof. William Carr on page???

The Book of Psalms

If you took five hymnals, an old German hymnal, a worship book from the 1950's, the latest liturgical offerings, a collection of contemporary praise songs, and a compendium of anonymous spirituals and put them all in one volume, you would have an amalgamation of worship texts from across time similar to the collection we know as the book of Psalms.

Though David is the primary author, there are also psalms written by Moses, by musicians like Asaph or the sons of Korah, and even a series of anonymous hits. All told, the Psalter is a collection of 150 songs divided into 5 major books.

These are sacred texts used in the worship life of God's people. There is a wide variety of themes and settings. Some psalms are historical, retelling the story in song to help teach future generations. Some psalms are laments, crying out to God in times of sorrow or distress. Some psalms are special kinds of poems, called acrostics, where each line of the psalm begins with a different Hebrew letter, all in alphabetical order.

There is a wide variety of themes and settings, but the most familiar refrain is this: His mercy endures forever. Yahweh's mercy, his steadfast love, his covenant faithfulness, is at the heart of the Psalms. The LORD is true to his promises, and therefore we give Him praise. In fact, the most common type of song in this collection is the song of thanksgiving and praise.



Type Alert

When Jesus opened the minds of His disciples to the OT Scriptures after His resurrection, He said, *"These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled"* (Luke 24:44). In other words, although the Psalms are about Yahweh and His people and David and Solomon, they are also about Jesus.

When David is surrounded by enemies and calls out to the God who in whom he trusts, he becomes a type of Christ: *"a company of evildoers encircles me; they have pierced my hands and feet—I can count all my bones—they stare and gloat over me; they divide my garments among them and for my clothing they cast lots"* (Psalm 22:16-18).

When Solomon, the son of David, takes his royal throne, he becomes a type of Christ: *"I will tell of the decree: The LORD said to me, 'You are my Son; today I have begotten you. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession'"* (Psalm 2:7-8).

In fact, no OT book is quoted more often in the New Testament than the book of Psalms. The worship texts of the people of God prepare the way for God coming in the flesh to save His people.



OT Interview

For more on the two basic themes in the book of Psalms and how they relate to Jesus, see the interview with Dr. Tim Saleska on page???

Proverbs

A proverb is simply a pithy saying; something short and sweet that carries a word of wisdom. But proverbs are more than catch phrases, they inform a particular way of life. As a part of the American culture, we have some pithy sayings that most people know. Some came from Ben Franklin's *Poor Richard's Almanac*, some from elsewhere. Can you complete the following?

A penny saved is . . .
The early bird gets . . .
God helps those who . . .

If you were raised in an American culture, chances are you could complete those sayings. But they are more than just memorable phrases, they also help shape how our culture understands appropriate ways of life. "If it feels good, do it," is a way of life. "It's a free country!" is a statement about what we find acceptable. In a world of sound bites and slogan marketing, people live by proverbs. The question remains, what proverbs will you live by?

In the Bible, a proverb is a general truth arrived at from godly observation that can direct future action when considered in the fear of the Lord. Some wise and godly people, most notably, Solomon, took a look around and said, "Hey! This is kind of how the world works!"

Proverbs, even Biblical proverbs are not meant to cover 100% of the situations in life. They just describe what usually is happening under normal circumstances. In fact, proverbs are not only wise sayings, they require wisdom to apply them to the right situation. Sometimes proverbs even seem to contradict each other. Can you fill in the blanks of these famous (and non-biblical) proverbs?

"He who hesitates . . ." BUT "Look before . . ."
"Absence makes the heart . . ." BUT "Out of sight, . . ."

Obviously, these proverbs can't be universally true. In fact, proverbs are never intended to be universally true! That's why it takes wisdom to apply them to the right situation! "He who hesitates is lost," doesn't always apply. Sometimes you have to "look before you leap."

For the Biblical authors, the wisdom it takes to apply these wise sayings to real life is centered in the relationship with Yahweh. In fact, "*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.*"

Proverbs 9:10

OT Interview

For more on how proverbs work and how they can be used in preaching or Bible study, see the OT interview with Prof. David Schmitt on page???



Ecclesiastes

The word "Ecclesiastes," means, "One who speaks to an assembly." The Teacher, in this case, is identified as King Solomon. Getting Solomon's perspective right is crucial to understanding the book: Solomon, in his wisdom, is considering "everything under the sun." *Under* the sun, as in, not with God in view. At the end of a long and prosperous life, you can look back at everything you did, and from the perspective of everything *under* the sun, nothing has lasting meaning. Only in a relationship with God does life make any sense. That's why Solomon can write: "*Meaningless! Meaningless!*" says the Teacher. "*Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!*" From the viewpoint of everything under the sun, that is, apart from God, there is nothing that has ultimate meaning.

Ecclesiastes 1:2
(NIV)

That's why Solomon's conclusion is that only a relationship with your Creator makes life make sense: "*The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*" Much of Ecclesiastes sounds like a bitter old man or a nihilist on a rant; but without God in your life, life is bitter. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless!" Nietzsche had nothing on Solomon!

Ecclesiastes 12:13



Old Testament Jukebox

The Byrds had a hit in the sixties: “Turn, Turn, Turn.” The lyrics actually came from Ecclesiastes 3:1-2: “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die . . .”

Song of Solomon

“Solomon’s Greatest Song” (the title could mean the song is by or about Solomon) isn’t the only R-rated book in the Old Testament. But it is the most shockingly explicit when it comes to sex. Not only are the Lover and her Beloved getting it on, they are waxing poetic about each other’s body parts. What in the world is this book doing in the Bible, for crying out loud?

The first thing we need to note is that sexuality is a gift of God, a God who created the physical world and it was very good. This celebration of love, including sexual love, between a groom and his new bride rejoices in the good gifts of a good God in a God-pleasing marriage relationship. On one level, the Song of Solomon can certainly be read as a yippee for whoopee.

But as we consider the whole Scriptural witness, we find that Yahweh’s love for His people can be expressed in terms of the love of a groom for his new bride. The words they spoke at Sinai were like wedding vows, “I will be your God and you will be my people, for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health.” That’s why God can complain His people have committed spiritual adultery when they run off to find comfort and joy in the arms of another “god.”

The New Testament book of Revelation picks up on that imagery when it refers to the redeemed people of God as “the Bride, the wife of the Lamb.” John the Revelator writes, “*And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband.*”

The way God wants us to see Him is like a bride looking down the aisle on her wedding day and seeing her Groom. There He is! The One I love! The One who loves me! With the bride in the Song of Solomon, the Church says, “*I am my beloved’s and his desire is for me!*”

And He looks at us, the ones washed in the blood of the Lamb, and sees His bride, dressed in white, anxious to walk down that aisle and run into His arms. And when your Husband can conquer death, “as long as you both shall live” is an awful long time.

Revelation 21:9, 2

S. o. S. 7:10



OT Interview

For more on the way the Church has interpreted the Song of Songs throughout history see the OT Interview with Dr. Paul Robinson on page???

The Prologue

Job 1-2

Job and Friends

3-38

YHWH answers

38-41

The Epilogue

Job 42

Job

Job is set in the time of Abraham, outside (and even before the existence of) the nation God called to be His own. Still, Job has a faith in Yahweh that will not be shaken, even in the face of terrible adversity.

If Proverbs covers what life is like 95% of the time, Job deals with the other 5%. Proverbs says, if you are upright and keep your nose clean, generally good things happen to you. Job asks the question, if you’re keeping your nose clean and still getting walloped, what’s going on? Why do bad things happen to good people, even good, God-fearing people?

In the prologue, Job, a God-fearing man, loses everything, health, wealth, and offspring to natural disasters. We know from the opening dialogue in heaven that Satan has been given

permission to try and shake Job's relationship with Yahweh. But Job is wondering what the heck is going on.

Different character in this dramatic novella display different attitudes toward material possessions and how they reflect on our relationship with God. After the LORD points out His the faithfulness of His servant Job, Satan says, "*Does Job fear God for no reason?*" I mean, come on God, this guy is living on easy street! Of course he loves You! In Satan's theology, God is a means to an end. Your relationship with God is established and sustained through material blessings.

Job 1:9

After Job has lost everything, his loving wife retorts, "*Do you still hold fast to your integrity? Curse God and die!*" In other words, if you're not going to get healthy, wealthy, and wise from your religion, ditch your religion. If this God doesn't work for you, go shopping for another. Again, material possessions (or their loss) has become the litmus test for Job's relationship with Yahweh.

Job 2:9

Bankrupt and childless, Job sits in the ashes scraping his open sores. That's when his friends come to cheer him up. There ensues a long debate between Job and his friends. His friends insist that Job must repent and then he will be restored. In their minds, Job must have done something really bad and is trying to hide it. Isn't it obvious? When bad things happen to you, it is always a punishment for some particular sin. Once again, the loss of material possessions has become a direct indication of Job's relationship with God.

But Job says, No! My material wealth with its ups and downs is not a reliable barometer of my relationship with God! It's not that Job thinks he's sinless, it's just that he knows there is no gross sin he is trying to hide that has somehow earned God's wrath. Job says, I'm innocent, but I'm still suffering!

Job's focus is not on his health and wealth, unlike all the other characters trying to cheer him up. In fact, Job doesn't even bring up his loss of money or family. What Job has lost, what Job is dying to get back, is a sense of relationship with God. Here Job is experiencing what seems to be punishment and wrath and Job wants his relationship with God back!

You see it in how Job holds on to God even in the face of what looks like God's verdict of judgment: "*Even now, behold, my witness is in heaven, and he who testifies for me is on high.*" I may be experiencing a guilty verdict, but I am confident in my defense attorney! God the advocate can overcome God the judge.

Job 16:19

In this confidence in the face of contrary evidence, Job does not limit his hope to his present circumstances, or even to this life. Job is not at all sure that his disease won't end in death; but he is sure that not even death can get in the way of his relationship with the Lord. From this OT tale of tragedy and trial, we get one of our greatest Easter hymns. In faith, Job declares, "*For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God!*"

Job 19:25-26

For Job, God is not the means to an end; God is the end itself. What he wants is a restoration of his relationship with God. And after that relationship has been restored, God also graciously restores what he allowed Satan to take away. Job ends the story healthier, wealthier, and wiser than he started. But most importantly, he was strengthened in his confidence in his relationship with the living God. "*Behold, we consider those blessed who remained steadfast. You have heard of the steadfastness of Job, and you have seen the purpose of the Lord, how the Lord is compassionate and merciful.*"

James 5:11

OT Interview

Job asks, why do the innocent suffer? For more on God's answer and what it means for us, see the OT interview with Dr. Joel Okamoto on page???





Fire Starters

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Web Extensions

For updates and links to the following resources, visit www.csl.edu/ ???.

To hear some psalms chanted in Hebrew, go to ???

To hear some psalms set to contemporary music, check out ???

To hear a chapel sermon preached on a proverb, go to ???

To listen to the Byrds, “Turn, Turn, Turn” visit ???

For a literalist rendering of the imagery in Song of Solomon, see
http://www.acts17-11.com/snip_song.html

To see artwork that depicts the story of Job, browse ???



Test Takers

Know anything underlined in the chapter and the following:

Be able to recognize the following Psalms based on their basic themes or content:

1, 8, 22, 23, 46, 90, 119, 150.

Make sure you can distinguish between the basic style/content of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. You should be able to spot a proverb. These pithy sayings have a balance, a certain ring to them: “A friend loves at all times, a brother is born for adversity.”

Ecclesiastes also has a rather unique tone; except for the Byrds song, most quotes from Ecclesiastes sound like a cross between Eyor and Nietzsche: “So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.”

Song of Solomon should be the most recognizable of all OT books. Where else can you get a line like, “Your navel is a rounded goblet that never lacks blended wine?”



For Further Reading

Day 1: Psalm 1, 8, 22, 46, 90, 119

Day 2: 1 Kings 1-3; at 1:40 read Psalm 2

Day 3: 1 Kings 4:20-34, Proverbs 1-2, 9-12

Day 4: 1 Kings 6-9, Song of Solomon 1-2, 7-8

Day 5: 1 Kings 10-11:25, Ecclesiastes 1-3, 12

Day 6: Job 1-3, 41-42