

The Wisdom Literature

Lesson #1

Introduction

I. **General Observations**

A. Job.

1. The issues raised in the book are among the most profound and difficult of human existence. The uniqueness of Job derives from its depth and thoroughness in dealing with the relationship of human suffering to divine justice. Numerous documents, especially from ancient Mesopotamia and Egypt, demonstrate that this type of wisdom writing was well-established in the Old Testament world; but none addresses these subjects so eloquently as this Old Testament book.
2. The book of Job cannot be forced into any single literary classification. It is generally called wisdom literature, but that describes more the subject matter than the form. The book is largely poetry of various genres (lament, wisdom, proverbs, hymns, etc.), and in places it is more difficult to understand than just about any other part of the Old Testament.

B. Psalms.

1. Of all the Old Testament books, none has meant more to modern Christians than the Psalms. The Psalms captures the essence of what it means to walk by faith with God. They display the outpouring of the human heart to God through praise and prayer. It is a simple collection of the sighings and singings of men; an unmatched treasury of devotion, comfort, sympathy, and gladdening reassurance -- all beautifully expressed in Hebrew poetry. Over the years so many Christians have felt the usefulness of this poetic book so necessary that many of our printed editions of the New Testament also contain the Psalms. Psalms is the emotional book of the Bible. While other scriptures provide a basis for our faith and action, Psalms provides for our emotions and feelings. People identify with the Psalms because they express the sentiments of real people. Here the suffering and sorrowful find a fellowship of sympathy. Here the persecuted and forsaken find reassurance in their time of need. Here the contrite, penitent sinner finds comfort for a broken heart. Psalms is a people book; but not just any people -- Psalms is the book of God's people timelessly expressing their deepest feelings toward their heavenly Father.
2. The English designation "psalm" comes from the Latin *psalmi* and the Greek *psalmoi* ("songs sung with musical accompaniment"), a

translation of the Hebrew *mizmor* ("a song accompanied by musical instruments"). The Hebrew title (*tehillim*) signifies the contents of the book: "songs of praise."

3. The book of Psalms is first and foremost God's word to His people. We hear the voice of God in each individual psalm. Its purpose is the same as that of any part of scripture; the Psalms are "*profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: That the man of God may be perfect, thoroughly furnished unto all good works*" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Nevertheless, the Psalms are unique. In them not only does God speak to His people, but the people speak to God. By applying these ancient psalms to our time, the life of faith, hope, and love of the individual Christian, the family, and the church may be greatly enhanced.
4. The values of the Psalms to the individual and to all Christians in general are many.
 - a) It is a book of prayers, of a human being's communion with God.
 - b) It expresses one's praise to God for acts fulfilled in the past. God's goodness in fulfilling His past promises becomes the occasion for a hope in the future.
 - c) The Psalms have a distinct place in worship, having been sung by Christians throughout the centuries.
 - d) The Psalms reflect the experience of faith of God's people. Their expressions of frustration, impatience, anger, and joy reflect the tension between reward and condemnation.
 - e) In the Psalms God addresses both the individual and all His people collectively.
 - f) The Psalms also connect the Old Testament and the New Testament. Although they belong to the Old Testament, the psalmists longed for the day of redemption. From the early church we have inherited a new perspective of reading the Psalms in the light of Jesus' mission and work. Psalms is perhaps the most used book of the Bible. Besides Isaiah, it is the most quoted book in the New Testament.

C. Proverbs.

1. The book of Proverbs is a marvelous collection of wise sayings and instructions for living a useful and effective life. These sayings perfectly illustrates "wisdom literature" -- literature that gives instructions for living while pondering the difficulties of life.
2. Proverbial wisdom is characterized by short, pithy statements; but books like Ecclesiastes and Job use lengthy monologues and dialogues to probe the meaning of life, the problem of good and evil, and the relationship between God and people.

3. The Hebrew term "proverb" means "a comparison," and it came to be used for any sage or moralistic pronouncement (cf. Ezekiel 18:2; Psalm 49:4). A proverb presents truths that are "parallel" or "similar." Many proverbs are condensed parables. This type of literature goes back in written form to about 2700 B.C. in Egypt and it was common throughout the ancient Near East. The second section (22:17-24:34) is similar to the proverbs of an Egyptian writer, Amenemope, who apparently antedated Solomon.

D. Ecclesiastes.

1. There have been an infinite number of schemes suggested for discerning the outline of Ecclesiastes. The word "Qoheleth" means "to call an assembly," but Solomon did more than call an assembly and give an oration. The word "Qoheleth" also carries with it the idea of debating, not so much with the listeners as with himself. He would present a topic, discuss it from many viewpoints, and then come to a practical conclusion. Ecclesiastes may appear to be a random collection of miscellaneous ideas about a variety of topics, but Solomon assures us that what he wrote was orderly (12:9).
2. The most satisfactory division of Ecclesiastes is one that separates the text into four parts. The most obvious advantage of this division is that each of the first three sections climax with a formal refrain that is given in almost identical terms (2:24; 5:18; 8:15).
3. The first section provides a preliminary argument from Solomon's own experience designed to show that happiness is not in man's own power. All striving and toiling, though it may surround man with every gratification his heart can desire, is powerless to give that gratification itself.
4. The second section demonstrates that God has a scheme in which all the diverse actions of men, with the time of their occurrence, are definitely arranged. This scheme is a beautiful one, though from their prevailing worldliness men do not comprehend it. He then comments upon various facts or anomalies which seem to be an exception to the doctrine that justice rules in the world and happiness attends righteous behavior. Because of this, he utters a caution. This caution covered three circumstances: being seduced to irreligion, to neglect of religious duty, or to inconsiderate language reflecting upon God's providence. These wrongs find restitution in superior government instituted by God.
5. The third section, which constitutes the central portion of the book, is to apply this plan (i.e., that enjoyment of the world is a gift of God, bestowed by God and regulated by His plan) to the explanation of the inequalities of divine providence. Therefore, we will find that prosperity may not be good while adversity or affliction is not

necessarily evil. A right application of these considerations will remove a large portion of the apparent inequalities of providence.

6. The fourth section is occupied with the removal of discouragements and the enforcing of practical lessons. The remaining mysteries of this subject should not be an obstacle to human joy or activity. In both joy and activity men should be mindful of death and judgment. The conclusion of the entire discussion is a command to fear God and keep His commandments, for in these does man find true happiness and meaning to life.

E. Song of Solomon.

1. The introduction to the Song of Solomon is perhaps more important than that of any other book in the Bible because of the problem that people have had in interpreting its meaning. The title "Song of Songs" is intended to be a Hebrew superlative expression, much like the "Holiest of Holies" in the temple. "Canticles" is a Latinized name for the "Song of Songs."
2. The Song of Solomon is obviously a collection of ancient Hebrew love poems celebrating the experiences of a lover and his beloved as they taste the beauty, power, agony, and joys of human sexual love. Is that appropriate, however, for a book that is part of the scriptures?
3. Why is the Song of Solomon included in the scriptures? It is found in all Hebrew manuscripts and also in the Septuagint. Its few references to a historically identifiable person (Solomon) and to known places (Jerusalem, En Gedi, Tirzah) show its Jewish origin. But the usual marks of biblical literature -- religious themes, institutions, and practices -- are absent. There are no references to law, grace, sin, salvation, or prayer. In fact, there is not a single, indisputable reference to God in the text.
4. Yet the Song of Solomon has held a significant place in the minds of Jews and Christians. In Israel the book came to be associated with the greatest Hebrew festival, being read on the eighth day of Passover. During the first 15 centuries of Christian history, most major writers turned their attention to this book. Neither Jews nor Christians have been able to ignore it.

II. **Authorship And Date**

A. Job.

1. Nothing is known about the author of the book. Ancient Jewish tradition ascribed the book to Moses.
2. As is true with much wisdom literature, the actual composition of the book of Job is hard to date with precision.

- a) It seems likely that Job himself lived in the second millennium B.C. (2000 to 1000 B.C.) and shared a tradition not far removed from the Hebrew patriarchs. Job's longevity of 140 years, his position as a man whose wealth was measured in cattle and who acted as priest for his family, and the picture of roving Sabean and Chaldean tribesmen fit the second millennium better than the first.
- b) Anywhere in the Old Testament biblical period is a possible date, though attempts to place its time of writing as late as the second or first century B.C. have been dealt a harsh blow by the discovery of parts of a Targum of Job among the Dead Sea Scrolls.
- 3. The exact place of origin is as difficult to determine as the exact date. At the end of the second millennium, some Aramean tribes moved south and settled on the borders of Babylonia and Palestine, but they continued to control the caravan route through the Khabur River area. This was when Aleppo and Damascus became Aramean centers and when the Chaldean tribes invaded Babylonia.
- 4. Job himself lived in the land of Uz (1:1). Genesis 10:23 and 22:20-22 ties Uz with the Arameans. The latter passage also ties in the Chaldeans with the Arameans and the Uzites. These passages refer to nations or tribes that were related, sometimes mainly by their proximity. The land of Uz was east of Palestine, but its precise location cannot be determined. According to Lamentations 4:21, Edom was in the land of Uz. It seems then that Uz was the name of a region east of Palestine, including the Edomites and adjacent tribes.

B. Psalms.

- 1. All but 34 of the Psalms bear some type of title as a superscription. The Jews referred to these 34 as "orphans." The heading or superscription may contain any or all of several categories of information.
 - a) Identification with a person.
 - b) Association with a historical event.
 - c) Music and worship details.
 - d) The type or genre of the psalm.
- 2. Though we usually associate David with the book of Psalms (his name is on 73 of them and the LXX adds 15 to that number), some of the Psalms were written anonymously and some list other authors including Asaph (50, 73-83), Solomon (72, 127), the sons of Korah (42-49, 84-85, 87-88), Ethan (89), and Moses (90). The psalms were gathered in separate collections that were eventually brought together into one book under the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Several collections arose over the centuries.

- a) Smaller collections included the psalms associated with the sons of Korah (Psalms 42-49; Psalms 84-85; Psalms 87-88), Asaph (Psalm 50; Psalms 73-83), the second Davidic psalter (Psalms 51-71), and the Hallelujah psalms (Psalms 146-50).
- b) The larger collections consisted of the psalms associated with David (Psalms 3-41; cf. 72:20), and the Elohist psalter (Psalms 42-83) -- itself a collection of smaller collections: the Korahite (Psalms 42-49) and Davidic psalms (Psalms 51-71); the Asaphite psalter (Psalms 73-83); and the Songs of Ascent (Psalms 120-34). The process of collection began with smaller collections, to which individual psalms or other collections were added, resulting in the final 150 psalms.
- c) In our English Bibles, the psalms are now commonly divided into five books, each ending with a doxology (1-41; 42-72; 73-89; 90-106; 107-150).
 - (1) Psalm 150 is a general doxology while Psalm 1 is a general introduction to the Psalms.
 - (2) Psalm 2, 42, 73, 90 and 107 serve as introductions to their respective books.
 - (3) According to the *Midrash on the Psalms*, an ancient Jewish commentary, the five books were intentionally created to parallel the five books of Moses.

C. Proverbs.

1. The traditional view that Solomon wrote the entire book of Proverbs is supported by the titles in 1:1, 10:1, and 25:1. Moreover, Solomon was a wise man, writing proverbs and collecting sayings from other wise men (cf. 22:17-24:34). Proponents of this view have usually assumed that Agur (30:1) and Lemuel (31:1) were pseudonyms of Solomon.
2. This general view, however, is incorrect. Agur and Lemuel were not pseudonyms for Solomon and 22:17-24:34 forms a separate collection of proverbs because it has a distinct form, separate title, and purpose. It is impossible to determine who added this material to the collection of Proverbs. Furthermore, the title of 1:1, which has generally been taken to head up 1:1-9:18, may not actually refer to these chapters; it may simply be the heading of the whole book in its final form and may not necessarily indicate that the first nine chapters are from Solomon.
3. An examination of the titles in the book is important to the study of its authorship. The heading in 10:1 clearly credits Solomon for the subsequent material. In 10:1-22:16 there may be two collections (10:1-15:33; 16:1-22:16) due to the difference in style. The heading in 25:1 also affirms that Solomon was the author (or editor) of

a larger collection from which the scribes of Hezekiah's court excerpted the proverbs in 25:1-29:27. Once again there are differences of style between 25:1-27:27 and 28:1-29:27.

4. In conclusion, then, Solomon is responsible for 10:1-22:16 and perhaps all or part of 25:1-29:27. The final section (30:1-31:31) was written at a later date by Agur, Lemuel, and an unknown author. The prologue to the book (1:8-9:18) would have been added to form an introduction, certainly by the time of Hezekiah, and possibly in Solomon's time. Finally, 1:1-7 headed up the final collection as a title.

D. Ecclesiastes.

1. The writer gives himself the name "Qoheleth" seven times in the book: three times at the beginning (1:1, 2, 12), three times at the end (12:8, 9, 10) and once in the middle (7:27). The word is derived from the Hebrew word *qahal*, meaning "to call together, to assemble, to collect." This title referred to the preacher's office and then became a term for the preacher himself. The Greek equivalent, "Ecclesiastes," also means "preacher" and is derived from the word "assembly."
2. In 1:1, the writer stated that he was the son of David, king in Jerusalem. In 1:12, the writer stated that he became king over Israel in Jerusalem. Because Solomon was the only immediate son of David who was king over Israel, reigning in Jerusalem, there can be little doubt that he is the one specified. When we compare statements in Ecclesiastes with those in the book of 1 Kings, the evidence for Solomon's authorship becomes overwhelming.
 - a) Ecclesiastes 1:16 with 1 Kings 3:12 which shows Solomon's unrivaled wisdom.
 - b) Ecclesiastes 2:4-10 with 1 Kings 5:27-32; 7:1-8 which shows Solomon's unrivaled wealth.
 - c) Ecclesiastes 2:4-10 with 1 Kings 9:15-25 which shows Solomon's huge assortment of servants.
 - d) Ecclesiastes 2:4-10 with 1 King 10:14-29 which shows Solomon's extensive building programs.
 - e) Ecclesiastes 7:20 with 1 Kings 8:46 which contains the statement, "There is no man who does not sin."
 - f) Ecclesiastes 7:28 with 1 Kings 11:1-8 which draws the similar conclusion that there is not a God-fearing woman among a thousand.
 - g) Ecclesiastes 12:9 with 1 Kings 4:32 which shows that Solomon studied, weighed, and arranged his many proverbs.
3. In the book, there is an air of repentance and humility for past thoughts and actions. Given the fact that Solomon wrote the book,

it will be best placed not before his apostasy, for the questions and sins of Ecclesiastes did not trouble him then, nor during his years of rebellion, for then he had no occasion to use this kind of spiritual language. Ecclesiastes is best placed after his apostasy, when both his recent turmoil and repentance were still fresh in his mind. There is no record that Solomon repented and turned to the Lord, but the message of Ecclesiastes suggests that he did. Since Solomon ruled from 970 B.C. to roughly 930 B.C., the best date for the book would be approximately 940 to 935 B.C.

4. Israel enjoyed peace and prosperity during the 40 years Solomon reigned over her as king. As king, his resources were without limits. He could afford to do anything he wanted to do. This book is his biography. It is like reading a diary of a man who is desperately searching for the meaning and purpose of life. He will find that purpose and meaning of life, but not where he sought it at the first.

E. Song of Solomon.

1. Traditionally, authorship of the Song of Solomon was attributed to Solomon, due in part to the title, the six other explicit references to Solomon (1:5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11, 12), and the three references to an unnamed king (1:4, 12; 7:5).
2. Solomon wrote 1,005 songs (cf. 1 Kings 4:32-33), and the superlative title "Song of Songs" indicates that it is his best one.
3. Since the contents of the book are fully in harmony with the great gifts of wisdom which we know Solomon possessed, there is no sufficient reason to suggest another.

III. ***Literary Forms In The Wisdom Literature***

- A. In order to best understand the wisdom literature it is necessary to understand a little about the nature of Hebrew poetry.
1. Hebrew is a pictorial language; every word is graphic and vivid. The verbal roots portray visible action, while the usage provides room for strong imagination. Poetry was more common in Bible times in the ancient Near East than it is today in our Western civilization.
 2. About 40% of the Old Testament is written in poetry. Most modern poetry is based upon rhyme (parallelism of sound), or rhythm (parallelism of time). However, in Hebrew poetry there is neither a parallel of rhyme nor of rhythm, but a parallelism of ideas. It is symmetry through balanced lines and other units of composition.
 3. The beauty of Hebrew poetry is that it can be translated into any language without losing its flavor or beauty; something that is not possible when translating rhyme or rhythm. Parallelism refers to the correspondence which occurs between the phrase of a poetic line.

- B. There are several different types of parallelism, illustrated in the book of Psalms.
1. In synonymous (identical) parallelism the members of a line express the same basic idea in several different ways (1:1).
 2. Emblematic parallelism is a form of synonymous parallelism in which one member of the line contains a figurative (metaphor or simile) development of the same thought (44:19, 22).
 - a) A simile is a comparison which is made explicit by the presence of the word like or as (42:1; 7:1-2).
 - b) A metaphor is a comparison which is implicit; that is, it is a comparison without the mention of like or as (23:1).
 3. In antithetic parallelism the members of the line are set in contrast to one another (44:3).
 4. In synthetic parallelism the members of a line complement one another harmoniously to create the desired effect (12:1).
 5. Repetitive parallelism is a further development of synthetic parallelism.
 - a) Not only do the members of the line harmonize, they also develop the thought colon upon colon (29:1).
 - b) One part may contain the subject and the second the predicate (Proverbs 15:31); the first line may state a condition and the second its consequences (Proverbs 16:7), its cause (Proverbs 16:12), or its purpose (Proverbs 15:24); and one part may state a preferred value or course over the other (Proverbs 15:16).
 6. Internal parallelism is parallelism treated in isolation from other verses. External parallelism denotes the kind of parallelism when two or more verses are compared with one another (30:8-10).
 7. Lastly, proverbs whose second line simply completes the idea begun in the first are said to exhibit formal parallelism.
- C. Another major characteristic of Hebrew poetry is imagery. Imagery is manifested in the Psalms using many literary devices.
1. Acrostic refers to the poetic practice of opening each line, verse, or stanza with a different letter of the alphabet (Psalm 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145).
 2. Alliteration is the phenomenon of repeating similar sounds at the beginning of words (22:4).
 3. Anthropomorphism is the ascribing of human form to God (130:2).
 4. Apostrophe, which is the addressing of an imaginary audience, results from a development of personification (68:15-16).
 5. Assonance is the phenomenon of repeating similar sounds within words (44:7).

6. Chiasm changes the order of the members of a line (1:1; 51:3; 90:7; 146:2). This is also called "inversion." This is a prominent literary device found throughout the Bible.
 7. Ellipsis is the phenomenon of leaving something out of the text that must be read into the colon from the context. The effect of the ellipsis is to bind two phrases more closely together (88:6).
 8. Hendiadys is a figure of speech in which two expressions are intended to be understood as one.
 9. Hyperbole or exaggeration creates a picture in the mind that shuns literalism (40:12).
 10. Inclusion is a form of repetition in which the beginning and end of the section close the unit by the restatement of the same motif or words or by a contrastive statement (70:1, 5).
 11. Merismus is a coordination of nominal phrases, expressive of totality (105:14).
 12. Metonymy is the substitution of the name of an attribute or adjunct for that of the thing meant.
 13. Onomatopoeia describes a word whose sound creates the effect intended by the speaker.
 14. Paronomasia is a play on words or, better, a use of two or more identical or similarly sounding words with different nuances in meaning.
 15. Personification is when inanimate objects are addressed as if they were animate, or actual persons (68:15-16).
 16. Repetition is inherent in the concept of symmetry, according to which words and phrases are repeated in the same, synonymous, or antonymous ways. Repetition is the most important element in Hebrew poetry, for it conveys symmetry and asymmetry, harmony and dissonance. Refrain is a form of repetition (136:1-26).
 17. Synecdoche is a figure of speech in which the part stands for the whole or the whole for the part (18:35).
- D. There are several categories of psalms.
1. Praise psalms -- offer praise to God.
 2. Messianic psalms -- speak of the Person and the work of the Messiah.
 3. Lament psalms -- a cry to God for help.
 4. Testimonial psalms -- communicate what God has done for them.
 5. The Songs of Ascent -- sung during pilgrimage to the city of Jerusalem.
 6. Imprecatory psalms -- asking for judgment on wicked men.
 7. Penitential psalms -- sorrowing over sin.
 8. Wisdom psalms -- guidelines for godly people.

9. Historical psalms -- looking back on God's dealings with the nation of Israel.
 10. Nature psalms -- the handiwork of God in Creation.
- E. The Hallel psalms are not to be confused with a literary genre.
1. Instead, they form three separate collections.
 - a) The "Egyptian Hallel" (Psalms 113-118).
 - b) The "Great Hallel" (Psalms 120-136 or Psalms 135-136 or Psalm 136; Jewish sources vary on the extent).
 - c) The concluding Hallel psalms (Psalms 146-150).
 2. The Hallel psalms had a significant part in the praise (*hallel*) of the Lord.
 - a) The Egyptian Hallel and the Great Hallel (most of which are pilgrimage songs: 120-134) were sung during the annual feasts.
 - b) The concluding Hallel psalms (Psalms 146-150) constituted a part of the daily prayers in the synagogues after the destruction of the temple and Jerusalem in A.D. 70.
- F. A casual reading of the Proverbs reveals the general form of a proverb. It is a short sentence or phrase whose meaning is applicable in many situations. Many, but not all, of the proverbs use a likeness or comparison ("like" or "as") to teach their truths. A thorough analysis of the Proverbs reveals that these short sayings follow many patterns and constructions that have bearing on the meanings.
- G. Proverbs are essentially intended to teach, whether they follow the pattern of a formal instruction using imperatives or prohibitions (16:3; 23:9), are expressed in sayings that observe traits and acts that are to be followed or avoided (14:31), tell a story (7:6-23), make a speech relating to wisdom (8:1-36), or develop numerical sayings (6:16-19).
- H. Instruction often uses motivation -- reasons for complying. The writer does not simply tell the facts. He arouses the emotions and stimulates the imagination. The most common form of motivation is a subordinate clause stating the purpose, result, or reason for the instruction: "Hear counsel, and receive instruction, that thou mayest be wise in thy latter end" (19:20). Sometimes the motivation is implied in a general observation: "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of his correction: For whom the Lord loveth he correcteth; even as a father the son in whom he delighteth" (3:11-12).

IV. **Purpose**

A. Job.

1. The purpose of the book of Job cannot be reduced to a single simple statement. The author appears to have had a multifaceted purpose under the general theme of wisdom teaching about God and human suffering. The various parts of the book speak with some-

what different purposes in mind. The prologue teaches the wisdom of one's total submission to the will of God. The readers view the drama from the divine perspective where they learn of God's purpose to expose the falsehood of the devil and to prove Job's faith. The speeches, on the other hand, give the human perspective. Job knows nothing of what transpired in the heavenly realm -- nor did he know the final outcome of his suffering. The author's purpose is to teach some profound lessons positively and negatively about our relationship with God and about a person's limited knowledge of the divine purposes.

2. The author of Job intends to show how Job's friends only have a shallow and partial observation of life; i.e., human suffering is always in proportion to one's sins. Overall there is no attempt to justify God with regard to the suffering of the innocent. But the author finally demonstrates that God does not abandon the sufferer but communicates with him at the proper time.
3. Another purpose of the book is to show that though human beings are often sinful, weak, and ignorant, they can, like Job, be relatively pure and upright even when in the midst of physical distress, turmoil, and testing. The divine speeches demonstrate to Job that God is Creator and Sustainer of everything and yet is willing to communicate with Job as His friend and not His enemy, as Job had imagined Him to be. While this does not answer all Job's questions, it is really all Job needs to know.
4. Satan was permitted to afflict Job and then test him through his friends who sounded like they were very righteous. Job's major problem was the question of how God could be both good and sovereign in the light of the suffering of the innocent and the prospering of the wicked. The devil bears the responsibility for Job's trouble, though he is permitted to do so by God.
5. Initially Job stands the test even when his wife says, "Curse God, and die" (2:9). But as his troubles multiply, Job has second thoughts; he wrestles with God, challenges God, and sinks into depths of despair, with moments of trust and confidence, only to fall again into despair. Throughout the book Job defends his innocence (not sinlessness) against the view of his friends. But Job is unsure as to why he is suffering. So he made many unfortunate statements; yet in it all he does not do what Satan said he would -- he does not curse God (2:10).
6. While his friends make no progress in their arguments, Job gradually grows less defensive. He persistently calls for an audience with God to argue his case. He also calls for a friend in heaven to plead his cause at the divine court. He is confident he will be vindicated

- (13:18; 19:26). The friends consistently stand on God's side, sometimes speaking beautiful hymns; but they could not seem to move from their false notion that the righteous always prosper and sinners always suffer and, conversely, that suffering proves sinfulness and prosperity proves righteousness.
- a) Much of what Job's friends said is true in an abstract sense, but it did not necessarily apply to Job.
 - b) It is not so much what they say but what they leave out that makes their advice so shallow.
 - c) They all finally reach the conclusion that Job is rebellious and that his refusal to humble himself and repent proves he has sinned greatly.
7. The book does not attempt to formulate a rational solution to the problem of evil. In his appearance to Job, God gives no rational explanation or excuse for Job's suffering, but Job is not destroyed; he is only rebuked and then shown to be basically right while the friends are condemned for their presumptive claim to have a knowledge of God's ways (42:7-9). When God does rebuke Job, it is for his ignorance (38:2) and presumption while arguing his case (42:2). Job realizes that God does not need human advice to control the world and that no extreme of suffering gives one the right to question God's wisdom or justice, and on this he repents and his rebellious attitude and resentment disappears (42:2-6). His friends do not see him pronounced guilty, so their view of his suffering is refuted. God is telling Job in chapters 38-41 that human beings do not know enough about God's ways to make judgments concerning His justice.
8. Job comes to accept God on God's own terms; and while we know the full story, Job had to walk by faith even after he was vindicated. The fact that God never condemns Job's character proves that Satan failed and that Job's testing has come to an end. Though he has not demanded restoration, God, having achieved His higher purpose through Job, now restores him. Job, in his suffering, despite moments of weakness, surpassed his critics in righteousness. After all his doubts and bitterness, Job arrived at that point of spiritual maturity where he could pray for those who persecuted him (42:10).
- B. Ecclesiastes.
1. The purpose of Ecclesiastes is to convince people of the uselessness of any view that does not rise above the horizon of man himself. It pronounces the verdict of "vanity of vanities" upon any philosophy of life which regards the created world or human enjoyment as an end in itself. To view personal happiness as the highest good in life is absolute folly in view of the existence of God and His universe.

- Having shown the vanity of living worldly goals, Solomon clears the way for a world view which recognizes God as the highest value of all, and the meaningful life as the one which is lived in His service.
2. Only as a vehicle for the expression of divine wisdom, goodness, and truth, does the world itself possess any real significance. It is only God's work that endures, and only He can impart abiding value to the life and activity of man (Ecclesiastes 3:14).
 3. Ecclesiastes is a book about life. Solomon was a realist who wrote about all our concerns. He writes with great candor about frustration, fulfillment, work, injustice, friendship, worship, happiness, insecurity, suffering, temptation, folly, confusion, and emptiness. His observations are really the conclusions that life itself forces upon us. In reading the book, one gets the impression that Solomon was not trying anything different than what our society tries today. It seems many would save themselves from a lot of heartache, pain, and suffering if they would read this book and benefit from the mistakes of the past. The mass of society today is searching for the meaning of life in all the wrong places. If the world will not learn from the wisdom of Ecclesiastes, at least you and I can.
 4. There is little dispute over the destiny of the book. It was primarily written to Israel. Like all other books of the Bible with the qualities of practical application, it must be accepted in the Christian dispensation for its contribution to our understanding of and participation in our salvation. It has been stated that Ecclesiastes asks the questions that the rest of the Bible answers.
 5. If the book did nothing more than demonstrate the futility of living apart from God's grace and revelation, it would have a pertinent place in every age. If the average non-Christian would read the book today, it could bring him much more quickly to Christ. It would save him the difficult, arduous journey of a wasted life. He could see immediately that God is the only alternative to this world and its offerings, and that Jesus is God's first and last argument to man's claim to genuine fulfillment and peace.
 6. Ecclesiastes was intended to be a book in celebration of "joy" and God's "good" creation. In Judaism, this book was read on the third day of the Feast of Tabernacles. The writer constantly advocated joy and rejoicing, because life is a gift from God.
- C. Proverbs.
1. Proverbs 1:8-9:18 is an organized introduction to the book with many admonitions and prohibitions as well as stories and personified speech concerning wisdom. This section runs in cycles: the purpose of Proverbs is to give wisdom (1:1-7), but folly may hinder this purpose (1:8-33); there are advantages to seeking wisdom

- (2:1-4:27), but folly may prevent one from seeking it (5:1-6:19); there are likewise advantages to finding wisdom (6:20-9:12), but folly may prevent this too (9:13-18).
2. Proverbs 10:1-22:16 is a collection of 375 unrelated proverbs. Then, there are two more collections of proverbs (22:17-24:22; 25:1-29:27). The last two sections include numerical sayings of the wise (30:10-33) and the acrostic poem on the worthy woman (31:10-31).
 3. The book of Proverbs covers a wide variety of topics, most of them connected with daily living. Almost every facet of human relationships is mentioned, and the teaching of the book is applicable to all people everywhere. Topics include such areas as wisdom in general, personal conduct, human attitudes (i.e., foolishness, humility, vengeance, strife, love, lust, laziness, pride), child-rearing, marital relationships, business tactics, use of money, friendship, instructions for rulers and judges, and the use of alcohol.
- D. Song of Solomon.
1. The Bible does not see marriage as an inferior state, a concession to human weakness. Nor does it see the normal physical love within that relationship as impure. Marriage was instituted before the fall of man by God with the command that the first couple become one flesh (Genesis 2:24). Therefore physical love within that conjugal union is good, is God's will, and should be a delight to both partners (Proverbs 5:15-19; 1 Corinthians 7:3).
 2. The prospect of children is not necessary to justify sexual love in marriage. Significantly, the Song of Solomon makes no reference to procreation. It must be remembered that the book was written in a world where a high premium was placed on offspring and a woman's worth was often measured in terms of the number of her children. Sex was often seen with reference to procreation; yet there is no trace of that in the book. The book is a song in praise of love for love's sake and for love's sake alone. This relationship needs no justification beyond itself.
 3. Song of Solomon, however, is more than a declaration that human sexual love in itself is good. The use of the marriage metaphor to describe the relationship of God to His people is almost universal in the Bible. From the time that God chose Israel to be His own, the covenant was pictured in terms of a marriage. Idolatry was equated with adultery (Exodus 34:10-17). The Lord is a jealous God. Monogamous marriage is the norm for depicting the covenant relationship throughout the Bible.

V. **Miscellaneous Topics**

A. Major characters in Job.

1. Job.

- a) Apart from the Bible nothing is known of Job. He was not an Israelite and showed no knowledge of the covenant between the Lord and His chosen people. Indeed, there is not in the book the slightest hint of any acquaintance with the history of the Hebrew people. There is, however, no good reason to question Job's historicity as a well-to-do patriarch who lived east of the Jordan at a time before the emergence of the Hebrews as a nation.
- b) Job assumes two roles. The author presents him as a truly righteous man whose commitment to God is total, yet who can still struggle with God to the point of anger over the mystery of God's ways. Job does not know what the reader knows -- that God honors him by testing, thus expressing His confidence in Job. But Job must remain ignorant of this for it to be genuine. For the intended message of the book, the angry Job is just as important as the patient Job. In his suffering Job served God supremely, not as a stoic, but as a feeling man who had to come to terms with the mystery of God.

2. Eliphaz.

- a) Based on a variety of passages, we have good reason to believe Eliphaz was an Edomite. According to Genesis 36:4, a man named Eliphaz was the firstborn of Esau, the progenitor of the Edomites, and Teman was his son.
- b) A number of prophets mention Teman as an Edomite city or district (Jeremiah 49:7, 20; Ezekiel 25:13; Amos 1:12; Obadiah 8-9). Apparently Eliphaz was the senior member since he spoke first. Throughout his speeches, at least until his final speech in chapter 22, he shows a broader spirit than the others, accepting Job as a righteous man gone astray (4:7; 5:16-19; 15:20-26). Though failing in compassion, he alone of the three showed some consideration and respect.

3. Bildad.

- a) This non-Hebrew name is not mentioned in any other Old Testament book. Bildad considers Job's struggle over the justice of God as blasphemy, and he uses his knowledge of ancient wisdom to prove to Job that his family got what they deserved and warns him about a similar doom (8:4-6). Genesis 25:2, 6 provides some helpful information about his tribe, the Shuahites.
- b) They were descendants of Abraham through Keturah and inhabitants of "the land of the east." Apart from a possible phonetic problem, Genesis 25:3 suggests this tribe lived near Dedan,

which Jeremiah locates near Tema and Buz (Jeremiah 25:23), far from the Euphrates. Bildad's name is probably a combination of Bil (baal, "Lord") and Adad, the well-known storm god (cf. Benhadad, the Aramean royal name, and the names of the Edomite kings Hadad the son of Bedad [Genesis 36:35] and Baal-Hanan).

4. Zophar.

- a) Zophar is from Naamah, but not the little Israelite town in the western foothills (Joshua 15:41). Scholars cannot agree on either the derivation of Zophar's name nor the location of the place.
- b) But it must have been somewhere in north Arabia or Edom. Zophar was the most caustic of the counselors. His message to Job was repent or die the horrible death the wicked deserve (11:13-15).

5. Elihu.

- a) Elihu appears only in chapters 32-37. He has the distinction of having his father's name recorded. "Barakel the Buzite" (32:2) seems to identify Elihu as one whose father was a leading figure in a clan more closely related to Job (Uz and Buz were brothers; cf. Genesis 22:21).
- b) Elihu's name means "He is my God"; it is the only name of the five characters that was used by Israelites (cf. 1 Samuel 1:1; 1 Chronicles 12:20; 26:7; 27:18). The Aramaic expressions in Elihu's speeches fit the statement that Buz was the son of Abraham's brother Nahor, whose son Laban spoke Aramaic (Genesis 31:47). Elihu gives his youth as the reason he dared not speak before the older men.

B. Scriptural values in Proverbs.

1. This collection of wise sayings is not exclusively religious; its teachings generally apply to human problems. The teacher concerns himself with plain, ordinary individuals who live in the world. Accordingly, the sayings exhibit several distinctive characteristics.
 - a) They focus attention on individuals rather than on the nation, setting forth the qualities needed and the dangers to be avoided by people seeking to find success with God.
 - b) They are applicable to all people at any period in history who face the same types of perils and have the same characteristics and abilities (1:20; 8:1-5). Proverbs was an antidote to the spiritual apostasy of Israel in the days of Solomon and Proverbs will help the spiritual apostasy of God's people today.
 - c) They are based on respect for authority, traditional values, and the wisdom of mature teachers (24:21).

- d) They are immensely practical, giving sound advice for developing personal qualities that are necessary to achieve success in this life and to avoid failure or shame, and warning that virtue is rewarded by prosperity and well-being but that vice leads to poverty and disaster.
2. This does not mean that Proverbs is a secular book; its teachings are solidly based on "the fear of the Lord" (1:7), making compliance with them morally and spiritually necessary.
- a) In fact, the book teaches that this fear of the Lord is the evidence of faith; for the wise teacher tells people to trust in the Lord whose counsel stands (19:21) and not their own understanding (3:5-7).
 - b) The purpose of proverbial teaching, then, is to inspire faith in the Lord (22:19). Such fear requires a personal knowledge of the Lord ("fear" and "knowledge" are parallel in 9:10) -- to find this fear is to find knowledge (2:5), a knowledge that comes by revelation (3:6).
 - c) Ultimately, however, the fear of the Lord is manifested in a life of obedience, confession, forsaking sin (28:18), and doing what is right (21:3), which is the Christian's job before God (17:3).
 - d) Since the motivation for faith and obedience comes from the scripture, Proverbs relates the way of wisdom to the law (28:4; 29:18). So there really are no secular proverbs that can be contrasted with religious ones; everything on earth serves the purposes of God.
3. Care must be given when reading Proverbs.
- a) Proverbs are general maxims, not absolute guarantees.
 - (1) A proverb states a general rule of godly living, but the reader must remember that often there are exceptions to the rule.
 - (2) General rules are not always applicable in every circumstance (cf. 6:20; 10:3; 15:25; 16:3; 22:6, 26; 29:12).
 - b) Proverbs are not complete statements of truth.
 - (1) Do not isolate an individual proverb from the rest of Bible teaching.
 - (2) Compare all of what the Bible says about a topic.
 - c) Proverbs are often parabolic.
 - (1) This means that they use figurative language, metaphors, exaggeration, and other poetic devices.
 - (2) They point beyond themselves to a certain truth; therefore, they must not be read literally.
 - d) Proverbs often reflect ancient, Middle Eastern practices which must first be understood and then "translated" into our modern,

Western world before they can be effective (cf. 11:1; 14:4; 17:3; 25:24; 26:8).

C. Key terms and phrases in Ecclesiastes.

1. In the first several verses, Solomon introduces some of the key words and phrases that are used repeatedly in Ecclesiastes.
2. Understanding these phrases and words will help us to better grasp the message of the book.
 - a) "Vanity of vanities" -- Solomon used this phrase 38 times in this book. It means "emptiness, futility, or vapor." The name "Abel" probably comes from this word (Genesis 4:2). Whatever disappears quickly, leaves nothing behind and does not satisfy is vanity.
 - b) "Under the sun" -- This phrase occurs 29 times in Ecclesiastes. It defines the outlook of the writer as he looks at life from a human perspective and not necessarily from heaven's point of view. He applies his own wisdom and experience to the complex human situation and tries to make some sense out of life.
 - c) "Profit" -- This word is used 10 times in Ecclesiastes and nowhere else in the Old Testament. Its basic meaning is "that which is left over." It may be translated "surplus, advantage, or gain." The word "profit" is just the opposite of "vanity."
 - d) "Labor" -- This word is used 23 times in Ecclesiastes. It means "to toil to the point of exhaustion and yet experience little or no fulfillment in your work." A person's daily work might seem to be futile and burdensome, but the Christian can labor gladly in the will of God (1 Corinthians 15:58).
 - e) "Man" -- This is the familiar Hebrew word "Adam" (Genesis 1:26; 2:7, 19) and refers to man as made from the earth. Of course, man is made in the image of God; but he came from the earth. Solomon used the word 49 times as he examined "man under the sun."
 - f) "Evil" -- This word is used 31 times and is also translated as "sore," "hurt," "mischievous," "grievous," "adversity," "wickedness," and "misery." It is the opposite of "good" and covers a multitude of things: pain, sorrow, hard circumstances, and distress.
 - g) "Joy" -- In spite of his painful encounters with the world and its problems, Solomon does not recommend either pessimism or cynicism. Instead, he admonishes us to be realistic about life and enjoy it. Words related to joy are used 17 times in Ecclesiastes.
 - h) "Wisdom" -- There are 32 references to "fools" and "folly" and 54 to "wisdom." Solomon was the wisest of men (1 Kings 4:31) and

he applied this wisdom as he sought to understand the purpose of life "under the sun."

- i) "God" -- Solomon mentions God 40 times and always uses "Elohim" and never "Jehovah." Elohim is the mighty God; the glorious God of creation who exercises sovereign power. Jehovah is the God of the covenant; the God of revelation who is eternally self-existent and yet graciously relates Himself to sinful man.

D. Interpretation of Song of Solomon.

1. Since the Song of Solomon is in the canon, how is it to be interpreted? No book in the Bible has had such varied treatment.
2. There are really only two different types of interpretations.

a) Allegorical.

- (1) The oldest documented interpretation of the Song of Solomon treats it as an allegory. An allegory is an extended metaphor and normally is not rooted in history or the real world but is drawn from the mind and imagination of the author. Its purpose is not to present real events related to identifiable places and persons, but rather to communicate spiritual truth of an abstract nature. Allegory is an old device in which there is a divorce between the obvious literal meaning and the "high" spiritual message. As an allegory, the Jews saw this book as a depiction of the relationship of the Lord to His chosen people, Israel. Many Christians have seen the book primarily as a statement of the love relationship between Christ and the church, his bride.
- (2) There are problems, however, in accepting the Song of Solomon as an allegory. First, nothing in the text indicates that the intention of the author was to allegorize. Second, the people, places, and experiences recorded seem to be real, not literary devices. Third, the book does not have the narrative character -- the clear progressive story-line -- that we usually expect in allegory. The result of the use of the allegorical approach is that the Song of Solomon has become to an unusual degree a field for fertile imaginations.

b) Natural.

- (1) In the first century apparently some Jewish readers understood the Song of Solomon literally. Some were even singing portions of it in their drinking houses. This evoked the wrath of Rabbi Aqiba who pronounced an anathema on such practices.
- (2) In the eighteenth century, an Anglican bishop suggested that the book actually tells us about the marriage feast of Solomon. The bride may well have been the daughter of Pharaoh.

He accepted the book as historical but was willing to see something typological here. Solomon, the king of Israel, took a Gentile bride and made her a part of the people of God. In this way he foreshadows Jesus, who would take from among the Gentiles a bride, the church. This approach prepared the way for the almost universal rejection of the allegorical approach in favor of the position now most commonly taken among biblical commentators.