

Lesson 13 – Wisdom Literature

Text: Job; Psalms; Proverbs; Ecclesiastes; Song of Solomon

Job:

The book of Job describes a man, Job, who deals with the aftermath of great calamity in his life. Job was a righteous man, and Satan challenged the reason for his righteousness to God, arguing that Job only was faithful because of the blessings God provided him. God allowed Satan to afflict Job in various ways, taking away his wealth, children, and good health. Job's friends came to comfort him, but eventually they and Job began to argue about the reason that Job was afflicted in the first place (they believed that he was being punished for sin). The ultimate lesson is that one's relationship with God must be constant, not affected by the trials of life. Job and his friends learned this lesson, amongst many others. At the end of the book, God restored Job's possessions and family (and even more).

Psalms:

The book of Psalms is simply a collection of Jewish songs which cover a variety of topics, including praise to the Lord, historical events, prayers for help, thanksgiving, and even prophecy. Many of the psalms were written by David, who wrote psalms during many events of his life such as his sin with Bathsheba (51), his deliverance from Saul (18), and others. Other authors include the sons of Korah (the Levite who rebelled in Numbers 16), Asaph (a director of singers in the temple), Solomon, and even Moses. Perhaps the most important psalms are those that prophesy about Jesus's coming, death, resurrection, and the establishment of His church (for good examples, see Psalms 2 and 22).

Proverbs:

Solomon, the wisest man to ever live, is the chief contributor to this book of wise sayings and instruction. The first 9 chapters of Proverbs contain a father's advice to his son, focusing specifically on the importance of seeking and finding wisdom while avoiding foolishness and the "adulteress." The next 20 chapters are a collection of proverbs given by Solomon regarding a variety of subjects, including laziness, wisdom, folly, children, materialism, and more. Chapter 30 was not written by Solomon, but rather by a man named Agur. The book ends with chapter 31, written by King Lemuel, which describes advice given to him by his mother and focuses particularly on the characteristics of a worthy woman.

Ecclesiastes:

Though the author is often debated, it seems most likely that the book of Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon. The author, who calls himself the "preacher," discusses at length the purpose of life, ultimately concluding that life, in and of itself, is pointless ("vanity"). He looks back on his life, his wisdom, his accomplishments, and his wealth, and calls them vanity, as nothing lasting was truly accomplished by any of it. He continues to discuss his various observations about his life and the lives of others before deciding that, without God, all life is vain. The author's final conclusion, after considering all that life has to offer, is that the only thing that can give meaning to life is God (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Song of Solomon:

The final book in this section of wisdom literature seems to have been written by Solomon. Though the exact meaning and purpose of the book are often debated, this song of love seems to record the tender (and, at times, explicit) words shared between a man and a woman. Some believe that this song is an allegory for the love that exists between Christ and the church (prophetic). Others hold that it is recording the love shared by newlyweds. Finally, the third prevalent view is that it is describing a man (Solomon) trying to woo a maiden who is in love with a humble shepherd, who is also in love with her.