



## **KINGS**

1 Kings 3-4; Psalm 1; 139:23-24, Proverbs 1; 12:1; Ecclesiastes 1; 8:15; 12:13; Song of Songs 8:6-7; Luke 2:40-52; 1 Corinthians 1:18-31, 3:18-23, James 3:13-1

### **WISDOM LITERATURE**

Every culture in the ancient Near East had its own wisdom literature. The wisdom literature of Israel was unique in that God is recognized as the source of all wisdom.

- Psalms: the hymnbook of the nation of Israel.
- Proverbs: a collection of short, pithy statements of wisdom
- Ecclesiastes: a wisdom book with a unique tone that feels somewhat negative—"everything is meaningless."
- Song of Songs: also called Song of Solomon - a collection of love poems about the longing and desire between a man and his wife.
- Job: a stand-alone story about a man who was "blameless"; contains much about divine wisdom, trying to understand God, and how to live in a godly way in the world.
- Lamentations: written by Jeremiah about the Fall of Jerusalem. Its poetic style fits both wisdom and prophetic genres.

James is often called the "wisdom literature of the New Testament".

## The Function of Wisdom Literature

Wisdom literature contains wisdom for the *best* way to live. You are much *more likely* to have a better life if you follow these principles.

While these books of wisdom literature are very much God's Word, it is important to make this distinction: (1) they are not the law, and (2) they are not promises or guarantees of success.

## The Wisdom of Solomon

As the wisest man who ever lived, Solomon wrote most of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament. Solomon asked for wisdom, to rule over the people well and "discern between good and evil."

## Wisdom Comes From God

*"The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge." Proverbs 1:7*

All wisdom literature is rooted in the concept of the "fear of the Lord" - a reverence of Him; a moral mindset acknowledging our place in the universe. He is God, we are not. We humble ourselves under God's word.

"To be wise, we must be humble. Humility is the beginning of wisdom."  
Augustine of Hippo

## Wisdom is Practical

Hebrew word for wisdom: *Khokhmah* which means much more than just intellectual knowledge, it means applied knowledge.

## PSALMS

Authorship: David, Moses (?), Solomon, Asaph

## Psalms as Wisdom

*"Blessed is the one who does not walk in step with the wicked... but whose delight is in the law of the Lord, who meditates on his law day and night. That person is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither – whatever they do prospers." Psalm 1:1-3*

## The Emotion of the Psalms

The Psalms give us the words and heart of praise, rejoicing, glorifying, worshipping, and honoring God.

*"The most valuable thing the Psalms do for me is to express the same delight in God which made David dance."*

*C.S. Lewis, Reflections on the Psalms*

John Calvin called the book of Psalms "an anatomy of all parts of the soul." The Psalms also give us permission to lament, to cry out to God in anger, to express doubt and fear, all while confessing trust in God and submitting to His will for our lives.

## **PROVERBS**

### Purpose

The purpose of Proverbs is declared from the beginning—to attain wisdom (Proverbs 1:1-5).

### The Fear of the Lord

*"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge." (Proverbs 1:7)*

WORD STUDY: The word "fear" as used in Proverbs 1:7 means an unconditional, reverential submission to God as Sovereign Lord.

### Wisdom vs. Folly

Wisdom literature, and especially in Proverbs, often contrasts wisdom and folly. The consistent theme is that the wise trust in what God says is right rather than their own understanding (Proverbs 3:5–6).

## **ECCLESIASTES**

### Author

The word *Ecclesiastes* is the Latin/Greek translation of the Hebrew word , meaning preacher/teacher (1:1).

The author of the book of Ecclesiastes is believed to be Solomon - in Chapter 1, he is referred to as "the Preacher" or "the Teacher," and the "son of David", "King over Israel in Jerusalem".

### Theme - Everything is Meaningless

Ecclesiastes is about man's search for meaning and purpose. Though it may seem negative a lot of the time ("everything is meaningless!"), the conclusion is positive, and consistent with the overall theme of all wisdom literature.

WORD STUDY: The Hebrew word *hevel* is used thirty-eight times in the book of Ecclesiastes, starting with this declarative statement right at the very beginning—"Hevel, hevel, everything is hevel!" (1:2). The word *hevel* literally means "a vapor" or "a breath."

*You do not know what tomorrow will bring. What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes. (James 4:14).*

### Ecclesiastes is a Balance to Proverbs

The book of Ecclesiastes (and also Job) create a balance to the book of Proverbs. Proverbs gives us straightforward statements of how to live a good life. Yet, as we have talked about, sometimes life throws us curveballs.

Jesus said: *God causes rain to fall on the just and the unjust (Matthew 5:45)*

## **SONG OF SONGS**

### Song of Songs as Wisdom

Song of Songs is sometimes called the Songs of Solomon, as we attribute Solomon as the writer. It is a collection of poetic and allegorical verses that explore themes of love, desire, and the relationship between a bride and bridegroom.

If wisdom literature teaches us *applied* wisdom/theology—how to live well in the world—then Song of Songs fits right in. The overarching theme of Song of Songs is how to enjoy love.

### Is It Allegory?

There have been scholars throughout church history who have interpreted Song of Songs as an allegory of the love between God and Israel, which later becomes the love between Christ and the church. However, most scholars today do not interpret it allegorically but interpret it in the same way other nations used ancient love poetry—as talking about human romantic love.

### Themes of Desire, Attraction, Intimacy

The inclusion of this book in the wisdom literature of the Bible shows us that human love, desire, and intimacy are a gift from God and are to be enjoyed and celebrated.

*"Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm, for love is strong as death,... it burns like a blazing fire... many waters cannot quench love, rivers cannot sweep it away..." (Song of Songs 8:6-7)*

### Imagery

The abundant garden imagery in the Song of Songs theologically points us back to the Garden of Eden, before the marriage relationship was tainted by the Fall of Adam & Eve. This intimacy describes the oneness of a man and wife in a marriage that is holy in God's eyes.

## THE WISDOM OF JESUS

### Jesus was even wiser than Solomon

*"The crowds were amazed at his teaching, because he taught as one who had authority, not as their teachers of the law." (Matthew 7:28-29)*

### Jesus is the Wisdom of God Incarnate

*"To those who are called, both Jews and Greeks, Christ the power of God and the wisdom of God." (1 Corinthians 1:24)*

In Proverbs, "Wisdom" was *personified* as a woman. But in Christ, wisdom actually was made incarnate!

### The Wisdom of God looks like Foolishness to the World

The wisdom of God and the wisdom of the world are opposing things. The wisdom of the world is foolishness to God (1 Corinthians 3:18-23) and the Gospel seems like foolishness to the "wise" of this world (1 Corinthians 1:18-30).

<b>WISDOM OF THE WORLD</b>	<b>WISDOM OF GOD</b>
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<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Accumulate Wealth</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Store up Treasures in Heaven (Mat. 6:20); It's more blessed to give than to receive (Acts 20:35)</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Look out for "number one"</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Whoever saves his life will lose it; (Mt 6:25) Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves (Phil 2:3)</li></ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Get even with your enemies</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you. (Mt 5:44)</li></ul>

Part of gaining wisdom is accepting correction

"A fool thinks himself to be wise, but a wise man knows himself to be a fool." - William Shakespeare

*"Whoever loves discipline loves knowledge, but whoever hates correction is stupid." Proverbs 12:1*

**GROWING IN WISDOM**

James

*"If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask God, who gives generously to all without reproach." James 1:5*