

Old Testament Survey

Session Fifteen

The Books of Psalms, Proverbs,
Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon

Introduction to Hebrew Poetry

- Job – aspiration for *mediation* by Christ **DONE**
- Psalms – aspiration for *communion* with Christ
- Proverbs – aspiration for *wisdom* in Christ
- Ecclesiastes – aspiration for ultimate *satisfaction*
- Song of Solomon – aspiration for *union* in love with Christ

Introduction to Hebrew Poetry (Cont.)

- Types of Hebrew Poetry
 - Lyric: intended to be accompanied by music.
 - Didactic: intended to teach people to observe and evaluate life.
 - Dramatic: conveys ideas and truth through dialogue and monologue.
- Parallelism as a dominant feature of Hebrew poetry
 - **Synonymous Parallelism** - different lines or members present the same thought in a slightly different form.
 - The heavens are telling of the glory of God;
 - And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands (Psa 19:1).
 - **Antithetic Parallelism** - presents a contrast or opposition of thought presented in the different sentences. This type of parallelism is especially abundant in Proverbs.
 - The tongue of the wise makes knowledge acceptable,
 - But the mouth of fools spouts folly (Prov 15:2).
 - **Synthetic Parallelism** - this is a correspondence and equality in structure, but not necessarily in words or sentences.
 - The LORD is my light and my salvation;
 - Whom shall I fear?
 - The LORD is the defense of my life;
 - Whom shall I dread? (Psa 27:1)

Two Types of Wisdom Literature

- Didactic: consists of wise sayings or proverbs that advocate all types of good habits, skills, and virtues.
 - Proverbs is filled with this kind of instruction.
 - Ecclesiastes also contains it, to a lesser degree.
- Interrogative: asks hard questions in seeking to understand God's ways and the meaning of life.
 - Job, Ecclesiastes, and the wisdom psalms exemplify this type.

Characteristics of Wisdom Literature

- Focuses on instruction for skillful living and emphasizes a lifestyle of godliness.
- Not so interested in theoretical matters, but instead is based on real experience and observation.
- Begins with the fear of the Lord and focuses on the result of a positive outcome.
- Seeks to pass on the insights gained from experience to the next generation, so that they might live successfully as well.
 - Then they said, “Come and let us devise plans against Jeremiah. Surely the law is not going to be lost to the priest, nor **counsel to the sage**, nor the *divine* word to the prophet! Come on and let us strike at him with *our* tongue, and let us give no heed to any of his words” (Jer 18:18)

The Book of Psalms – General

- The Book of Praises (תהלה) *Tehilim*
- Author: Numerous
 - David (73) - Shepherd, musician, king, warrior
 - Asaph (12) - a priest who headed the service of music
 - Sons of Korah (10) - a guild of singers and composers
 - Solomon (2) – Israel’s most powerful king
 - Moses (1) - prince, herdsman, deliverer
 - Heman (1) - a wise man
 - Ethan (1) - another wise man
 - Anonymous (50) - Some of these are attributed to Ezra
- Date & Setting.....

Date and Setting

- The Book of Psalms covers a wide range of time, from Moses (1410 B.C.) to the post-exilic community under Ezra and Nehemiah (430 B.C.). Most were written during the era of the united monarchy (1051-931 B.C.).
- As individual psalms were composed, some were used in Israel's corporate worship.
- A number of small collections were made first, then these were composed into the 5 books.
- Because the psalms were composed over such a wide span of time, it is important to pay attention to the superscriptions when interpreting them, but realize that they are *not* part of the Bible, were added by man, and are therefore not inspired and infallible.

Structure

- Book 1: Psalms 1 – 41
 - Book 2: Psalms 42 – 72
 - Book 3: Psalms 73 – 89
 - Book 4: Psalms 90 – 106
 - Book 5: Psalms 107 – 150
- Mostly David's
- Various authors
- Mostly anonymous

Note: the major periods of the organization of the psalms were most likely during the reigns of Kings David, Solomon, and Hezekiah, and the time of Ezra the scribe.

Types of Psalms

- **Royal**: refer to the Davidic king on the throne at the time of the psalm; later applied to Christ by the NT writers (e.g. Ps 2, 110)
- **Lament**: a cry to God for help because of trouble that either the psalmist or the nation finds itself in (e.g., Ps 60)
- **Testimonial or Praise**: gives honor to God for His character or for something He has done (e.g., Ps 30, 34).
- **Pilgrim** (aka Songs of Ascent): sung as the Israelites ascended to Jerusalem for the great annual feasts (e.g., Ps 120-134; 122).
- **Imprecatory**: request judgment on wicked men who are enemies of both the writer and God (e.g., Ps 58, 109).
- **Penitential**: express sorrow over sin; composed mostly by David (e.g., Ps 32, 51).
- **Wisdom**: contrast the lifestyles and destinies of the righteous and the wicked; seek to help the godly man view life from God's perspective (e.g., Ps 37, 49, 73).
- **Historical**: reflects upon God's dealings with the nation of Israel (e.g., Ps 78, 105, 106).
- **Nature**: gives praise to God for His handiwork and power as demonstrated in His creation (e.g., Ps 8, 19, 104).

The Book of Proverbs – General

- The Book of Proverbs (משלי) *Mashal*
- Author: Solomon, Agur, and King Lemuel
 - Similar to 1 Samuel, there is no direct claim to authorship in this book
- Date:
 - Solomon: 971-931 B.C.
 - Final edition appears to have been compiled in the days of Hezekiah (690 B.C.).

The Nature of Proverbs

- A proverb is a brief saying, a maxim, that is easily memorized and communicates much truth for daily living; it is truth expressed as to be caught by the mind and retained by the memory.
- These are observations on life that are *generally* true, not ironclad promises. Proverbs deals with generalities; Job and Ecclesiastes deal with the exceptions.

Four Assumptions of Solomon's Worldview

(from *Hear, My Son: Teaching & Learning in Proverbs 1 – 9* by Daniel J. Estes)

- **Creation:** The universe is Yahweh's creation.
 - Because Yahweh created the world in a purposeful way, the world is not random and meaningless. The order that God established when he made the world provides the ground for human significance in the world.
- **Order:** Yahweh is sovereignly controlling the world.
 - There is a predictable relationship between acts and consequences which holds true in most situations in life. This order encouraged the search by wise teachers to regulate life in accordance with the intrinsic order of the universe.
- **Rationality:** Yahweh's world is knowable, but also mysterious.
 - Because Yahweh created the world and he is sovereignly controlling it, the world is knowable, at least in part. The universe manifests intelligent design in its order. This fact is the foundation for human understanding in the cosmos.
- **Fear of Yahweh:** Humans must reverence Yahweh in their lives.
 - The fear of Yahweh is an implication of his creation of the universe. Because Yahweh alone fashioned the world, all of life proceeds from him. Yahweh, then, is the foundational authority for the whole ethical system of wisdom.

Major Topics in Proverbs

- God's Sovereignty and Judgment
- "Fear of the Lord"
- Wisdom vs. Foolishness/Godly vs. Wicked
- Pride vs Humility
- Speech
- Diligence
- Self-control
- Finances
- Relationships
 - Kings
 - Wives
 - Children/Child rearing
 - Neighbors
 - Friends

Structure

- The Purpose of Proverbs (1:1-7)
- A Father's Reflection on the Way of Wisdom (1:8 – 9:28)
 - Discourses on Wisdom (1:8 – 4:27)
 - Instructions on Marriage and Warnings Against Adultery (5 – 7)
 - Wisdom Personified; Lady Wisdom and Lady Folly (8 – 9)
- Proverbs of Solomon (10:1 – 22:16)
 - Proverbs Contrasting the Godly and the Wicked (10:1 – 15:33)
 - Proverbs Encouraging Godly Lives (16:1 – 22:16)
- Anonymous Wise Sayings (22:17 – 24:22)
- More Anonymous Wise Sayings (24:23-34)
- Proverbs of Solomon Copied by Hezekiah's Men (25:1 – 29:27)
 - Proverbs Regulating Relationships with Others (25:1 – 26:28)
 - Proverbs Regulating Various Activities (27:1 – 29:27)
- The Words of Agur (30:1-33)
- The Words of King Lemuel (31:1-31)
 - Wisdom for Leaders (31:1-9)
 - The Excellent Wife (31:10-31)

The Fool Family

- *How long, O naive ones, will you love simplicity? And scoffers delight themselves in scoffing, And fools hate knowledge? (Pro 1:22).*
- Levels of foolishness in Proverbs:
 - ❖ The “naïve” or “simpleton” - easily enticed and misled (1:32; 7:7; 9:6; 22:3; 27:12); believes everything, including bad counsel (14:15); lacks moral prudence (8:5; 19:25); needs discernment (21:11); but is capable of learning (9:4, 16). This is the “wide-eyed youth” who is headed for trouble unless he listens to the counsel of wisdom.
 - ❖ “Fool” – a moral and spiritual dullard, by his own choice. His problem is not mental, but spiritual. No desire for wisdom or correction.
 - ❖ “Scoffer” - cynical and defiant freethinker who ridicules the righteous and everything for which he stands.
 - *Strike a scoffer and the naive may become shrewd, But reprove one who has understanding and he will gain knowledge (Prov 19:25).*

The Book of Ecclesiastes – General

- The Book of the Preacher (קהלת) *Koheleth*
- Author:
 - was the “son of David, king in Jerusalem” (1:1) and “king over Israel in Jerusalem” (1:12)
 - his wisdom, wealth, and great building projects described in Ecclesiastes match well with Solomon’s life as described in 1 Kings 2–11. His role as one who “taught the people knowledge” and wrote “many proverbs” (12:9) also points to Solomon.
- Date:
 - It appears that Solomon wrote the Song of Songs in the earlier part of his reign, wrote and collected the wisdom sayings of Proverbs throughout his reign, then wrote Ecclesiastes in his later years, no later than 930 B.C.

Differing Approaches to the Book

- Solomon is a cynical pessimist. He is assuming a secular (or unbelieving) stance and looking at life apart from any acknowledgment of God.
- Solomon is a hedonist! This perspective focuses on the “enjoy life” commands that conclude major sections of the book (2:24-25; 3:12-13, 22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-9; 11:8-9).
- Solomon is a realist, a very *biblical* realist. He is looking at life “under the sun” (i.e. that which he can observe by sight) in light of the creation being “subjected to futility” (Rom 8:20; Gen 3:14-19) and offering his conclusions on how to deal with life accordingly.

Major Themes

- Futility of Life; “all is vanity,” “striving after wind”
- “under the sun”
- “fear God”
- Life’s inequities
 - frustrating nature of work
 - uselessness of pleasure
 - uncorrected injustice
 - the “unknowableness” of life
- Satisfaction
- Enjoyment and Judgment
- Death
- Wisdom (especially its limitations)
- God’s Sovereignty

Structure

- Title (1:1)
- Poem—A life of activity that appears wearisome (1:2-11:10)
 Solomon's Investigation & Conclusions
 Regarding Man's Activity
- Solomon's Investigation (1:12 – 6:9)
 - Introduction: The king and his investigation (1:12-18)
 - Investigation of Pleasure-Seeking (2:1-11)
 - Investigation of Wisdom and Folly (2:12-17)
 - Investigation of Labor and Rewards (2:18–6:9)
 - One has to leave them to another (2:18-26)
 - One cannot find the right time to act (3:1 – 4:6)
 - One often must work along (4:7-16)
 - One can easily lose all he acquires (5:1 – 6:9)

Structure (cont.)

- Solomon's Conclusions (6:10 – 11:6)
 - Introduction: The Problem of Not Knowing (6:10-12)
 - Man cannot always find which route is the most successful to take because his wisdom is limited (7:1 – 8:17)
 - On prosperity and adversity (7:1-14)
 - On justice and wickedness (7:15-24)
 - Investigation of Wisdom and Folly (7:25-29)
 - On the wise man and the king (8:1-17)
 - Man does not know what will come after him (9:1 – 11:6)
 - He knows he will die (9:1-3)
 - He has no knowledge in the grave (9:5-10)
 - He does not know his time of death (9:11-12)
 - He does not know what will happen (9:13 – 10:15)
 - He does not know what evil will come (10:16 – 11:2)
 - He does not know what good will come (11:3-6)
 - Man should enjoy life but not sin because judgment will come to all (11:7 – 12:8)

Structure (cont.)

- Epilogue (12:9-14)
- The end of the investigation, when one has come to realize the effects of the curse, and the limitations of wisdom:

“Fear God and keep His commandments.”

Solomon’s Conclusions on How to Deal with Life

- 1:12 – 2:26: Don’t look for the *answer* to life in pleasure.
 - If you make pleasure your goal in life, you will be disappointed. Joy is important, but you must be willing to wait for God to give it (2:24-26). Receive it from the hand of God.
- 3:1-15: Don’t expect to know the future.
 - God has put a sense of both history and the future into the heart of every man. Rest in the fact that though God has appointed a time for everything, you cannot know what will come.
- 3:16-22; 8:10-15: Don’t expect fairness in this life.
 - Fairness does not characterize this life; you can’t fix everything. Enjoy life in spite of its difficulties.
- 5:10-19: Don’t try to find satisfaction in wealth or in what wealth can accomplish.
 - There is nothing wrong with wealth; it, too, is a gift from God. But it is wrong to make wealth the ultimate goal. Solomon addresses the impact that our possessions have on us, the danger of materialism.
- 9:1-10: Don’t expect enjoyment at all times.
 - You don’t know what is going to happen. There will certainly be times when you will not enjoy life; nevertheless, enjoy life!

Enjoy life because your satisfaction comes from the hand of God in a sin cursed world.

Solomon's Balance of Enjoyment with Judgment

- Solomon is very concerned about the *outcome* of all his activity (1:3; 2:22; 3:9).
- God rewards obedience, God punishes disobedience. This is the way God has designed the universe. . . but what about Job?
 - The apparent exceptions to this rule are by God's sovereign will.
- Believe that God has appointed a time in which to judge you (3:17).
 - It is appropriate to keep in mind, "I will have to stand before God and give an account."
- Don't let the delayed nature of judgment serve as an excuse to disobey (8:11-12).
- Control the root of disobedience within you with the thought of judgment.
 - Let the certainty of future judgment balance your enjoyment of life (11:9).

The Book of Song of Solomon – General

- The Song of Songs (שִׁיר הַשִּׁירִים) *Shir ha Shirim*
- Author:
 - Solomon’s “fame was *known* in all the surrounding nations. He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005.” (1 Kings 4:31-32)
- Date:
 - It must have been written sometime between, 970 and 931 B.C.

Major Interpretive Approaches

- Allegorical
 - OT: Husband = Yahweh, Bride = Israel
 - NT: Husband = Christ, Bride = Church
- Typological – a historical story which foreshadowed Christ and His bride, the Church. Problem: nothing in the NT ties Solomon and his wife with Christ and the church.
- Natural or Literal – takes this song in its natural, normal sense and sees it as celebrating the joy of God-ordained, marital love (cf. Proverbs 5:18-19; Ecclesiastes 9:9).

Major Themes

- Three main characters
 - The Bride (Shulamite)
 - The King (Solomon)
 - A Chorus (Daughters of Jerusalem)
- Physical attraction and love
- Joy
- Sexual purity
- Commitment in marriage

Structure

- | | |
|---|------------|
| • Title | 1:1 |
| • Beginning of Love | 1:2 – 5:1 |
| – Wedding Day Reflections | 1:2 – 2:7 |
| • Shulamite preparing for wedding feast | 1:2-8 |
| • At the wedding feast | 1:9-14 |
| • In the bridal chamber | 1:15 – 2:7 |
| – Courtship Period Reflections | 2:8 – 3:5 |
| • A springtime visit | 2:8-17 |
| • Dream of separation | 3:1-5 |
| – Marital Union Reflections | 3:6 – 5:1 |
| • The wedding procession | 3:6-11 |
| • The wedding night | 4:1 – 5:1 |

Structure (cont.)

- Broadening of Love 5:2 – 8:14
 - Struggling in Love 5:2 – 7:10
 - Shulamit’s dream of love refused 5:2-7
 - Bridegroom’s handsomeness praised 5:8 – 6:3
 - Bride’s beauty is praised 6:4 – 7:10
 - Growing in Love 7:11 – 8:14
 - Shulamite’s desire to visit home 7:11 – 8:4
 - Journey to the country 8:5-7
 - At Shulamite’s country home 8:8-14

Structure (alt.)

- The Virgin and the Vineyard 1:1 – 2:7
- The Damsel and the Dream 2:8 – 3:5
- The Queen and the Quest 3:6 – 5:1
- Recollection and Romance 5:2 – 6:9
- Romance and Reality 6:10 – 8:4
- The Homestead and the Honeymoon 8:5-14

Old Testament Survey

End Session Fifteen

Question Time!