

BIBLE OUTLINE: WISDOM WRITINGS

BIBLE OUTLINE OVERVIEW

- The Bible is a very large collection of writings that can be confusing to read. We have created these outlines as way to give you an overview of each section of the Bible and to remind each reader that the Bible is a story that points to God and is fulfilled in Christ.

HEBREW POETRY

- Hebrew Poetry makes up most of the Wisdom Writings and it is built upon a form of repeated or parallel thoughts. Sometimes these thoughts run together, which is called synonymous parallelism. Sometimes the lines are at odds with one another. This is called antithetical parallelism. It is important to read poetry in its whole so that we may receive the whole message of wisdom.
- Hebrew Poetry also uses other poetic devices that we may not see as we read the Bible in English. In the original Hebrew, styles such as alliteration, assonance, acrostic, meter, and paronomasia (play on words) all impact our understanding of the wisdom writings.

WISDOM WRITINGS

- In the Old Testament, there is a collection of poetic writings known as the “Wisdom Writings.” These wisdom books are made up of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.
- These writings include various forms of poetry, songs, proverbial phrases, and narratives that direct God’s people to seek the wisdom of God. Each type of wisdom writing invites the reader to live in the “fear of the Lord”. This important phrase is a repeated theme throughout the wisdom writings and calls for the people of God to live with the understanding that God is God and we are not. Wisdom ultimately comes from knowing God is the source of wisdom, and as we live in relational and covenant connection with Him and His people, we grow in wisdom.

WHAT IS WISDOM?

- The whole point of the wisdom writings is to lead the people of God to greater awareness and reception of God’s wisdom, so that they may understand life and live well. Wisdom is broken into different forms that reveal these deeper meanings. The categories of wisdom are:
 - Art
 - Knowledge
 - Insights about People and Relationships
 - Reverence for God
- Although the wisdom writings are in the Old Testament, the whole Bible is filled with wisdom that leads readers to discipline, discretion, learning, discernment, understanding, and knowledge.

SHARED WISDOM

In Israel, families would share wisdom statements, proverbs, phrases, songs, and other forms of wisdom as a pillar of raising their children. Wisdom was taught at the city gates from teachers and even the priests and prophets “professionally” explained wisdom to their people. Ultimately, wisdom was central and important to God’s people.

HOW TO READ WISDOM WRITINGS

Wisdom books are different from the previous Old Testament books we have covered. They are filled with proverbs, songs, and stories that are aimed at imparting wisdom to the readers.

Because of the different writing styles, we suggest the following interpretation tools:

- Fear of the Lord - anchor everything you read in knowing God is God and we need Him as our source of wisdom and understanding.
- Job - remember that Job is an epic poem and most of the book is made up of dialogue. We should not base theological beliefs on one or two phrases, but we should read the story in its entirety, asking God for wisdom, and keeping in mind that the story has wisdom to impart to us.
- Psalms - this hymnbook of God’s people shows a blueprint of worship, lament, and other forms of praise. It is important to read the Psalms, understanding the context and style of song that is presented.
- Proverbs - the book of Proverbs is not so much about promises as it is about instructions to help people learn moral and ethical principles. Don’t try to read these through the lens of our current context, but remember these proverbs are written in a different time, and the meaning must be understood from then.

HOW TO READ CONT.

- Ecclesiastes - although this wisdom writing is filled with a negative attitude, the underlying message is about how God is the only one who can bring about change to our human condition. We highly suggest reading ALL of this book to better understand its meaning.
- Song of Songs - this wisdom writing is an exchange of romantic poetry between two lovers. As tempting as it may be to romanticize this love story between God and humanity, we must remember its context.

WISDOM QUESTIONS AND PRAYERS

The Wisdom Writings present a number of LARGE questions for God’s people to consider. We may read Job and ask questions about why evil happens in our world and why bad things happen to good people. We may read Ecclesiastes and feel empty and hopeless. We may read throughout the wisdom writings and leave with more questions than answers. The Good News is that God is our source of Wisdom and invites us through His Spirit and Word to receive that wisdom. As you read and have questions, we suggest you to consider the following:

- Read with others. The Bible was written to be read in community and we will find support together.
- Pray. James wrote, “If any of you lacks wisdom, they should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to them (Jms. 1:5).” With your questions, desires, and next steps, ask God through prayer. Listen to His voice. Rest in His Presence in the silence. Wisdom starts with God, and He is our ultimate source of wisdom.
- Consult Commentaries. Commentaries are highly important for understanding the difficult writings we read. This is especially important for wisdom writings that may leave us confused and asking many questions.
- Don’t Give Up! God is with us and in due time, His wisdom will meet us and fill us.

JOB OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

Job is the first of the wisdom writings, and many scholars consider it the oldest Biblical writing we have. Job is a poem and is filled with many speeches, dialogues, and narrative writings that detail the story of a righteous man named Job who loses his family and wealth at the hand of the enemy. This is followed by speeches and dialogues between Job and his friends, and Job and God. Ultimately, the book ends with a concluding dialogue between God and Job in which Job repents of his lack of wisdom, commits to trust in the mystery of God's work, and then God restores double Job's wealth, and all of his family are restored as well. This book leaves us with many questions, but invites us to seek God as the only source of Wisdom and to trust in God's redemption and restoration.

The content of Job can be broken into the following parts:

- Prologue - 1:1-2:13
- Job's Monologue - 3:1-26
- Speeches - 4:1-27:23
- Wisdom Poem - 28:1-28
- Job's Final Response - 29:1-31:40
- Elihu's Speech - 32:1-37:24
- God's Response - 38:1-42:6
- Epilogue - 42:7-17

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blessing, and Redeemer of Creation
- Job - the book of Job opens with a description of a wealthy, righteous man named Job. He feared God, shunned evil, and lived a holy life.
- The Satan - the story quickly shifts to a scene of angels before God, and the Satan is one of these angels. God calls Satan's attention to Job's righteousness, and Satan quickly says this is only because God has blessed him and that if his wealth was taken, he would curse God. God allows Satan to take away all that Job had, which Satan does by killing Job's children and taking his livestock and wealth. Job's response is still praise, and so Satan tells God if Job experienced pain and suffering, then he would curse God. God allows Satan to do this, but Job still does not curse God. This all sets up the series of speeches and responses from Job, his friends, and God.
- Eliphaz - this mystical friend tells Job that God is mysterious and all of humanity must submit to God's judgment because none of us can be righteous before God. He concludes by declaring that God will restore all who humbly repent.
- Bildad - this friend of Job focused on God's justice and told Job he needed to repent for his sin, and that because he hadn't, that was the reason he was suffering.
- Zophar - this friend of Job challenged Job's innocence and righteousness, and told Job the judgment he was receiving was much less than he deserved. He also encouraged Job to repent to experience God's restoration.
- Elihu - this man challenged Job's innocence as well, but anchors his speech in detailing that God can send punishment on good or evil people for instruction and calling sinners to Him. He says that all who turn to God, God will restore.
- Job's Responses - Job responds to each speech with his own speeches. These are filled with complaints, pleadings for his friends not to turn against him, desires to speak directly to God in appeal of the suffering, lament of his own life and losses, and praise to God. He lamented and even speaks negatively (curses) his own life, but never curses God.
- God's Response - God's response to Job's quarrels and questions is not to answer them, but to show him the immense power and wisdom of God through creation. Ultimately, this points to God's infinite nature to create, restore, and reign in perfect justice. This encounter leads Job to respond with repentance and humility, and Job is once again blessed by God's favor.

PSALMS OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

Psalms is the second of the wisdom writings and is a book filled with songs, hymns, and poetry for God's people. The Psalms is titled from the Hebrew word for "songs of praise" and consist of five (like the Torah) books or collections of songs. The Psalms were a collection of writings given to the people of God to help them remember God, God's Law, God's covenants, and the hopeful anticipation of the coming Messiah. These wisdom writings included a myriad of song types, but were holistically unified in the calling for the people of God to worship in every season as they remembered God, celebrated His faithfulness, and participated in His covenant love.

The content of Psalms can be broken into the following parts:

- 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

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blesser, and Redeemer of Creation
- Psalm Writers - David, Asaph, Sons of Korah, and others are attributed with writing the Psalms.
- Psalm Types - The book of Psalms is filled with a wide diversity of Psalm types. They consist of:
 - Hymns - These Psalms invite the people to praise God for any number of reasons.
 - Laments - These Psalms were cries to God for help. Often, these songs included deep emotional descriptions of defeat, suffering, and pain. Although agony is involved in laments, they are not disconnected from hope in God.
 - Thanksgiving - These types of Psalms were expressions of gratitude to God. They include both individual and communal-focused songs, and the community Psalms include call-and-response phrases to sing and read.
 - Royal - These Psalms are focused on earthly monarchs and on the Kingship of Yahweh.
 - Zion - These Psalms give praise to God for dwelling in Jerusalem and the promise of God's defense of this city, often referred to as "Zion."
 - Wisdom - These Psalms are songs, but include language that is more similar to that of the Proverbs. Wisdom Psalms express lessons on life, God's justice, and hope in God.
 - Trust - These Psalms mainly focus on how the people of God can trust in God. These songs feel like promises about who God is, what God has done, what God graciously gives, and how He impacts our lives.
 - Imprecatory - These Psalms call for judgment on the enemies of God and God's people.
 - Remembrance - These Psalms describe the story of God, detail God's character and attributes, and explain the people of God's identity. They are invitations to remember through song and praise.
 - Praise - These Psalms often include the phrase "HALLELUJAH" which is translated as "Praise the Lord".
- Types of Worship - The book of Psalms is filled with different types of worship that provide deeper understanding and application of the songs. These include:
 - **Selah** - This Hebrew word appears sporadically throughout the Psalms, and many scholars believe it marks a pause in the song and/or music. It can be seen as an intentional place of rest within the Psalms. **Yadah** - to lift one's hand in praise. **Tehillah** - to praise loudly. **Barak** - to kneel, bow, or give reverence through adoration. **Halal** - to praise and boast in. **Towdah** - to worship with extended hands in surrender and thanksgiving. **Zamar** - to sing with instruments and music. **Shabach** - to proclaim worship with a loud, unashamed voice.

PROVERBS OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

Proverbs is the third of the wisdom writings. The book is attributed to King Solomon, Agur, King Lemuel, and others known as “The Wise.” This collection of proverbs, sorted into 5 books (like the Torah), was given to call the people of God to wisdom so that they could remember God and live according to His ways. There are foolish characters and wise characters depicted, with the invitation being for the people of God to pursue God’s wisdom and live wisely. These are not literal statements about what will or will not happen if we do things a certain way, but proverbial principles to base our pursuit of God and wisdom on.

The content of Leviticus can be broken into the following parts:

- The Way of Wisdom - 1:1-9:18
- Proverbs of Solomon and The Wise - 10:1-29:27
- Closing Proverbs - 30:1-31:31

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blesser, and Redeemer of Creation
- Fear of the Lord - The fear of the Lord is the foundation of wisdom. This term points to a reverence, respect, and dependency upon God for wisdom, life, and righteousness.
- Righteousness - The terms righteous and righteousness are repeatedly used in Proverbs. This word points to right standing with God and others, and it was a gift God extended to His people through living out specific moral obligations He detailed throughout the Law and the story of God. Ultimately, righteousness is explained as the way in which God’s justice, compassion, mercy, and good life are experienced individually and communally. The Proverbs details ways in which the people of God were invited to embrace and express this righteousness. The book of Proverbs also explains the life of the righteous through portraying specific characters. They are:
 - The Wise - these people are described as those who fear God, seek instruction, discern, avoid immorality/foolishness/sin, and pursue wisdom through prudence, learning, and fulfilling the basic moral obligations of righteousness.
 - Lady Wisdom - this personified representative of God’s wisdom invites people to choose her path of wisdom and righteousness, which ultimately leads to life. Some would even attribute the woman described in Proverbs 31 as a continued definition of what Lady Wisdom and a wise and righteous person look like.
- Wickedness - In contrast to righteousness, wickedness is marked by those who are immoral, blatantly sinning, and violating the social and moral obligations of righteousness. In the book of Proverbs, wickedness and the way of the wicked are regularly attributed to specific actions and characters that represent those actions. They are:
 - The Fool (Simple, Naive) - these people are described as those who oppose the covenant and ways of God. They despise correction, are quick to anger, do not listen to wisdom or instruction, and act without wise thought, often leading to destruction, wickedness, division, and death.
 - Lady Folly (The Adulteress) - this personified representative of foolishness is symbolized through seduction that lures people away from righteousness and wisdom into the ways of foolishness and wickedness.
 - The Scoffer - Scoffers are those who symbolize people who refuse to listen to correction and wisdom, often mocking the wise voices and ways around them.
 - The Sluggard - Sluggards are those described as lazy, procrastinators, and avoids of effort and work. These actions, or inactions, often lead them to poverty, pain, and struggle.
 - The False Witness/Untruthful - This group of fools is described as people who flee from the truth, are unfaithful, and bear false witness.

ECCLESIASTES OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

Ecclesiastes is one of the wisdom writings. The author wrote this book to show that all things were vanity compared to the fear of the Lord. The writings reveal all is “hevel” or smoke/fleeting, not out of hopelessness, but rather out of an understanding that our main call is not to have all the understanding or figure everything out, but to live with the truth and wisdom that God is God and we are not. Our call is to fear God and do what He calls us to because ultimately, He knows best and we can trust in that reality.

The content of Ecclesiastes can be broken into the following parts:

- Prologue - 1:1-11
- Futility and Meaning in Life - 1:12-11:6
- Epilogue - 11:7-12:14

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blesser, and Redeemer of Creation
- The Teacher - the author of Ecclesiastes refers to themself as “The Teacher.” Some scholars believe this to be King Solomon, while others see writing and language consistent with a person who was not royalty. Either way, the Teacher presents their perspective on the meaninglessness of life and the goal of seeking wisdom that is anchored in a healthy fear of the Lord.
- “Hevel” - this Hebrew word is the first word of Ecclesiastes and reveals the ultimate message for the Teacher: “everything is meaningless.” The theme and meaning of “Hevel” reveal to the reader that there is no rhyme or reason to fully comprehend everything in our lives. Good things happen to both the righteous and wicked. Bad things happen to the wise and the evil. Those who work hard may still lose everything, and even be consumed by an unending desire for more wealth. The Teacher speaks about a number of difficult topics, such as justice, wealth, timing, and death. In all these matters, the Teacher makes it clear that we will never understand all of these things, but one thing we can choose to do is enjoy life as a gift from God, fear God, and keep His commandments. In these postures, we may still experience the “hevel” of life, but at least we are anchoring ourselves in the wisdom of God that invites us to find joy in life. This is summarized in the Teacher’s final words:
 - “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.” - Ecc. 12:13-14

SONG OF SONGS OVERVIEW AND OUTLINE

Song of Songs is the last of the wisdom writings. The title of this book comes from the Hebrew phrase, “the greatest song,” and the content of this song is an exchange of romantic poetry between two lovers. One of the lovers is often described as King Solomon, and even some would attribute the whole book to his wisdom writing style. No matter who authored it, the Song of Songs expresses a collection of love songs and invites the reader to see the literal beauty of the marital covenant and the joy and pleasure God has created humanity to share in that covenant. It also portrays a symbolic and metaphoric understanding of God’s love for His people (as a pursuer). However, this is not to be exaggerated for an overly romantic love, but to be understood through the lens of Jesus’ sacrificial love.

The content of Song of Songs is a collection of disconnected poems that, unfortunately, cannot be broken into a traditional outline. Therefore, the goal should be to read it in its entirety as it is presented.

Key Characters, Themes, Terms, Locations, and Stories:

- God the Creator, Blessing, and Redeemer of Creation
- Song of Songs includes many repetitive themes, images, and word pictures, including:
 - Gardens
 - Vineyards
 - Animals
 - Perfumes
 - Spices
 - Trees
- It is important to recognize the symbolism of these images as metaphors that aid the two lovers in expressing their romance to one another. It is also highly important that we recognize some of these images are sexually suggestive. It would be beneficial to see these within the context of marriage and to NOT imply them towards our relationship with God or others outside of marriage.
- “HE” - this character is the husband of the other main character, “SHE” or “THE SHULAMITE”. Many believe this one to be King Solomon. Through poetry, he and his lover exchange songs to one another detailing their passions and desires.
- “SHE” - this character is the wife of the husband. This Shulamite bride expresses her desire to her beloved through poems and songs.
- “FRIENDS” - this choir of singers aids both the husband and wife in pursuing one another, communicating, and finding each other. They reveal themselves to be the wife’s brothers in chapter 8.
- Jerusalem - the scenes shift from both lovers speaking to their poems explaining their location in the streets of Jerusalem. This implies their central setting in the city of David and the connection to the King, the temple, and the life of the people of God.
- Love - these romance poems reveal a love that is very sensual and desirous. It is important to recognize and celebrate this love for what it is: a romantic love. It is also important to distinguish that love from a sacrificial love revealed fully in Christ Jesus. We highly suggest not exaggerating the love of Song of Songs into an overly romanticized love between Christ and His Church. Rather, celebrate the love given between two people in marriage and receive the wisdom from these writings calling for the people of God to respect and honor that covenant, while prioritizing God and His wisdom as our source to understand this all.

BIBLE RESOURCES

You will find that there are many challenging passages to understand and apply to your life in Christ. We suggest the following resources to aid your study and application of Scripture.

- **Scripture Reading Practices:**

- SOAP
- Discovery Bible Study
- Lectio Divina
- Communal Reading of Scripture

- **Websites:**

- The Bible Project
- Bible Gateway

- **Commentaries:**

- New Beacon Bible Commentaries
- Word Biblical Commentaries
- Anchor Bible Commentaries

- **Books:**

- *How to Read the Bible for All It's Worth* by Fee and Stuart
- *Seven Things I Wish Christians Knew About the Bible* by Bird
- *Discovering the Old Testament* by Alex Varughese
- *Reading the Pentateuch* by John McDermott
- *Left of Matthew* by Norman Hubbard
- *Bruce and Stan's Guide to the Bible* by Bruce Bickel and Stan Jantz
- *Exploring the Old Testament: A Guide to the Psalms & Wisdom Literature* by Ernest Lucas