

# **Psalms and Wisdom Literature-**

## **Week 3**

### **Psalms**

The Greek word is “psalmos,” from the Hebrew word meaning “to pluck;” i.e., taking hold of the strings of an instrument with the fingers. Psalms were originally composed to be accompanied by a stringed instrument. “Psalms are songs for the lyre, and therefore lyric poems in the strictest sense.” (Delitzsch, Psalms, Vol. I, p. 7)

“The most valuable thing the Psalms do for me is to express the same delight in God which made David dance.”- C. S. Lewis

## **Notes important for understanding the Psalms**

1. It is written in poetic emotive language- ex. Might not be useful for a theology on hell
2. It was originally musical- think about what could happen if we read modern worship songs like history
3. Vocabulary of poetry is metaphorical and shouldn't then be taken too literally
4. The writers of the psalms often used repetition and play on words or sounds to make their points which is difficult (near impossible) to translate

**Look at Psalm 119- what is unusual about this Psalm?**

## **Parallelism (important for Prov. as well)**

**Synonymous parallelism**- same thought repeated- Num 6:24-26, Psalm 103:1

**Synthetic parallelism**- second statement builds on the first statement or completes the first statement- Prov 4:23, or Psalm 103:2-5

**Antithetical parallelism**- two statements are contrasted with each other - Prov 12:15 or 15:1

**Find an example of one of these parallelisms and share it with your table... we will then hear a few examples from the whole room**

## **The Arrangement Of The Psalms**

The Psalms were originally collected into five **“books”**

Book I (Ps 1-41), Book II (Ps 42-72), Book III (Ps 73-89), Book IV (Ps 90-106), Book V (Ps 107-150)

## **The Authors Of The Psalms- we don't know when they were added...**

**David** – He wrote 73 of the psalms.

**Asaph** - music director (**1 Chr 16:1-7**). He wrote 12 psalms.

**The Sons of Korah** - Levites who served in the Temple (**1 Chr 26:1-19**). Wrote 12 psalms.

**Solomon** - At least 2 psalms are attributed to him (**Psa 72, 127**). That he wrote many more is stated in **1 Kin 4:29-32**.

**Moses** – He wrote Psalm 90 (considered to be the oldest in the Psalter).

**Heman** - known as “the singer” (**1 Chr 6:33**). He wrote Psalm 88.

**Ethan** - A companion with Asaph and Heman in the Temple worship (**1 Chr 15:19**). He wrote Psalm 89.

**Anonymous** - The authorship of 48 of the psalms is unknown.

**Question- The authorship sometimes affects the meaning- Psalm 90- what does it add if Moses wrote this?**

## **Types of Psalms**

Psalms of Praise/ Hymns- Psalm 8:1, 150:6, 103, 148- Liturgical - Responsive readings

Thanksgiving Psalms- Psalm 19, 30, 119, 100

Wisdom psalms- Psalm 1:1-4- or didactic

Historical - Psalm 78, 105, 106, 135, 136

Messianic Psalms- Psalm 110 is most quoted in NT, Psalm 2:1-7, 10-12; Psalm 22:1, 12-18; 110

Royal or Enthronement Psalms- Kingship-  
Royal- Psalm 2, 18, 20, 21, 45, 72, 101, 110, 144;  
Enthronement psalms- 24, 29, 47, 93, 95-99

Songs of Zion- 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122

Penitential Psalms- Psalm 51:1-3

Laments- this is the largest category in the Psalms- 60 or more Psalms are in this category – Psalm 102:1-8, 88, 42:1-6 and 9.

Imprecatory Psalms- Psalm 139:21, 35, 69, 109, 137:7-9, 58:6-8

**Read Psalm 137:7-9- What do we do with this?**

What category would you place the following Psalms into? (22, 145, 110, 40, 1, 137)

# Wisdom Literature

Wisdom Literature- Psalms, Proverbs, Job... and Song of Solomon, Ecclesiastes- focuses on love of wisdom

## What is Wisdom?

Wisdom defined- hear it described from Proverbs itself...

**Proverbs 1:1-7**

**Proverbs 2:1-5**

Why are these books important enough to be in the canon? What about other books of wise sayings?

Philosophy means 'love of wisdom'... but it is very different from what the Hebrews meant by wisdom... How would you describe the difference? (R. C. Sproul)

# Proverbs

Contrast between life of the fool and the wise-  
over and over- understand what it means to be  
foolish in Proverbs

Consider the English proverbs- “look before you  
leap”, or “a stitch in time saves nine.” ... easy to  
remember, not always true... instead they point  
to truths...

Often visual and even funny- Proverbs 11:22

Often they need careful reflection- Proverbs  
24:27

Law- a command you must always obey

Promise- A guarantee that is always true

Proverb- a catchy observation about the way  
things generally are

Which category do the following fall into (law,  
promise, or proverb)?- Deut 6:5, Romans 8:37-  
39, Proverbs 10:4, 1 John 1:9, Exodus 20:13,  
Proverbs 26:4

Consider these modern proverbs...

'Look before you leap' vs. 'He who hesitates is lost'

'Opposites attract' vs. 'Birds of a feather flock together'

'Absence makes the heart grow fonder' vs. 'Out of sight, out of mind'

'Many hands make light work' vs. 'Too many cooks spoil the soup'

'You have to keep your eye on the ball' vs. 'A watched pot never boils'

## **A few things to keep in mind when reading Proverbs**

1. Book of 'Promises from the Bible' should not include Proverbs
2. Proverbs should be read in balance with the rest of scripture and even other Proverbs
3. Often we need cultural reference to properly understand proverbs
4. Proverbs are geared for a person to live in a humble godly way

## Part 2

### Job

Why is there suffering in this world? Why would a perfect, all-powerful God allow suffering?

Possibly the earliest book written.

Structure- fascinating look into heaven, Job devastated, ages of arguments back and forth, and then God shows up

In God's response there is no explanation... God doesn't even mention Job's suffering... God's response is about who he is

Contrast- Proverbs 3:7-8, 8:17-21, with Job 8:5-7- We know that Job's friends were wrong... does that make Proverbs wrong?

## **Solomon**

Writings of Solomon- wisest man that ever lived- read 1 Kings 3:9 and 1 Kings 4:29-34... downfall 10:23- 11:4

Proverbs- 1vs1- “The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:”- obviously a collection with some other peoples writing included especially toward the end- such as at the start of chapter 30 and 31

Ecclesiastes- In verse one we read- “The words of the Teacher, son of David, king of Jerusalem:”- Solomon

Song of Songs- In verse one we read- “Solomon’s Song of Songs”

## **Ecclesiastes**

On the whole the book seems to be written as that of Solomon... in the description of his wisdom, wealth, that as 'son of David, king in Jerusalem'

This book is difficult to understand, Cyclical view of life

Vanity- refers to that which is done in vain

Ecc 12:1-2, 12:13-14

### **Quote from Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart-**

"The bulk of the book, everything but these two final verses, represents a brilliant, artful argument for the way one would look at life- if God did not play a direct, intervening role in life and if there were no life after death... The book thus serves as a reverse apologetic for cynical wisdom; it drives its readers to look further because the answers that the "Teacher" of Ecclesiastes gives are so discouraging."

What might the writer of Ecclesiastes have to say to Job?
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## Song of Songs

Focus is on who to love and how to love... which are critical questions of life.

Two key questions-

1. Is this a drama or a collection of love poems?
2. Should this book be read as an allegory?

Look at 4:1-5- What do you make of the symbolism there?
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'Your eyes... are doves'

'Your hair is like a flock of goats'- way that a flock of goats would rush down a hill

'Your temples... are like the halves of a pomegranate'- symmetrical

'Your neck is like the tower of David'- tall and strong