

Promised Land 2 Study and Discussion Questions

Lesson Six: Books of Poetry and Wisdom Literature –

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs

Read Job 1-3 and 38-42. The book of Job is an excellent example of reflective wisdom literature. Reflective wisdom literature raises questions about the problems of human existence and is either presented in dialogue (conversation between two or more persons) or monologue (a single individual speaking). The main body of Job, chapters 4-37, is classic, reflective wisdom literature in dialogue.

- 1) What subject matter is addressed in the book of Job, and also in James 1:12 and 1 Peter 1:3-7 (which give excellent commentaries on Job's situation)? **Job is a reflection on suffering: faith in suffering, how one ought to cope with suffering, and whether or not the innocent suffer. It also reflects the ideas that true faith perseveres and that the invisible spiritual world is real and impacts our lives. 1 Peter says our trials (suffering) prove our faith to be genuine. James says that trials exist to test our faith and we will be rewarded if we persevere. Both James and Peter address the subject of the authenticity of faith, which was the issue Satan brought to God about Job: would Job's faith endure when he was sorely tested?**
- 2) In chapters 4-37, Job's friends argue that he cannot be as innocent as he maintains, since God does not allow the righteous to suffer. In chapter 42, the Lord condemns Job's friends for speaking foolishly. With this in mind, how do you think you can best help a Christian who is suffering innocently (consider how you have been best helped by others when you have suffered)? **Often, loving acts of service are more helpful to a person who is suffering than anything we might say. If a loving relationship is already established, reminding the person that the Lord is concerned about their trouble, that Jesus understands all their suffering, and that their suffering will not last forever may be encouraging. A hurting person is most helped by someone who has encountered a similar kind of suffering, even by sitting in silence with them, allowing the hurting person the opportunity to talk if they choose, and offering practical advice with regard to the situation, if it is asked for.**
- 3) Try to summarize God's answer to Job in chapters 38-41 by listing at least three of the truths He reveals. Then tell how you can apply one of these truths to a situation you face today. **Some of the truths about God contained in Job 38-41 are: 1) True understanding of suffering lies with God alone; 2) only God knows everything; 3) only God can control everything; 4) only God is righteous to judge; 5) only God has the right to do all He pleases; and 6) insight and understanding of the deep questions of life belong to Him alone.**
Personal sharing

Like Job, the book of Ecclesiastes is reflective wisdom literature (speculating about the problems of human experience). While Job is presented in dialogue, Ecclesiastes is in monologue. Many parts of Ecclesiastes reflect a humanistic point of view, evidenced by the repeated phrase "under the sun."

- 4) According to Ecclesiastes 1:2 and 12:8, what is the theme of the book? **The theme of the book is the meaningless, vanity, or puzzle of life.**
- 5) Skim through as much of the book as time permits you. The Biblical writer included contrasting ideas. For example, compare Ecclesiastes 2:17 and 4:4 with verses like 3:14, 5:7 and 12:13. What conclusion do you think we are meant to draw by these contrasts? **The writer says that life "under the sun" is meaningless. He also says that everything that belongs to God endures forever and that fearing and standing in awe of Him are meaningful activities. By presenting these contrasting points of view, it seems the writer intended for us to conclude that the only real meaning to be found in life is found in the life of faith.**
- 6) Read Ephesians 1:3-2:10. Describe the perspective on life that a person who is "in Christ" should have, as opposed to the disillusionment a person experiences whose sole perspective is found "under the sun" (you may find descriptive words in the Ephesians passage to help you). **The believer knows how precious they are to God (2:4), so precious that they were uniquely "chosen before the creation of the world" (1:4). They**

are chosen for a high calling (holiness and blamelessness, 1:4). This high calling brings meaning to our lives. Furthermore, in His great love, the Lord predestined us for adoption through Christ into His family (1:5). He wants us to experience the freedom and joy of knowing we have been redeemed and forgiven by Him (1:7). He treasures us enough to share the mysteries of His will with us (1:9). He has sealed us with His Holy Spirit (1:13). The fact that God lives within us is more than enough to make life satisfying, yet His sealing gives us the further delight and guarantee of a hope that is certain: eternal life with Him (1:14)! He also desires to give us wisdom and understanding, so that we may know Him and our rich inheritance in Him better (1:17-18). He wants us to know the greatness of the power that He has made available to us (1:19-20). He has exalted us to a position in the heavens, along with Christ (2:6). Finally, He created meaningful work for us on earth, prepared especially by Him in advance (2:10). God offers His children peace, joy, and hope *despite* the troubles of life. Our perspective is that, even though life is full of trouble, we belong to One who has overcome the world, He will see us through and bring us safely to our heavenly home.

- 7) Sometimes, Christians can lose perspective and become discouraged. For what part of your life “under the sun” do you need to regain a Biblical perspective? **Personal sharing**

The book of Proverbs illustrates a second type of wisdom literature: *prudential*. Prudential wisdom literature is presented in a style that makes sayings memorable -- either by short, pithy statements or by more lengthy instruction in the form of parables, riddles, fables, taunt songs, narrative wisdom, acrostics, numerical sayings or lists. Most often, prudential wisdom literature contains generalizations gleaned by observation and human experience. This is especially true with Proverbs.

- 8) Read Proverbs 1:1-8. According to these introductory statements, who is the author of the majority of Proverbs, to whom was he specifically writing, and what was his purpose? **Solomon recorded these proverbs to enable his “son(s)” to gain wisdom and understanding. Modern scholars think much of the book, though Solomonic in nature, was not actually written by Solomon. Verse 7 is the theme verse.**
- 9) Skim as many chapters as time allows and record some of the many subjects that are covered. **Wisdom, righteousness, life, knowledge, work, orderliness, success, self-control, faithfulness, honesty, truth, justice, humility, peace, encouragement, generosity, friendliness, wealth, contentment, family relationships, prostitutes, stealing, food, hypocrisy, service, pride, folly, death, anger, rebellion, anxiety, shame, talkativeness, envy, and many more**
- 10) Read and evaluate Proverbs 4:23, 12:8, 15:19, 22:6, 22:11, 27:17. Would you say that these statements are *always* true, in your experience? Why or why not? If not, why are these Proverbs worth heeding? **These statements are generalizations not promises (as is typical of prudential wisdom literature). For example, Proverbs 4:23 says the heart is the wellspring of life, but the heart of man is also “deceptive above all things and beyond cure” (Jeremiah 17:9); some people with warped minds are esteemed rather than despised (Proverbs 12:8); lazy people do not always meet with failure and frustration and the road of life is not always smooth for those who do right (Proverbs 15:19); it is not uncommon for righteous people to raise children who do not followed God in the way their parents have (even some of the righteous kings of Judah had wicked sons succeed them [Proverbs 22:6]); sometimes, honest, gracious people are mistreated by those in authority, as was Jesus (Proverbs 22:11); a man can sharpen another, but he can also be the downfall of another (Proverbs 27:17). From the perspective of human experience, the statements made in the proverbs are generally true. One will never err by following the advice or heeding the warnings of the Bible’s wisdom literature, even though the anticipated outcomes are sometimes foiled. Wise generalizations about the way life works best give us ideals for which to aim and pitfalls to be avoided.**
- 11) Where does the Christian find access to wisdom when needed (see Proverbs 1:7, 8:1-5 together with Mark 6:1-2, Luke 11:29a (for context) with verse 31, Colossians 2:2 (very end of verse) and 2:3, and James 1:5)? With regard to what situation or decision will you ask God for wisdom today? **True wisdom only comes to**

the person who fears the Lord (Proverbs 1:7), that is, the person who is in right relationship with Him. To such a person, it is freely available (Proverbs 8:1-5). Jesus is the ultimate wise man. In Him, all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden (Colossians 2). God exhorts us to ask Him for wisdom for specific needs and He promises to freely give it (James 1:5). The Christian finds wisdom in the person of Christ and in the context of a relationship with Him. Personal sharing

Some scholars say that Song of Songs (also known as Song of Solomon or Canticles) belongs to the category of wisdom literature. Skim the short eight chapters after noting the questions below.

- 12) Song of Songs extols the beauty of human love within an exclusive relationship between a lover and his “bride.” Why do you think God would ensure such a book was included in the canon of Scripture (books recognized as authoritative)? **God’s clear instruction regarding the exclusive and shameless relationship in which one husband and one wife become “one flesh” (Genesis 2:24) has been distorted and disobeyed in every generation. God created sex and condones it within the marriage relationship. Since sex is an interest common to all people of every age, it should not be surprising that God has devoted space to it in Scripture.**
- 13) The New Testament speaks of the Church (the corporate body of all believers in Christ) as Christ’s bride (Ephesians 5:23-33, Revelation 19:7; 21:9). What does Song of Songs suggest about human intimacy that, when taken allegorically, helps you understand God’s love for you and the love He wants from you in return (see Song of Songs 2:3b-4; 2:8; 2:16a; 5:16; 6:3a, and 7:10 to get the feel of this)? **God has placed within every human being the desire for deep intimacy. Song of Songs tells of intimacy in the human (especially sexual) relationship. Its language suggests that passion and longing are natural, and even desirable, in the love relationship. The Ephesians passage (and many others) speaks of the depth of God’s love for us. Deuteronomy 6:5 admonishes us to love the Lord with all our heart and soul and strength. Our passions *can* lead us into sin, but we are wrong to dismiss them entirely, for they are *intended* to lead us to God. As the Oxford Christian writer C.S. Lewis wrote, our greatest problem is not that our desires are too strong but that they are too weak: “We are far too easily pleased” (*The Weight of Glory*).**

The following Psalms can be included among the wisdom literature in the Bible: Psalms 1, 9, 32, 34, 37, 49, 73, 111, 112, 127, 128, 133. Some contain prudential wisdom and some are reflective.

- 14) Next to the verses listed, write the word “reflective” or “prudential” to indicate which type of wisdom literature you believe it to be. Refer to all underlined statements given in this lesson for help.

a) Psalm 1:1-3	prudential	h) Psalm 73:3-28	reflective
b) Psalm 32:3-4	reflective	i) Psalm 111:2, 10	prudential
c) Psalm 32:8-10	prudential	j) Psalm 112:5	prudential
d) Psalm 34:11-22	prudential	k) Psalm 127	v 2 reflective; the rest is
e) Psalm 37:3-6	prudential		prudential
f) Psalm 37:25-26, 35-38	reflective	l) Psalm 133	prudential
g) Psalm 49:10-15	reflective		

- 15) What habits could you establish to ensure that the Bible’s wisdom literature becomes a regular part of your meditations? **Ideas may include some of the following: Making categories of topics covered in the proverbs (use of money, family relationships, use of the tongue, anxiety, child-rearing, etc.) with references for each; using the Psalms as guides in one’s prayer life; if married, reading Song of Songs with one’s spouse for confidence that the Lord condones healthy sexuality; planning to read Job and Ecclesiastes when one senses their perspective on life is askew; making a regular Bible reading plan that incorporates a small portion from wisdom literature daily; memorizing verses from wisdom literature that address key needs in one’s life or printing them on a card or paper and displaying them as reminders.**