

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)?

- 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)?

- 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.

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?

- 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?

- 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).
- 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?

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?

- 9) Skim as many chapters as time allows and record some of the many subjects that are covered.

- 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?

- 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?

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)?
- 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)?

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.

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

- 15)** What habits could you establish to ensure that the Bible’s wisdom literature becomes a regular part of your meditations?