

LESSON 7 Writings of a Kingdom Age

The Old Testament includes five books known as poetry or wisdom literature. These are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Songs. In contrast to the books we have already studied in this course, these books do not deal primarily with historical events. They deal, rather, with the experiences of life that were familiar to the Israelites. The problems, beliefs, attitudes, and emotions that are expressed in this literature give us insight into their lives.

While most of these writings were produced during the kingdom age, some of them were written earlier. Nevertheless, the experiences they deal with are common to people everywhere at every time of history. These writings speak to us today! The Holy Spirit has caused them to be preserved for our consideration, enjoyment, and growth.

As you study this lesson you will understand why these writings are beautiful in every language. You will discover the main theme and value of each one and learn why many Christians find them to be so meaningful and inspirational. Your spiritual and devotional life will be enriched as a result.

lesson outline

The Writings and Their Form

Writings for Wisdom

Writings for Devotion

lesson objectives

When you finish this lesson you should be able to:

- Name the five books of wisdom and poetry.
- Identify the basic poetic styles found in the writings of wisdom and poetry.
- State the main teaching of the book of Job.
- Summarize the book of Proverbs.
- Identify the main message of the book of Ecclesiastes.
- Describe the book of Psalms.
- Distinguish between the literal and spiritual meanings of the Song of Songs.

learning activities

1. Read each of the books of poetry and wisdom in your Bible as directed by the lesson.
2. Study the lesson development according to the usual method. Answer each of the questions, review the lesson, and take the self-test. Be sure to check your answers with those given.

key words

allegorical
antithetic
interpretation
intimate

parallelism
philosophy
poem
rhyme

synonymous
synthetic
translated
wisdom

lesson development

THE WRITINGS AND THEIR FORM**The Writings**

Objective 1. *Name the five books of wisdom and poetry.*

The books of the Bible which we will study in this lesson include those which many people regard as their favorites. Among the authors of these books were kings, prophets, poets, and common people. But though we are living in a time and culture different from theirs, the basic teachings of their writings are still valuable to us. These books show us that God relates to our lives in practical ways. He is concerned with our suffering, our business, our family life, and our desire to worship Him.

Application

- 1 The five books of poetry and wisdom are
.....,,,, and
- 2 The book of the Bible that comes immediately before Job is named. The book of the Bible that immediately follows Song of Songs (or Song of Solomon) is
named

**Their Form**

Objective 2. *Identify the basic poetic styles found in the writings of wisdom and poetry.*

The books of wisdom and poetry are written in a poetic style called *parallelism*. This style is the main feature of Hebrew poetry. Parallelism means that the *thoughts* which are expressed are similar or balanced in some way (parallel). This style is in

contrast to *rhyme*, in which the *sounds* of the words (usually the last word in each line) are similar. Notice this contrast below.

Rhyme: Only one life, 'twill soon be past,
Only what's done for Christ will last.

Parallelism: You make springs flow in the valleys,
And rivers run between the hills
(Psalm 104:10).

Thus Hebrew poetry has great beauty, but this beauty comes primarily from the thoughts expressed. The wonderful thing about this style is that the beauty of the poetry is not lost when the poem is translated.

Application

- 3** The beauty of Hebrew poetry (parallelism) can be kept when the poetry is translated because it
- a)** lies in the balanced thoughts which can be put into other words.
 - b)** has to do with special words which have the same sound and length.
 - c)** can be found even if the meaning of the words cannot be understood.

There are three main kinds of parallelism:

1. *Synonymous*—the second line repeats the meaning of the first in different words.
2. *Synthetic*—the second line adds a new thought to the first (on the same theme or subject).
3. *Antithetic*—the second line gives a thought whose meaning is opposite to that of the first.

Application

4 Match each example of poetic style (left side) to the word which names it (right side).

- | | | |
|--------------|---|---------------|
| ... a | Evil people are trapped in their own sin, While honest people are happy and free. | 1) Rhyme |
| ... b | When I survey the wondrous cross, My richest gain I count but loss. | 2) Synonymous |
| ... c | Evil does not grow in the soil, Nor does trouble grow out of the ground. | 3) Synthetic |
| ... d | How hard it is to find a capable wife! She is worth far more than jewels! | 4) Antithetic |
| ... e | He protects everyone who loves him, But he will destroy the wicked. | |

As you read these books of poetry and wisdom, try to recognize each of these different kinds of parallelism.

WRITINGS FOR WISDOM**Job—Dealing With Suffering**

Read Job 1–15, 28–35, 38–42

Objective 3. *State the main teaching of the book of Job.*

It is likely that Job lived during the times of the patriarchs between Abraham and Moses. He is referred to in the book of Ezekiel along with Noah and Daniel (Ezekiel 14:14, 20). The book which bears his name is probably the oldest of the Bible books; it is also a poetic masterpiece. Its theme is human suffering—one of humanity’s universal, unsolved problems.

The key word of the book is *test* or *trial*. Job spoke of God, ““When he has tested me, I will come forth as gold”” (Job 23:10). A simple outline of the book is as follows:

1. *Job 1:1–3:26*. Job and his three friends are introduced; Job has been reduced to poverty and misery.
2. *Job 4:1–31:40*. Job and his three friends discuss his suffering.
3. *Job 32:1–37:24*. Elihu speaks; he says that suffering is a means of purifying and chastening.
4. *Job 38:1–41:34*. God speaks; man cannot understand all the ways of the Creator, for His ways are above man's ways.
5. *Job 42:1–7*. Job worships God; his fortunes are restored to him in double measure.

In the book four basic views or ideas about suffering can be seen. We may call these views that of Satan, of the saint, of the sufferer, and of the Savior.

1. *Satan's view*: People serve God only for the riches and honor it brings (*Job 1:1–2:8*). He used this philosophy later when he tempted Jesus (*Matthew 4:1–11*).
2. *Friends' view*: (the view of Job's friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, who agree for the most part): The righteous are always rewarded and the sinner always suffers. Thus, they concluded, Job as a great sufferer must have been a great sinner (*Job 4:7*).
3. *Sufferer's view*: (the view of Elihu): Suffering is always the Father's discipline to bring us back to His purpose. Elihu's speeches are a far more just defense of God.
4. *Savior's view*: God revealed himself to Job. He teaches that the godly are allowed to suffer so that they might see themselves. Job, although a good man, was self-righteous.

The book of Job shows us that trials and suffering are not always for our punishment. Sometimes they are allowed to come into our lives so that we may be trained and educated. An athlete, for example, does not undergo strict discipline for punishment. His discipline prepares him to run the race. In the same way God is always preparing us for the work we each must do. And sometimes He does this through the discipline of trials and

suffering. He has a wise purpose in it all. He wants to show us His wisdom.

Application

5 A person who had the “Savior’s view” concerning suffering would say that when we suffer we

- a)** need to ask ourselves if we should continue to serve God.
- b)** find out that it is a result of our disobedience.
- c)** come to know ourselves and God in a new way.

6 Which of the following statements is the best description of the main teaching of the book of Job?

- a)** Man cannot understand the ways of God, so he must accept all the suffering he experiences as punishment for his sin.
 - b)** Suffering is not always the result of sin, but godly people who experience it should respond to God in humility and worship.
 - c)** People who serve God faithfully do not go through trials because God does not allow them to suffer.
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Proverbs—Dealing With Life

Read Proverbs 1–10, 13–16, 29–31

Objective 4. *Summarize the book of Proverbs.*

The book of Proverbs is a marvelous collection of wise sayings. The Jews likened it to the outer court of the temple, the place where the Jew met other people. Proverbs is the godly man on his feet, for it seems to show us that godliness is practical. Every relationship is mentioned. In it we find our duty to God, our neighbor, our parents, our children, and even our country all mentioned.

The author of most of the book of Proverbs was Solomon. He was so wise that he was described as actually representing wisdom in himself (1 Kings 3:3–28; 4:29–30; 5:12). Many foreign rulers sought his advice (2 Chronicles 9:1–24). Along with Solomon (Proverbs 1:1, 10:1), the following additional

authors are mentioned: a) The words of the wise (22:17); b) The Proverbs of Solomon copied by the men of Hezekiah (25:1); c) Agur (30:1); and d) King Lemuel (31:1). The book of Proverbs may be divided into three main sections:

1. Counsel for young men: chapters 1–10.
2. Counsel for all humankind: chapters 11–20.
3. Counsel for kings and rulers: chapters 21–31.

A notable part of this remarkable book is chapter 8. It is a forceful, beautiful description of wisdom. Many students of the Bible have noticed similarities between this chapter and certain descriptions of Jesus Christ which are found in the New Testament. In Colossians 2:3, for example, Christ is described as the One “in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge.” For a refreshing exercise, as you read verses of Proverbs, try putting the name *Christ* in place of the word *wisdom*.

Application

7 Compare Proverbs 8:23–31 with John 1:1–2 and Hebrews 1:2. In your notebook, name two things about wisdom (Proverbs 8:23–31) which are also true of Christ (John 1:1–2, Hebrews 1:2).

8 Read in your Bible the verses in Proverbs given in the references below (right side). Then match each one to the subject it deals with (left side).

- | | |
|-----------------------------|----------|
| a Gossip | 1) 3:5–6 |
| b Idleness | 2) 6:6–8 |
| c Dishonesty | 3) 11:1 |
| d Humility | 4) 11:13 |
| e Guidance | 5) 16:18 |
| f Honesty | |

- 9 The contents of all the book of Proverbs can best be summarized as
- a) a group of wise sayings concerning our duty to God.
 - b) an explanation of how kings should behave.
 - c) practical wisdom applicable to all of life's relationships.

Ecclesiastes—Dealing With Despair

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1–12:14

Objective 5. *Identify the main message of the book of Ecclesiastes.*

Ecclesiastes is a statement of a human philosophy of life. It is like a record of all that the human mind can think and religion can offer. The arguments in the book are not God's arguments; they are God's record of humanity's arguments. Some of the arguments which are presented by man are in opposition to teaching found elsewhere in the Bible (see 1:15; 3:19; and 8:15).

The author identifies himself as “Solomon son of David, king of Israel” (1:1). Many believe that this book is a dramatic account of Solomon's own experience. The author asks a question: what is most valuable as a goal for life? He doubts that there really is an answer to this question. His experience shows that everything people seek after for satisfaction brings only despair. They seek satisfaction apart from God (1:1–3). They seek satisfaction in science (1:4–11). Philosophy does not give them an answer (1:12–18). Neither does pleasure (2:1–11) including happiness, drunkenness, work, possessions, wealth, and music. All are empty.

The author turns to materialism (2:12–26), an attitude of fatalism (3:1–15), and general but impersonal religion (3:16–22). These are also vain. It is not easy to please God (5:1–8), and riches bring no joy (5:9–16). Neither does being good (7:1–12).

Finally, he comes to an important conclusion: “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (12:13).

Application

- 10** What is the main message of the book of Ecclesiastes?
- a)** It gives us a record of Solomon's thoughts concerning riches and wealth.
 - b)** It shows us that there is nothing worth doing.
 - c)** It teaches us that everything eventually brings despair except obedience to God.
 - d)** It points out that rich and poor men will all meet the same fate.
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WRITINGS FOR DEVOTION

God created humans for fellowship with Him. As we have learned from the message of Ecclesiastes, humanity finds no meaning for life apart from fellowship with God. One of the main ways in which a believer has fellowship with God is through worship. When we worship God, we recognize His worth. We may be busy working for God, but only our true devotion and personal expression of worship to Him will bring lasting satisfaction. The two books of poetry we study in this section are both examples of and means for this experience.

Psalms—Praise and Prayer

Read Psalms 1–41, 79–91, 119–150

Objective 6. *Describe the book of Psalms.*

For more than 2,000 years the book of Psalms has been one of the most popular and best-loved books in the Old Testament. Beginning from the time of David, the Israelites used these songs in their worship of God. Christians today of every race and nation use them and sing from them. Their great popularity comes from the fact that they deal with the common experiences of the human race.

The title *Psalms* means “Praise” or the “Book of Praises.” The Psalms magnify and praise the Lord. His names, His word, and His goodness are all honored.

About two-thirds of the Psalms name a specific author; among these are David (who wrote 73), Asaph (12), the sons of Korah (10), Solomon (2), and Moses (1). Ethan and Heman, two men compared for wisdom with Solomon (1 Kings 4:31), wrote one each.

But remember, Asaph was David's appointed choir master. The sons of Korah seem to have been a special group of singers from the Levites in David's day. Many of the Psalms that name no author seem to fall naturally to David. The shadow of David is everywhere in the Psalms. He shared his life openly with us, and his writings have given each of us an opportunity to know that God cares for us even in discouraging moments.

In the traditional collection, the 150 Psalms are divided into five units or "books." Each unit ends with a statement of praise. The five units are as follows: 1) Psalms 1–41; 2) Psalms 42–72; 3) Psalms 73–89; 4) Psalms 90–106; and 5) Psalms 107–150. Of course, each psalm is also a single unit in itself.

The Psalms can also be divided into groups according to their theme or subject. These groups include the following: Prayers of the righteous, songs of repentance and confession, songs of praise, songs about Israel's history, songs about the Messiah (Jesus), songs in distress, and songs of instruction.

Application

11 Read each of the Psalms listed below (left side) and match it to the group to which you believe it belongs (right side).

- | | |
|------------------------|------------------------------|
| ... a Psalm 1 | 1) Repentance and confession |
| ... b Psalm 32 | 2) Instruction |
| ... c Psalm 105 | 3) History |
| ... d Psalm 111 | 4) Distress |
| ... e Psalm 142 | 5) Praise |
| ... f Psalm 149 | |
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The Psalms also contain many prophecies concerning Christ, the Messiah. Many of these were fulfilled in His first coming; others will be fulfilled when He comes again.

Application

12 Read in Psalms each of the verses listed in the references below. After each reference, write a word or two saying what it tells about Christ.

- a) 2:8.....
- b) 22:16.....
- c) 110:4.....
- d) 118:22.....



The Psalms show us an important principle we must all learn to follow in our relationship with God: honesty. Fellowship with God, like fellowship with a friend, demands truth. The attitude David showed in the Psalms gives us an example of what God expects from us in worship and prayer. God wants us to express our true feelings. Whether you are—like David was—in the temple of worship, the cave of hiding, the pit of despair, or the dance of joy, there is a psalm to express your feeling. Make the Psalms your personal book.

Application

13 Read 2 Samuel 11 and 12. Then read Psalm 51. What was David’s response to the message of God’s prophet?

.....

14 What did David say in Psalm 5:3?

.....



Do you have a definite time each day of devotion, praise, and prayer? If you do not, will you choose a time and begin now? It is very important!

Application

15 Circle the letter in front of each TRUE statement.

- a)** Although the Psalms were written long ago, they are used by Christians today.
 - b)** About three-fourths of the Psalms were written by David.
 - c)** The Psalms show us that discouragement and distress are not experienced by godly people.
 - d)** The Psalms have prophecies concerning the death of Christ.
 - e)** Some Psalms describe events in Israel's history.
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Song of Songs—Loyalty and Love

Read Song of Songs 1:1–8:14

Objective 7. *Distinguish between the literal and spiritual meanings of the Song of Songs.*

This book is one of the 1005 songs written by Solomon (1 Kings 4:32). The title “Song of Songs” suggests that this was the best of all of them (in some Bibles it is called “Song of Solomon”). Because of its subject, many explanations have been given for its inclusion in the Bible. As we study these explanations, we will discover that this book has a special message for us.

In its literal or actual meaning, the song is about the warm emotions of human love and marriage. The main speakers are a country maiden called the girl of Shulam or the Shulammite (6:13), her lover, and a group of Jerusalem women. According to one interpretation, the country maiden has been taken to the royal court (1:1–2:7). Although the king expresses his love for her, she longs for her shepherd lover (2:8–7:9). At the end, she is reunited with him (7:10–8:14). Many other interpretations have also been given.

The Jewish people saw the Song of Songs as a picture of the relationship between God and His people Israel. It was read each year at the Passover celebration. As the Israelites heard it, they were reminded of God's love for them in their deliverance from Egyptian slavery. The bond between Israel (the Shulammite maiden) and God (her shepherd lover) was so strong that no worldly appeal (the king) could break it. Other passages in the Old Testament also picture the relationship between Israel and God to be like that of a marriage (see Isaiah 50:1; Ezekiel 16, 23; and Jeremiah 3:1–20). This picture is also used in the New Testament, where the relationship between Christ and the church is described as a "marriage" (see Ephesians 5).

Application

16 Read each statement below concerning the Song of Songs (left side). Match it to the word which names the kind of meaning it portrays (right side).

- | | | | |
|-----|----------|---|----------------------------|
| ... | a | The Shulammite maiden dreams of her shepherd lover. | 1) Literal 2) Spiritual |
| ... | b | God's love for Israel is beautiful and intimate. | |
| ... | c | The shepherd calls the maiden to come with him. | |
| ... | d | Israel is loyal to God who loves her. | |
| ... | e | The bond between Israel and God is very strong. | |

Like the Psalms, the Song of Songs is a call for the believer to enter into an intimate love relationship with God.

self-test

1 Following is the first line of a verse from Proverbs. Which would be the second line if the verse is one written in antithetical parallelism? A good man's words are like pure silver

...

- a)** a wicked man's ideas are worthless.
- b)** they will benefit many people.
- c)** a righteous man's talk is a fountain of life.

2 Circle each TRUE statement about the book of Ecclesiastes.

- a)** It says that wealth is an unworthy goal in life.
- b)** It concludes that happiness comes only from obeying God.
- c)** David was its author.
- d)** Moses was its author
- e)** It teaches that hard work brings ultimate happiness.

3 The relationship between God and His people is spoken of in the New Testament as that of a "marriage" (Ephesians 5). In the Old Testament, a similar picture can be found in

- a)** Job.
- b)** Psalms.
- c)** Proverbs.
- d)** Ecclesiastes.
- e)** Song of Songs.

4 A person who understood the message of Job would say that Job suffered because God wanted to

- a)** make him stop leading a sinful and wicked life.
- b)** teach him new things about himself and God.
- c)** show him that all his friends understood God's purpose.
- d)** have Satan see that Job was being judged for his sin.

5 Suppose you wanted to lead a Bible study on ways to worship and praise the Lord. Which book would be the best to study?

- a)** Job
- b)** Psalms
- c)** Proverbs
- d)** Ecclesiastes

6 The Jews likened the book of Proverbs to the outer court of the temple because it

- a)** explains the rules about offering different sacrifices.
- b)** has a section about the duties of the priests.
- c)** applies wisdom to human relationships.

7 The verses below are taken from each of the five books of poetry and wisdom. Match each one (left side) to the book to which you think it belongs (right side).

- | | | | |
|-----|----------|--|------------------|
| ... | a | Praise God with shouts of joy, all people! Sing to the glory of his name; offer him glorious praise! | 1) Job |
| ... | b | Have you asked God to show you your faults, and have you agreed to stop doing evil? | 2) Proverbs |
| ... | c | I have seen everything done in this world, and I tell you, it is all useless. It is like chasing the wind. | 3) Ecclesiastes |
| ... | d | Let me hear your voice from the garden, my love; my companions are waiting to hear you speak. | 4) Psalms |
| ... | e | Then I knew only what others have told me, but now I have seen you with my own eyes. | 5) Song of Songs |
| ... | f | Do not try to talk sense to a fool; he cannot appreciate it. | |

answers to study questions

- 9 c)** practical wisdom applicable to all of life's relationships.
- 1** Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs.
- 10 c)** It teaches us that everything eventually brings despair except obedience to God.
- 2** Esther, Isaiah
- 11 a)** 2) Instruction
b) 1) Repentance and confession
c) 3) History
d) 5) Praise
e) 4) Distress
f) 5) Praise
- 3 a)** lies in the balanced thoughts which can be put into other words.
- 12 a)** 2:8; He rules over all the earth.
b) 22:16; His hands and feet were torn or pierced.
c) 110:4; He is a priest in the line of Melchizedek.
d) 118 :22; He is the rejected stone which has become the most important one.
- 4 a)** 4) Antithetic
b) 1) Rhyme
c) 2) Synonymous
d) 3) Synthetic
e) 4) Antithetic
- 13** He confessed his sin and repented.
- 5 c)** come to know ourselves and God in a new way.
- 14** He said that he prayed to the Lord in the morning.
- 6 b)** Suffering is not always the result of sin, but godly people who experience it should respond to God in humility and worship.
- 15 a), d), and e)** are true

7 Wisdom existed before creation and had a part in creation.

- 16 a** 1) Literal
 - b** 2) Spiritual
 - c** 1) Literal
 - d** 2) Spiritual
 - e** 2) Spiritual
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- 8 a** 4) 11:13
 - b** 2) 6:6–8
 - c** 3) 11:1
 - d** 5) 16:18
 - e** 1) 3:5–6
 - f** 3) 11:1