

Xenos Christian Fellowship
Christian Ministry 2
Week 3 – Old Testament Poetry and Wisdom

Old Testament Poetry and Wisdom

- Job – making sense of undeserved suffering.
- Psalms – honest prayer and praise to God.
- Proverbs – the value of true wisdom based on the fear of God.
- Ecclesiastes – the possibility of finding meaning and significance during our short life on earth.
- Song of Songs – celebrating love between husband and wife.

Common features:

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Key features of Hebrew poetry

1.

- a. Synonymous parallelism. The second or subsequent line repeats or reinforces the sense of the first line.

“For he satisfies the thirsty
and he fills the hungry with good things.” – Psalm 107:9

“He turned rivers into a desert,
flowing springs into thirsty ground .” – Psalm 107:33

- b. Antithetical parallelism. The second or subsequent line contrasts the thought of the first.

“The upright see and rejoice,
but all the wicked shut their mouths.” – Psalm 107:42

“A wise son brings joy to his father,
but a foolish son grief to his mother.” – Proverbs 10:1

c. Synthetic parallelism: The second or subsequent line provides more information about or completes the thought in the first line.

“Others went out on the sea in ships,
they were merchants on the mighty waters.” – Psalm 107:23

“Blessed is the man
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
or stand in the way of sinners
or sit in the seat of scoffers.” – Ps. 1:1

Notice how each line advances the meaning of what is being said. The verbs “walk,” “stand” and “sit” show the gradual progression of the wicked man—he moves from a casual to a settled relationship with sin.¹

Implication for the reader:

“Some people never learn anything because they understand everything too soon.”
– Alexander Pope

Good questions to ask:

“How are these lines related to each other?” “Are they saying the same thing?”
“Are they saying the opposite thing?” “What additional information is being
communicated in this line about the one preceding it?”

2.

“Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men.” – Psalm 107:8,15,21,31

*“Praise the LORD, all nations;
Laud Him, all peoples!
For His lovingkindness is great toward us,
And the truth of the LORD is everlasting.
Praise the LORD!” – Psalm 117*

Implication for the reader:

3.

¹ Tremper Longman, *Reading the Bible With Heart and Mind* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1988) p. 133.

“*As the deer pants for the water brooks,
So my soul pants for Thee, O God.*” – Psalm 42:1

“I will say to *God my rock*, ‘Why have you forgotten me?’” – Psalm 42:9

Good questions to ask:

“Who does this image describe?” “What does it say about the person or group being described?” “What does this image tell you about the way God relates to people?”

Compare narrative and poetry:

Exodus 14:26-31; Exodus 15:1-5

Psalms

What are the Psalms?

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(Tremper Longman) “Here we have one hundred fifty separate poems, constituting a book that functioned as the hymnbook of the Old Testament people of God.”²

Who wrote the Psalms and how are they organized?

Authors: One Psalm was written by Moses, 73 by David, 12 by Asaph, 10 by the sons of Korah, one or two by Solomon, and one each by Heman and Ethan. The rest are anonymous. The Psalms are often called the Psalms of David because he is the principal author.

Organization: The book of Psalms is a collection of smaller collections. In the Hebrew Bible, the Psalms are grouped into 5 smaller books: Psalm 1-41; Psalm 42-72; Psalm 73-89; Psalm 90-106; Psalm 107-150. Within these books there are hints of additional groupings.

Different Kinds of Psalms

² Tremper Longman, *Reading the Bible with Heart and Mind* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 130.

Psalms of Praise and Thanksgiving

Structure:

- A call to praise or thank God.

(Psalm 103:1) “Bless (praise – NLT, NIV) the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name.” (103:1)

(Psalm 107:1) “O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, For His lovingkindness is everlasting.”

- An explanation of why God should be praised or thanked.
 - Because he cares for the oppressed (103:6).
 - Because he is compassionate and gracious (103:8).
 - Because he is sovereign and rules over all (103:19).
 - Because he has delivered us. See Psalm 107:6,13,19,28. Each of these verses summarizes a section describing God’s deliverance.
- Conclusion – usually a word of praise or closing command.

(Psalm 103:22) “Bless the Lord, O my soul.”

(Psalm 107:43) “Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the LORD.”

The importance of thanksgiving:

(Psalm 95:2) “Let us come before his presence with *thanksgiving*, let us shout joyfully to him with Psalms.”

(Psalm 107:1) “Oh *give thanks* to the Lord, for He is good, for his lovingkindness is everlasting.”

(1 Chronicles 16:8) “Oh *give thanks* to the Lord, call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples.”

(Colossians 3:15) “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and *be thankful*.”

(Hebrews 12:28) “Therefore, since we have received a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us *show gratitude*, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe...”

(Ray Locke) "Next to Christianity, advertising is the greatest force in the world. And I say that without sacrilege or disrespect. Advertising makes people

discontented. It makes them want things they don't have.”³

Application:

1.

2.

(J. I. Packer) “(The cross) is the measure of the goodness of God; lay it to heart. Ask yourself the Psalmist’s question – ‘What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?’ See grace to give this answer – ‘I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord... O Lord, truly I am thy servant... I will pay vows unto the Lord now...’ (Psalm 116:12ff.).”⁴

3.

The importance of praise:

(Psalm 29:2) “Give honor to the Lord for the glory of his name. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.”

(Psalm 135:1) “Praise the LORD. Praise the name of the LORD; praise him, you servants of the LORD...”

(Hebrews 13:5) “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name.”

Why would God be so intent on receiving praise from us?

³ Former advertising executive Ray Locke quoted in *Selling Discontent* by Anna White in the New American Dream a web magazine located at <http://www.newdream.org/newsletter/discontent.php>.

⁴ J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1977) p. 150.

1.

“For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;
he is to be feared above all gods.
For all the gods of the nations are idols,
but the LORD made the heavens.
Splendor and majesty are before him;
strength and joy in his dwelling place.
Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations,
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength,
ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name.”
– 1 Chronicles 16:25-29

2.

(C. S. Lewis) “I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation... the delight is incomplete till it is expressed... the worthier the object the more intense this delight would be.”⁵

(C. S. Lewis) “To fully enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him.”⁶

3.

Application:

1. Choose a psalm filled with praise and...
2. Praise God together in your...
3. Start your own time of prayer with praise.

Psalms of Lament

Structure:

⁵ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York, New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1986), pp. 95-96.

⁶ C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York, New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1986), p. 97.

- Address to God
- Complaint
- Request for help
- Expression of trust / vow to praise

Psalm 42 & 43

An *individual* lament meant to be read together as one Psalm.

What is the situation of the author?

- He is in despair. (42:5,11; 43:5)
- He has suffered oppression at the hands of his enemies. (42:9; 43:1)
- He longs to be with God (42:1,2), but feels abandoned. (42:9)
- He is surrounded by people who taunt him about the impotence of his God. (42:3,10) He used to lead joyous processions to the temple (42:4), but does so no longer. This may suggest he is in exile.
- He longs to praise God in the temple. (43:3,4)

Importance and Application

(Athanasius) “Most of the Bible speaks to us. The Psalms speak for us.”⁷

1. God wants us to relate _____ with him.

Reverence and respect: (Psalm 5:7) “But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house; in reverence I will bow down toward your holy temple.”

Shame: (Psalm 44:15a) “My disgrace is before me all day long and my face is covered with shame....”

Anger: (Psalm 109:9-10) “May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow, May his children be wandering beggars; may they be driven from ruined homes.”

Sorrow: (Psalm 6:6) “I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears.”

Doubt: (Psalm 73:3-5) “I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles....Surely in vain I have kept my heart

⁷ Athanasius was Bishop of Alexandria (297-373 A.D.).

pure; in vain I have washed my hands in innocence.”

2. God wants us to affirm what is true, even in the midst of pain.

(Psalm 42:5) “Why are you in despair, O my soul?
Why have you become disturbed within me?
Hope in God, for I shall again praise him.
For the help of his presence.”

(Psalm 73:3) “For I was envious of the arrogant
As I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”

(Psalm 73:15) “If I had said, ‘I will speak thus,’
behold, I would have betrayed the
generation of Your children.”

(Psalm 73:27,28) “For, behold, those who are far from
you will perish; you have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You. But
as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my
refuge, that I may tell of all your works.”

3.

(Psalm 121:1-2) “I lift my eyes to the hills- where does my help come
from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.”

4.

Messianic Psalms

(Luke 24:44) He said to them, “These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still
with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets
and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

2:7 Acts 13:33; Hebrews 1:5 ; 5:5

2:8, 9 Revelation 2:26, 27; 12:5; 19:15

8:2 Matthew 21:16

- 8:4-6** Hebrews 2:6-8
8:6 1 Corinthians 15:27; Ephesians 1:22
- 16:8-11** Acts 2:25-28
16:10b Acts 13:35
- 18:2b** Hebrews 2:13
18:49 Romans 15:9
- 22:1** Matthew 27:46; Mark 15:34
22:7 Matthew 27:39; Mark 15:29; Luke 23:35
22:8 Matthew 27:43
22:18 John 19:24; compare Matthew 27:35; Mark 15:24; Luke 23:34
22:22 Hebrews 2:12
- 110:1** Matthew 22:44; Mark 12:36; Luke 20:42, 43; Acts 2:34, 35; Hebrews 1:13.
 Compare. Matthew 26:64; Mark 14:6,2; 16:19; Luke 22:69; 1 Corinthians 15:25;
 Ephesians 1:20; Colossians 3:1; Hebrews 1:3; 8:1; 10:12, 13; 12:2; 1 Peter 3:22.
110:4 Hebrews 5:6; 6:20; 7:17, 21⁸

Application restrictions for all the Psalms

1. .

(Psalm 26:6) “He [the Lord] made Lebanon skip like a calf, Sirion like a wild ox.

(Psalm 114:5-7) “Why was it, O sea, that you fled, O Jordan, that you turned back... Tremble, O earth at the presence of the Lord, at the presence of the God of Jacob, who turned the rock into a pool – the hard rock into springs of water.”

2.

(Psalm 105:34) “He spoke and the locusts came, grasshoppers without number.”

Proverbs

Definition of a proverb:

⁸ Adapted from <http://www.jesuswalk.com/psalms/psalms-NT-quotations.htm>.

Who wrote Proverbs?

Most of the Proverbs are attributed to David's son Solomon (cf. I Kings 4:32; Prov. 1:1; 10:1; 25:1), but he did not write all of them (cf. 30:1; 31:1).

The purpose of the book of Proverbs:

Proverbs 1:1-6.

(Fareed Zakariah) "Diffusion of knowledge is the dominant trend of our time... But knowledge is not the same thing as wisdom. Knowledge can produce equally powerful ways to destroy life, intentionally and unintentionally. It can produce hate and seek destruction. Knowledge does not by itself bring any answer to the ancient Greek question 'What is a Good Life?' It does not produce good sense, courage, generosity and tolerance. And most crucially, it does not produce the farsightedness that will allow us all to live together—and grow together—on this world without causing war, chaos and catastrophe. For that we need wisdom."⁹

Wisdom is not just the accumulation of information.

Wisdom is the _____ of information.

A key concept in Proverbs: the fear of God.

(Proverbs 1:7) "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction."

To fear God is to...

(Proverbs 14:26) "In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and his children will have refuge."

(Proverbs 23:17) "Do not let your heart envy sinners, but live in the fear of the LORD always. 18 Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off."

(Proverbs 8:13a) "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil..."

The opposite of fearing God is

(Psalm 14:1) The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."

⁹ Fareed Zakaria, "The Earth's Learning Curve," *Newsweek*, Issues 2006 (see <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/10206249/site/newsweek/>)

Implication for the reader: Solomon's emphasis on fearing God has obvious implications for the reader... Are you willing to humbly entrust yourself to God's power and faithfulness? Do you see him as a source of truth, someone whose counsel should be heeded? Are you willing to act on his wisdom and trust him that his way is best?

(Proverbs 14:12, 16:25) "There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death."

Application restrictions

1. Proverbs tend to be general maxims that speak the truth but not the whole truth. They do not deal with the exceptions.

(Proverbs 16:7) When a man's ways are pleasing to the LORD, he makes even his enemies live at peace with him.

2. You must interpret a SINGLE proverb in light of ALL of the proverbs.

8:18 With me are riches and honor, enduring wealth and prosperity. 10:4 Lazy hands make a man poor, but diligent hands bring wealth. 10:22 The blessing of the LORD brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it. 14:24 The wealth of the wise is their crown, but the folly of fools yields folly. 22:4 Humility and the fear of the LORD bring wealth and honor and life.	11:4 Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death. 11:28 Whoever trusts in his riches will fall, but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf. 19:1 Better a poor man whose walk is blameless than a fool whose lips are perverse. 22:1 A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold. 30:8 Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread.
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The cautions of 11:4, 28; 19:1; 22:1 and 30:8 temper the maxims of 8:18; 10:4; 10:22; 14:24; 22:4 regarding material riches.

Job's friends: an example of misusing proverbial wisdom

(Job 11:13,15) "If you devote your heart to him and stretch out your hands to him... you will surely forget your trouble, recalling it only as waters gone by."

(Job 11:20) But the eyes of the wicked will fail, and escape will elude them; their hope will

become a dying gasp."

(Job 13:4,12a) You... smear me with lies; you are worthless physicians, all of you... your maxims are proverbs of ashes.

Conclusion

Memory Verses

Psalm 42 & 43** – Why are you downcast, O my soul? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him.

Psalm 107** – God rescues those who cry out to him. Give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men.

Proverbs 1:7* – “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.”

Assignment

Complete the *Acts Assignment*.