

A Panoramic View of the Old Testament – Part 3: The Wisdom Books and Psalms

In this lesson, we will give an overview of the following books:

1. Psalms
2. Job
3. Ecclesiastes
4. Proverbs
5. Song of Solomon

There are other wisdom books in the canon of the Greek and Coptic Old Testaments, namely the Wisdom of Solomon and the Wisdom of Sirach, but we will limit our discussion to the aforementioned books.

The Psalms

The beauty of the psalms lies in the fact that the psalms express every emotion possible and expresses it so beautifully. Who of us can pray and even utter words comparable to that of David the prophet of the king?

There are different categories of psalms that we can highlight:

1. Psalms of Lament – example of Psalm 12
 - a. The invocation – asking for God’s help
 - b. A Lament or a complaint
 - c. A petition or request asking for God’s help
 - d. Confession of trust or statement of confidence

Compare this to our own prayers of lament. How often do we stop at steps a, b or c? Many people complain, but they end up blaming God and they do not end with a note of confidence. This psalm offers completeness in our lamentations. It restores our trust in God that he can solve all of our problems.

2. Psalms of Praise – example Psalm 99 (100) or Psalm 116 (117) or Psalm 121
 - a. A Call to Praise God
 - b. Reasons for praising Him

The significance of these psalms:

1. We bring our burdens to God in Whom we find comfort and relief
2. We should not focus on the problem, but trust and focus on God’s ability to answer our prayers.
3. God’s house is a place of praise and thanksgiving. This joy should fill our hearts
4. God is to be praised because He is God. Praise, therefore, is such a selfless act on our part. We are His people and He has provided for us. It is enough for us to stand in His presence and be satisfied.

Other categories of Psalms:

1. Historical Psalms (Psalm 77 (78)) – it is a catalog of God’s wonderful deeds to remind generations of His mighty acts.
2. Psalms of Confession and Repentance – Psalms 50 (51) and 31 (32) are perfect examples of repentance that none of us could ever come up with on our own.
3. Wisdom Psalms – harder to identify but they reveal wisdom and teachings, council and guidelines. Psalm 1 is a good example of a wisdom psalm
4. Royal Psalms - which deal with the kingship of God.
5. Messianic Psalms – Psalm 2 and Psalm 109 (110) are prophetic and tell us about the coming of our Lord.

Job

Job is the oldest book of the Old Testament written. Job lived in the era of the Patriarchs during the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The book of Job answers many questions for us, namely:

1. What is the meaning of man’s life?
2. What is his destiny?
3. Why does man suffer in this world?

Job had much wealth, but he was not a materialist. He was righteous in the sight of the Lord, and because of this, Satan became envious and wished to tempt Job. The devil thought that Job only worshipped God because he was wealthy. The devil seemed to have utterly destroyed Job with God’s permission. Satan did not stop but afflicted him more with a severe illness and skin disease. His wife even suggested that he curse the Lord and die. Even his friends, who came to console him, seem to grieve him even more. They wanted to persuade him that he had sinned and for this reason he suffered, but God honored him for his patience and blessed his house, and returned him to his former happiness and even greater (contemplate on the story of the blind man who neither sinned nor his parents that God’s glory may be revealed).

We can summarize the following points about the book of Job:

1. God may allow people to be tested so that they can demonstrate their dedication to God and His will for their lives.
2. It is an error to conclude that all sickness and trouble come because of sin. Sometimes the innocent suffer, and the wicked are not immediately judged.
3. Since people on earth cannot see the whole picture and have a very limited understanding of God’s plans and wise purposes, they should not question God’s justice.
4. Comforting the sufferer is not achieved by naïve accusations, but by identifying with their grief and praying for God’s mercy.

Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes means a gathering and refers to God Who is preaching. This preaching is necessary in our spiritual lives.

The author of this book is Solomon. Solomon closely looks at nature and its course which relates to the inner man. Just as there is nothing new under the sun outside God's creation, so the problems that face man back then are the same in essence that we face now (perhaps in different forms, but nevertheless the same temptations and sins).

Solomon constantly speaks of the vanity of life. Solomon had riches beyond the imagination, but still cried vanity of vanities (2:1-11).

Those who look superficially at this book say that Solomon is a pessimist. Rather, Solomon wants to remove us from our attachment of material things and turn to God (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

We have something new in creation, the incarnation of our Lord Jesus Christ. The Holy Spirit renews us daily. This is true joy while the vanities of this world remain constant.

Lessons from Ecclesiastes:

1. People always striving for more wisdom, pleasure, or wealth will not find satisfaction without God.
2. Although we cannot fully understand it, God is really in control of each aspect of our lives
3. People can enjoy things in life so long as we are not wholly dependent on them and understand that God has granted us these gifts.
4. Above all things, we should fear God and obey his commandments; to be wise and to be in this world but not of this world

Proverbs

Solomon also writes the proverbs, although there is others collected here. It is said that Solomon wrote thousands of songs and proverbs, so what we have is but a glimpse into the wisdom that God granted to him.

We have an outline of the proverbs:

1. The Purpose of the proverbs – to give the reader wisdom, knowledge, and understanding and to encourage wise behavior, justice, honesty, prudence, and discretion.
2. Instructions to be Wise
3. The Proverbs of Solomon
4. Admonitions and Warnings
5. Hezekiah's Collection of Proverbs
6. The Words of Agur and Lemuel
7. The Virtuous Wife

What can we learn?

1. Fearing God is the first step to gaining wisdom
2. God created this world and runs it according to wise principles
3. Foolish people reject God and His ways, but the wise trust Him and will enjoy His blessings
4. God has set guidelines for our interpersonal relationships with others. The wise person will learn and follow them.

The Song of Solomon

Many say that this book arouses carnal desires, but there is a beautiful conversation here, and spiritually, we look at it as the loving relationship between Christ and His church. If we approach the book spiritually, we will see it spiritually.

Solomon had many wives, but this Shulammitte woman caught his eye. But she did not hastily throw herself at this king. She loved a shepherd very tenderly. She was attracted to the pure love of the good shepherd.

There are other loves that distract us, but let us keep our eyes on the pure love of God.