

Old Testament Poetry and Wisdom Literature from a Pastoral Perspective
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Old Testament Poetry and Wisdom Literature from a Pastoral Perspective
Course Notes Compiled
By Steve Paulus

1. Introduction

When we talk about Old Testament Poetry and Wisdom Literature, we cover a vast array of material including the Pentateuch (Law), the Prophets, and the Writings. Poetry and wisdom as literary styles may be observed in sections of nearly all of the Old Testament Books. Our purpose is to isolate the traits of Hebrew poetry and wisdom, learn to recognize them, and as a result, better understand the Bible. Mostly, we want to read and study various passages of the songs and wisdom of Israel, and apply their lessons to our lives.

In any course in Biblical Studies, it's my habit to begin by answering basic questions about the Bible itself. That is, its nature, origin, languages, translations, and uses. This course begins by addressing a simple but oft overlooked question, "What is the Old Testament?"

2. The Old Testament: What Is It?

Since we regard the Bible as a uniquely inspired book, a revealed book, we need to look at the nature of revelation and inspiration.

2.1. Revelation and Inspiration

Revelation is the activity of God whereby He makes Himself known. It is a personal self-disclosure. There is natural and special revelation. Nature, the created universe, and conscience comprise aspects of natural revelation (Ps. 19:1ff.; Rom. 1:20, 2:14-16) Special revelation is comprised of the work of the Holy Spirit in visions, dreams, prophecy, the person of Christ, and the enscripturated revelation of God to man through the Holy Spirit in the Bible (Heb. 1:1ff.; II Peter 1:20-21; II Tim. 3:16, *theopneustos*). We shall concentrate on the latter, that is, special revelation. In the Bible, God's self-disclosure is verbal, it is progressive (from Old to New, clarifying, illuminating, emphasizing), it was given through various means -- sometimes through visions, dreams, ecstatic, or prophetic utterance, and at other times through more "natural" means of research, observation of natural events, recording of history, and the careful composition of poetry or songs (Is. 6:1; Daniel 7:1ff.; II Kings 3:15-20; Joel 1:1-4; Ezra 4:6-24; Lamentations).

God's verbal self-revelation is accomplished through human agency, not obliterating or by-passing human personality and limitation, but making full use of these characteristic human traits. Thus, language, cultural setting, and historical circumstance play a role in

the inscripturation of the verbal revelation. Understanding such factors is significant in obtaining a clear understanding of the meaning of God's self-revelation.

The revelation which resulted in the Old and New Testament Scriptures may be described as incarnational. That is, God's infallible Spirit worked in a unique fashion through fallible human instrumentality. Therefore the Scriptures are all the more a self-expression of God to His creation. *Inspiration* is "the supernatural influence of God's Spirit upon the Biblical authors which insured that what they wrote was precisely what God intended them to write for the communication of His truth." (J.I. Packer, "Revelation and Inspiration" *Eerdmans Bible Commentary*, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1970, p. 17). Any view of verbal inspiration which fails to take into account the use of human instrumentality is inadequate. Likewise a view of the exegetical task which fails to recognize this truth is inadequate. A "gnostic" view of inspiration – where God bypasses "tainted flesh" through the violation of the scribe's personality or faculties -- is suitable for a sub- or non-Christian view of revelation. Such a view may characterize the Muslim view of the composition of the Koran, for instance, which was given to Mohammed in a trance-like state.

(For an excellent discussion of revelation and inspiration see J.I. Packer, "Revelation and Inspiration," in *Eerdmans Bible Commentary*, Donald Guthrie, ed. Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., pp. 12-18.)

2.2. Versions and Translations: Hebrew, Greek, Latin, English, Russian

The original Old Testament was written in the Hebrew and Aramaic languages. The oldest extant manuscripts are from the Dead Sea Scrolls, which date from before Christ. Manuscripts used for current English translations date from the first millennium A.D. and are called *Masoretic* texts because a group of scribes known as *Masoretes* worked to preserve the integrity and pronunciation of these texts. It is uncertain when the *Masoretes* began their work, some say around 500 A.D. "Nothing in the discoveries from the *Qumran* caves endangers the essential reliability and authority of our standard Hebrew Bible text, as represented, for example in the Kittel editions of *Biblia Hebraica*" (Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, p. 42).

Between 250 and 150 B.C. the Hebrew Bible was translated into Greek in Alexandria, Egypt in the most widely used Greek version known as the *Septuagint*, or LXX. *Septuagint* comes from a Greek word meaning seventy which reflects the belief that the Old Testament was translated in seventy days by seventy scribes for Greek speaking Jews in Egypt and other parts of the Hellenistic world. Another very famous version of the OT was Origen's *Hexapla*. Origen was a Church Father who created the first parallel Old Testament Bible, completed about 240 A.D. In the first column was the original Hebrew text. In the next column was a Greek transliteration (Hebrew written in Greek letters), then four different Greek translations including the *Septuagint*. A famous Latin version is known as the *Vulgate*, translated primarily by St. Jerome and published prior to the year

420. It was created in order to standardize the many differing Latin translations of that era. It was a standard in the Roman Catholic Church for over a millennium.

There are many English translations of the scriptures. One of the most famous is the Authorized or King James Version, completed in 1611. Additional translations include the English Revised Version (1881,1885), The Jerusalem Bible (Catholic Version Published in English in 1966) The New American Standard Version (1971), The Living Bible (1971), and The New International Version (1978).

The oldest Slavic translations of the Bible date back to the ministry of Cyril and Methodius in Great Moravia in 864-5. These translations known as Old Church Slavonic, went through various forms until a complete Church Slavonic translation of the Bible appears in Russia at the end of the 15th century. The Vulgate and the Septuagint were the basis of the Old Testament translation, the New Testament made use of the Old Church Slavonic. It is known as the *Gennadievskaia Biblia* after Archbishop Gennady of Novgorod the sponsor of the translation. A Church Slavonic Bible was published by Ivan Fyodorov at Ostrog in 1581. A revision of these versions based on the Septuagint was completed under Peter the Great in 1724. The Elizabeth Bible built on these previous works was completed in 1751 and later revised. This is the authorized version of the Russian Church. The Russian Synodal Bible is widely used by Protestant Russian speakers. *Slovo Zhivny* was published by the International Bible Society in 2000. It is a dynamic equivalent translation similar to the English language New International Version.

Translations take on certain characteristics in relation to the original manuscripts. They may be literal (the King James Version), or fluid (New International Version). They may be wooden, translating idioms literally (New American Standard), or a paraphrase, giving only the sense of the passage (The Living Bible). For serious Bible study, a student who does not know Greek or Hebrew, might make use of a literal translation and compare it to a more fluid or paraphrase version.

A literal translation “attempt(s) to translate by keeping as close as possible to the exact words and phrasing in the original language, yet still make sense in the receptor language” (Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart, *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*, Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1982, p. 35). *A free translation* “attempt(s) to translate the *ideas* from one language to another, with less concern about using the exact words of the original. A free translation, sometimes called a paraphrase, tries to eliminate as much of the historical distance as possible” (Fee and Stuart, p. 35). *A dynamic equivalent* “attempt(s) to translate words, idioms, and grammatical constructions of the original language into precise equivalents in the receptor language” (Fee and Stuart, p. 35)

2.3. OT Books: Order, Hebrew, Greek, Catholic, Orthodox, Protestant

The order of placement of the Old Testament differs from version to version. The *Masoretic* text follows a formula known as the Law, the Prophets, and the Writings. The Law consists of the five books of Moses – Genesis through Deuteronomy. The Prophets

consist of the former prophets – Joshua, Judges, I and II Samuel and I and II Kings – and the later prophets – Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and the Twelve Minor Prophets. The Writings consist of poetry and wisdom - Psalms, Proverbs and Job, Song of Solomon – the scrolls - Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, Esther- and historical books - Daniel, Ezra, Nehemiah, I and II Chronicles.

The *Masoretic* text contained all 39 of these writings, but counted only 24 books, combining I and II Samuel, I and II Kings, I and II Chronicles, the twelve Minor Prophets, and Ezra and Nehemiah.

The *Septuagint* changed the order of the books resembling the order of the Protestant Bible. It also included additional books to the Hebrew Canon known as the Apocrypha (of questionable authorship or authenticity). Catholic and Orthodox Churches retained the books of the apocrypha in their translations and refer to them as deuterocanonical. That is, they can be read publicly in church services but do not possess the same authority as the books of the Hebrew Canon. These books were rejected by Protestants and are not included in Protestant translations of the Old Testament.

2.4. OT Canon: How was it formed?

The word canon comes from Greek *kanon* meaning measuring instrument, or rod. The word indicates a standard or list and is applied to the closed, standardized list of books which have been received as inspired Holy Scripture. The Old Testament canon is composed of 39 books (English Bible), which are variously combined in Ancient Israel as scrolls containing 22 or 24 books. The discrepancy in number is due to grouping numerous books together on one scroll in various fashions. In addition to the 39, 14 apocryphal books have been passed down through the Septuagint and Vulgate into the Catholic and Orthodox churches. However, even church fathers Jerome (c. 400) and Athanasius (c. 367) recognized the deuterocanonical, or secondary status of the apocryphal books.

What makes a book canonical? “The only true test of canonicity ... is the testimony of God the Holy Spirit to the authority of His own Word. This testimony found a response of recognition, faith, and submission in the hearts of God’s people who walked in covenant relationship with Him” (Archer, p. 78). In addition to acceptance by the community of believers over a long period of time, there are the issues of subject matter, orthodoxy of doctrine, Hebrew language, antiquity and authorship when identifiable.

Questions of the Old Testament canon, especially in regards to the Apocrypha, were resolved/closed for Jews by the deliberations of rabbis at Jamnia c. 90 A.D.

Assignment:

1. Find five passages from Old or New Testament where the writer refers to the inspiration, revelation, or some other trait of scripture as the word of God.

2. Find a passage of scripture from at least three different translations which demonstrates a marked difference in translation style. What is the difference?
3. Find a Bible with the apocrypha and read several chapters from I Maccabees. What do you think?
4. Find an example of each of the following types of literature in the Old Testament: historical narrative, vision or dream, song.

Sources for Part 2:

Gleason L. Archer. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*.

Chicago: Moody Press, 1974, p. 15-54, 68-82.

F.F. Bruce. *The Canon of Scripture*. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1988.

Otto Eissfeld. *The Old Testament: An Introduction*. New

York: Harper and Row, 1965, p. 669-721.

Gordon Fee and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible for All Its Worth*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing, 1982.

3. Hebrew Poetry: The Songs of Israel

One of the common modes of expression in the Old Testament is the use of songs and poetry. Songs, of course, are poetry put to music. Songs appear quite early in the Old Testament narrative and find their ultimate expression in the Psalms.

3.1. The *Mashal* (Definition and Examples)

One of the primary means of poetic expression in the OT is known as the *mashal*. This word has broad meaning and can be understood as a “proverb, parable, allegory, byword, taunt or discourse” (Harris, Archer, Waltke. *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, vol. I, p. 1258). The songs and wisdom literature of the OT are often expressed in this form. Many of the songs, Psalms, and Proverbs are referred to as a *mashal*.

Some examples of the songs of Israel are found in the following passages: the song of Miriam, Ex. 15:1-18; the song of Deborah, Judges 5:1-31. The Psalms and the Song of Solomon are also examples of the songs of Israel.

A famous example of a *mashal* is Jotham’s taunt of Abimelech and the men of Shechem after the murder of Gideon’s sons and the anointing of Abimelech as king (Judges 9:7-21).

Music and the implied use of song is often noted in the OT. Some examples include the following: David and Saul, I Sam. 16:15-17, 23. David’s tent, I Chron. 16:4-6, 37ff. David’s preparations for temple worship, I Chron. 25:1-7. II Chron. 5:11-14. Elisha in the desert, II Kings 3:14-16. Jehoshaphat at war, II Chron 20:20-22. Nehemiah celebrating the completion of the city wall, Neh. 7:1; 12:31, 35-38, 40.

3.2. Characteristics of Hebrew Poetry.

As with all poetry sound – stress, accent, and metrical arrangement – is a significant element in Hebrew poetry. In addition, the nature of the language requires the use of metaphor and imagery even in prose speech or writing. The use of metaphor or imagery is a common characteristic of poetry in many languages. Other characteristics are more common to Hebrew poetry, however, and a trained eye can discern them even in non-Hebrew translations of the Bible. Rhyme is not a feature of Hebrew poetry, generally speaking.

3.2.1. *Parallelism*: The primary characteristic of Hebrew poetry is parallelism. Parallelism is the balancing of one thought or phrase with a corresponding thought or phrase. The corresponding thought or phrase often contains the same number of words or at least a corresponding number of ideas.

There are four primary types of parallelism:

3.2.1.1. *Synonymous parallelism*: The primary trait of synonymous parallelism is repetition. The same thought is repeated using different words. For example:

“Simeon and Levi are brothers;
Their swords are implements of violence.
Let my soul not enter into their council;
Let not my glory be united with their assembly;
Because in their anger they slew men,
And in their self-will they lamed oxen.
Cursed be their anger for it is fierce;
And their wrath for it is cruel,
I will disperse them in Jacob
And scatter them in Israel” (Gen. 49:5-7).

“The Lord is my light and my salvation; whom shall I fear?
The Lord is the defense of my life; whom shall I dread?” (Ps. 27:1 NASB)

“The heavens are telling the glory of God;
And their expanse is declaring the work of His hands.
Day to day pours forth speech,
And night to night reveals knowledge” (Ps. 19:1-2).

“Unless the Lord builds the house,
They labor in vain who build it:
Unless the Lord guards the city,
The watchman keeps awake in vain” (Ps. 127:1)

“He who is slow to anger is better than the mighty,
And he who rules his spirit, than he who captures a city” (Prov. 16:32).

3.2.1.2. *Antithetic parallelism*: The primary trait of antithetic parallelism is contrast. Two contrasting ideas are placed side by side. For example:

“The Lord will tear down the house of the proud,
But he will establish the boundary of the widow” (Prov. 15:25).

“The Lord is far from the wicked,
But he hears the prayer of the righteous” (Prov. 15:29).

“Better is a little with righteousness
Than great income with injustice” (Prov. 16:8).

“Those who sow in tears shall reap with joyful shouting.
He who goes to and fro weeping, carrying his bag of seed,
Shall indeed come again with a shout of joy, bring his sheaves with him” (Ps. 126: 5-6)

3.2.1.3. *Synthetic parallelism*: The primary trait of synthetic parallelism is the extension of a thought through repetition and incrementally adding concepts or meaning. For example:

“How blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
Nor stand in the path of sinners
Nor sit in the seat of scoffers!
But his delight is in the law of the Lord,
And in his law he meditates day and night,
And its leaf does not wither;
And in whatever he does he prospers” (Ps. 1: 1-3)

“Ascribe to the Lord, O sons of the mighty,
Ascribe to the Lord glory and strength.
Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name
Worship the Lord in holy array” (Ps. 29:1).

Much of the remainder of Ps. 29 is an example of synthetic parallelism.

“Do not rob the poor because he is poor,
Or crush the afflicted at the gate;
For the Lord will plead their case,
And take the life of those who rob them

Do not associate with a man given to anger
Or go with a hot-tempered man,
Lest you learn his ways,
And find a snare for yourself” (Prov. 22:22-25).

Proverbs chapter 22:17 through chapter 24 are composed of short statements in the form of synthetic parallelism.

3.2.1.4. *Chiasm*: The primary trait of chiasm is synonymous parallelism with the order reversed. For example:

“Be gracious to me, O God, according to thy lovingkindness;
According to the greatness of thy compassion blot out my transgressions.
Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity,
And cleanse me from my sin.
For I know my transgressions and my sin is ever before me” (Ps. 51:1-3).

In this Psalm verse 1 is chiasmic, verses 2 and 3 are synonymous. The remainder of the Psalm is written in synonymous, synthetic and chiasmic parallelism demonstrating the interchangeable nature of parallelismic form in many Psalms.

3.2.2.. *Acrostic*: Another common characteristic of Hebrew poetry is the use of alphabetic acrostic. This is a device where the letters of the Hebrew alphabet are used as the first letter in a verse followed by the next letter to begin the following verse and so on. This is a feature which does not normally come across in translation, though one may see clear implications of it in Ps. 119, for instance. Each segment of this Psalm is a strophe beginning in a given letter of the alphabet. When I first read Psalm 119, I thought the headings were names of the authors! Other acrostics, both partial and complete, are Lamentations, Proverbs 31:10-31, Ps. 37 and Nahum 1:1-10.

3.2.3. Other Characteristics: There are several other characteristics of Hebrew Poetry including *Stich*, *Strophe*, *Alliteration*, *Anthropomorphism*, *Personification* and *Pun*.

3.2.3.1. The *stich* is the most basic element of poetry and is composed of a phrase which is the basic building block of a verse. Verses of Hebrew poetry are usually composed of two or three phrases. But there are other patterns as well. These are most easily discerned in the original Hebrew, but are preserved well in the NASB. For example:

“For if you cry for discernment,
Lift your voice for understanding;

If you seek her as silver,
And search for her as for hidden treasures;

Then you will discern the fear of the Lord,
and discover the knowledge of God” (Prov. 2:2-5).

This is an example of the distich (two-line verse) in a 2:2 rhythmical pattern.

“The Lord has accomplished His wrath,
He has poured out His fierce anger;
He has kindled a fire in Zion
Which has consumed its foundations” (Lamentations 4:11).

Here we have an example of four lines to a verse.

3.2.3.2. The *strophe*, or larger grouping of verses, is sometimes used in Hebrew poetry, but it is not a primary characteristic. A strophe or stanza may be signaled by a repeated verse or phrase known as a refrain. For example:

“The Lord of hosts is with us;
The God of Jacob is our stronghold” (Ps. 46:7,11)

This refrain repeated in Psalm 46 marks the end of two stanzas (strophes) of unequal length. Unlike the Greeks, the Hebrew mind seems less concerned with symmetry and a tidy mathematical framework. Stanzas contain a different number of lines, forms of parallelism change within the same psalm, acrostics are sometimes left off in mid-alphabet. Nevertheless, general characteristics are evident, and with practice, easily spotted.

Another example of a refrain marking the end of a strophe is found in Is.9:8-10:4:

“In spite of all this His anger does not turn away,
And His hand is still stretched out” (9:12,17,21; 10:4)

3.2.3.3. *Personification* is the practice of giving human characteristics to inanimate things. For example:

“How lonely sits the city
That was full of people!
She has become like a widow
Who was once great among the nations!
She who was a princess among the provinces
Has become a forced laborer!
She weeps bitterly in the night,
And her tears are on her cheeks;
She has none to comfort her
Among all her lovers
All her friends have dealt treacherously with her;
They have become her enemies.
Judah has gone into exile under affliction,
And under harsh servitude;
She dwells among the nations,
But she has found no rest;

All her pursuers have overtaken her
In the midst of distress” (Lam. 1:1-3)

3.2.3.4. *Pun* (paronomasia) is the “play on words” such as substituting a word for one similar in sound or meaning. A good example is found in Micah 1:8-16, or Jeremiah 1: 11-12. This poetic device is not clear except in the Hebrew language. A good translation will include an explanation of these devices in the margin.

Assignment

1. Identify 2 examples of synonymous, antithetic, and synthetic parallelism from Psalms or Proverbs.
2. Find a passage in the Old Testament where personification or anthropomorphism is used.

Sources for Part 3

- Gleason L. Archer. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1974.
- C. Hassell Bullock. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*. Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1979.
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- Richard J. Clifford. *The Wisdom Literature*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.
- Otto Eissfeld. *The Old Testament: An Introduction*. New York: Harper and Row, 1965, p. 669-721.
- Ronald E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature and Psalms*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1983.

4. What is Wisdom?

“Like all Hebrew intellectual virtues, wisdom ... is intensely practical, not theoretical. Basically, wisdom is the art of being successful, of forming the correct plan to gain the desired results. Its seat is the heart, the center of moral and intellectual decision” (“Wisdom,” D.A. Hubbard. *The New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd edition, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996, p. 1244)

Wisdom, primarily, interprets general revelation and applies universal principles. It works from creation upwards, rather than supernatural revelation descending from heaven.

The wisdom of the OT however is quite distinct from other ancient worldviews although the format of wisdom literature is similar to that of other cultures. Reflected in the OT wisdom is the teaching of a personal God who is holy and

just and who expects those who know him to exhibit his character in the many practical affairs of life. This perfect blend of the revealed will of a holy God with the practical human experiences of life is also distinct from the speculative wisdom of the Greeks. The ethical dynamic of Greek philosophy lay in the intellect; if a person had perfect knowledge he could live a good life (Plato). Knowledge was virtue. The emphasis of OT wisdom was that the human will, in the realm of practical matters, was to be subject to divine causes. Therefore, Hebrew wisdom was not theoretical and speculative. It was practical based on revealed principles of right and wrong, to be lived out in daily life (R. Laird Harris, Gleason Archer, and Bruce Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. I, Chicago Moody Press, 1980, p. 283).

4.1. Definitions

There are numerous Hebrew words which correspond to the English concept of wisdom, understanding, and knowledge. These words are all used in the context of the wisdom literature.

4.1.1. *Hokhmah*: "Not theoretical knowledge or philosophy but a proper grasp of the basic issues of life and the relationship of God to man as a moral agent." (Archer, p.475). "The essential idea of *hakam* represents a manner of thinking and attitude concerning life's experiences; including matters of general interest and basic morality. These concerns relate to prudence in secular affairs, skills in the arts, moral sensitivity, and experience in the ways of the Lord' (R. Laird Harris, Gleason Archer, and Bruce Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. I, Chicago Moody Press, 1980, p. 282).

4.1.2. *Binah*: "Connotes the ability to discern intelligently the difference between sham and reality, between truth and error, between the specious attraction of the moment and the long-range values that govern a truly successful life." (Ibid.)
To distinguish or understand the difference. "Consider, discern, perceive" (HAW, 282).

4.1.3. *Tushiyyah*: "Authentic insight into ... spiritual or psychological truth." (Ibid.)
This is a kind of wisdom which brings one into practical success.

4.1.4. *Sakal* : "Wisdom and the success which is the effect of wisdom" (Haw, p.282).
Prudence, good sense, practical insight of complex details leading to success.

4.2. Backgrounds (Ancient Near East)

Wisdom was valued in the cultures of the ancient Near East and was said to be possessed even by non-Israelites, though ultimately wisdom is associated with Yahweh, the God of the Israelites. (I Kings 4:29-34, Bezalel, Ex. 35:30ff.; Hiram I Kings 7:13-14. Is. 10:13, 29:14).

In I Kings 4:30 Solomon's wisdom is compared to that of all the people of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt. The wisdom of Mesopotamia and the wisdom of Egypt have become known in some detail only in the 20th century (Ronald E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature and Psalms*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1983, p. 21). In Mesopotamia there is evidence of a school and bi-lingual wisdom literature recorded in Akkadia and Sumeria. Some of the titles of later Babylonian and Sumerian wisdom literature are *The Counsels of Wisdom*, *Dialogue of Pessimism*, and *A Dialogue about Human Misery*. Mesopotamian wisdom literature dates from over 2 millennia B.C to about 1000 B.C.

“Again the topics are the problems of human existence and the ills of society: piety and its value, the reality and even the profit of crime What is common to all these works is the problem of the human condition . . .” (Murphy, 23). *The Story of Ahikar*, and Egyptian *Sebayit* or teachings are also among extant examples of ancient Near Eastern Wisdom Literature. Egyptian wisdom is translated as *ma'at* and carries the idea of truth, intelligence, justice, in which there was a single order in the whole universe.

4.2.1. Biblical Wisdom

Many aspects of wisdom are made clear in the biblical literature. First of all “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (Prov. 1:7). Both wisdom and folly are depicted as women calling to potential followers in the open places of the public square (Proverbs 8 and 9)). Wisdom is personified and shown to pre-exist the created order (Prov. 8:22-31). Wisdom not only calls, but must be sought as well (Prov. 2:1-5). Wisdom is seen as unsearchable. (Job 28:23), and as the supreme good (Ecc. 12:13-14).

Wisdom (*hokmah*) is used to designate the practical skill of an artisan, such as Bezalel, who works on the construction of the tabernacle (Ex. 35:30 – 36:1). Such skill can be applied to various trades, even to government officials such as Ahitophel, David's counselor (2 Samuel 16-17). Wisdom is also cleverness in coping with a situation, such as is evidenced by small but wise animals (Prov. 30:24-28). Coping with life (*tahbulot*, or “steering”; Prov. 1:5) is the heart of the wise teaching given in the Book of Proverbs. This is experiential wisdom, which issues in practical commands and admonitions for human beings. Many times this is equivalent to a code of ethics. (Murphy, p.33-34).

According to another interpreter:

[W]isdom is ‘the ability to cope,’ ‘the art of steering’; it is ‘practical knowledge of the laws of life and of the world, based on experience’; wisdom constitutes ‘parents’ legacy to their children’; it is the quest for self-understanding and mastery of the world’ -- no single definition suffices because of the variety of phenomena that employ the Hebrew word *hokma* and similar ideas in the ancient Near East (James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998, p. 9).

4.2.2. Apocryphal Wisdom

Two additional books form the corpus of wisdom literature in the non-canonical books of the Old Testament known as the Apocrypha. They are Ecclesiasticus (or Sirach), and the Wisdom of Solomon. These books are dated later than the books of the Hebrew Canon. For instance, Sirach is about 180 B.C. and written in Greek.

4.2.3. Biblical Folly

Two Hebrew words are most often used to designate folly, they are *aval* and *kasal*. Folly, of course is often contrasted with wisdom and the way of wisdom. Folly implies “weakness, and applied to the mind, to include also confidence, fond expectation.” Another definition is fat, dull, heavy, or inactive. Essentially, it is false confidence.

A fool is one who is not prudent, without aim or counsel, regardless of the means or instruments he should use, most ready to form rash hopes, who carelessly commits everything to an uncertain issue; opposed to one who walks uprightly, or straightforward; is easily provoked (William Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies*, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1978, p. 172).

Sources for Section 4

- Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1964.
William P. Brown. *Character in Crisis: A Fresh Approach to the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1996.
C. Hassel Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1979.
R.E. Clements. *Wisdom in Theology*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans, 1992.
Richard J. Clifford. *The Wisdom Literature*. Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1998.
James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom: An Introduction*, Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998
R. Laird Harris, Gleason Archer, and Bruce Waltke, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, Vol. I, Chicago Moody Press, 1980, p. 282
D.A. Hubbard. “Wisdom,” *The New Bible Dictionary*, 3rd edition, Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1996.
Ronald E. Murphy, *Wisdom Literature and Psalms*, Nashville, Abingdon Press, 1983.
William Wilson, *Old Testament Word Studies*, Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1978

5. Wisdom Psalms

A Psalm is a prayer put to music and sung by an individual or a congregation. Many of the songs of Israel have been collected into the book known as Psalms. It has been said that the Psalms are the prayer book of Israel and the Church. Psalms is one of the most oft read pieces of literature ever, and for many the most popular and comforting of the books of the Bible. A brief survey of current and past praise music and hymnals shows that Psalms continues to be the church’s hymnbook – the inspiration for our worship of

God. As we shall see, there are different types of Psalms expressing prayer, teaching, prophecy, and praise.

There are various types of Psalms. For our purposes they can be divided into five forms:

Psalms of Praise: 146-150, 136, 101, and others.

Wisdom Psalms: 1, 37, 49, 73

Messianic Psalms: 2, 22, 45, 55, 110

Lament (penitential): 32, 38, 51

Imprecatory: 35, 41, 69, 109, 137

Most of these types are self-explanatory if not always easy to recognize. One of the most difficult to understand for New Testament believers is the imprecatory psalm, or the curse. They seem to be below the theology of the New Testament of giving place to wrath, forgiving those who have sinned against us, and blessing those who curse us. One view is that these Psalms are a cry for God's justice, and that many of these Psalms are prophetic of Jesus' life and ministry. It is also proposed that these Psalms are an expression of the Old Testament ethic which has been superceded by the teachings of Christ. In any case imprecatory Psalms are at times an enigma to New Testament believers.

Sources for Part 5

Gleason L. Archer. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*.

Chicago: Moody Press, 1974.

C. Hassell Bullock. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*. Chicago: Moody Bible Institute, 1979, p. 113-151.

Keil and Delitsch. *Old Testament Commentaries*. Vols. III and IV. Grand Rapids: Associated Authors and Publishers.

6. Proverbs

6.1. Definitions

All proverbs whether similitudes or paradigms, were grounded in experience . . . a proverb is a short sentence founded on long experience, containing a truth.

Brevity characterizes all proverbs; they say a great deal in a few carefully chosen words. Observation also belongs to the intrinsic character of a proverb, which announces an important discovery in "sentence," or statement, form. The weight of tradition rests behind proverbs; they do not represent the isolated view of one person, however intelligent that individual may have been. Above all, proverbs embody truth. On hearing a proverb for the first time, "It is as though, within the depths of human consciousness, we perceived the proverbs content to be true" (Creshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature: An Introduction*, p. 56).

6.1.2. *Mashal*: "A statement which seeks to reveal the true nature of one thing by comparing it to another." (Bullock, p. 159). *Mashal* takes many forms in the OT. (Also, see 3.1 above). The meaning is also "to represent, to be like, a comparison."

6.1.3. Proverb types: Proverbs teach, they offer theory and experience in short, pithy sayings that might be used as a rule of thumb for personal conduct. (Ibid.) Proverbs can be divided into seven types: Identity or equivalence; Nonidentity, or contrast; Similarity; Contrariety to proper order indicative of absurdity; Classification of persons, actions, or situations; Valuation or priority of one thing relative to another, consequences of human character or behavior (Bullock, p. 159-160).

6.1.4. Jesus use of Proverbs and Parables:

The first shall be last andthe last shall be first.
He who humbles himself shall be ...exalted.
He who exalts himself shall be humbled.
The Son of Man came to seek and ...to save that which was lost.
The Son of Man came not to call the righteous but sinners to repentance.
To Him who hasshall more be given. To him who does not havehe shall lose even what he does have.
The Sabbath is made for mannot man for the Sabbath.
The harvest is plentiful but....the laborers are few.
Judge not thatthat you be not judged.

6.1.5. Examples of American Folk Proverbs

Historic Proverbs (common grace/wisdom -- why we can learn from our elders, the experienced, non-believers, a good doctor, lawyer, politician—"by me kings reign" any skillful person is guided by common grace wisdom)

Everyday Proverbs:...

.If it ain't broke...don't fix it.
A stitch in time....saves nine.
Nip it in thebud.
You can't teach an old dog new tricks.
The grass is always greeneron the other side of the fence.
The bigger they arethe harder they fall.
Stop beating a A dead horse. (Get over it, get a life)
Don't cry overspilt milk.
If you can't stand the heat get out of the kitchen.
The buck stopshere.
Out of the frying pan...into the fire.
It's like the pot calling the kettle ...black.
One good turn deservesanother.
Better safethan sorry.

Better latethan never.
Sticks and stones can break my bones, but words will never hurt me.

Some less common American folk aphorisms:
Luck is when preparation and opportunity meet.
A mighty oak is just a little nut that held on for a long time
Trouble often starts out as fun.
Worry ends where faith begins.
Keep your temper, nobody else wants it.
Just because you're paranoid doesn't mean they're not after you.

Follyverb – Buy nowpay later.

6.2. Contents and Authorship

The following is an overview of contents and authorship.

Outline (Bullock, 162, ff.)

Superinscription: 1:1
Introduction: 1:2-6
Reflections on Wisdom: 1:7-9:18
Miscellaneous Proverbs of Solomon:10:1-22:16
Words of the Wise: 22:17-24:22
Also These are for the Wise:24:23-34
Solomon's Proverbs collected by Hezekiah's Men: 25:1-29:27
The Words of Agur:30:1-33
The Words of Lemuel: 31:1-9
Acrostic on the Virtuous Woman 31:10-31

Authorship (internal evidence)

6.3. Major Themes: In addition to those below, youth, chastity, eternal wisdom, the women wisdom and folly.

6.3.1. Obedient-Teachable (Disobedient-Stubborn)

6.3.2. Humility-Pride

6.3.3. Industry-Laziness (2)

6.3.4. Fidelity-Unfaithfulness

6.3.5. Speech (Good and Bad effects)

6.3.6. Rulers (Characteristics, Power, How to be a ruler, How to deal with one)

6.3.7. Foolishness

6.3.8. Generosity (Selfishness, Stinginess)

6.3.9. Use or misuse of money, time

6.3.10. Friendship

6.3.11. Additional themes, characteristics: Surety (6:1-5), numerical proverbs (6:16-9; 30:18-9), wisdom of the lowly or small (30:24-28); the virtuous woman (31:10-31).

Assignment: Each team will be assigned one of the above categories. You will be asked to give a synopsis on how Proverbs as a whole speaks about your issue.

7.1.1. Wisdom and Wealth: Principles of Stewardship

1. Practice Consistency

Prov. 21:5; 13:11

2. Avoid “get rich quick” schemes. (Read “Affinity Fraud Blog)

Prov. 12:11; 28:20

3. Practice Work

Prov. 12:11; 22:9; 14:23a

4. Avoid laziness

Prov. 10:4-5; 12:24; 19:15

5. Practice Saving and investing

Prov. 6:6-8

6. Avoid luxuries

Prov. 21:17; 21:20

7. Practice giving

Prov. 11:24-26; 3:9-10

8. Avoid judgmental attitudes toward the poor

Prov. 14:31; 19:17; 21:13; 22:9; 22:22-23; 28:3

9. Practice putting your trust in God

Prov. 16:20b; 28:5-6

10. Avoid placing your trust in wealth

Prov. 11:28; 23:4-5

11. Practice paying your bills on time (budgeting).

12. Avoid living in debt, co-signing loans you cannot afford to pay

Prov. 22:7; 22:26-27; 6:1-5

John Wesley taught the early Methodists, “Make all you can, save all you can, give all you can.”

Luke 12:15-21

7.1.2. True and False Intimacy

Proverbs 5:1-23; 6:20-35; 7:1-27; 9:13-18

1. Wisdom understands that the marital relationship is sacred and exclusive.
2. Wisdom understands that the marital relationship is pleasurable. The physical relationship in marriage is likened to water – the deepest physical need other than breath itself. The readers is encouraged to be “intoxicated” with the love of his wife.
3. Wisdom understands that the physical passions are powerful and potentially destructive. There is a counterfeit intimacy which can be likened to drinking salt water – that which does not quench the deepest thirst but rather increases it. Song of Solomon tells us that love is like a fire, the very flame of God (*shalhevet-yah*). Fire can heat our home -- or burn it down.
4. Wisdom understand that false intimacy leads to untold sorrows. Today we have actual false intimacy – prostitution, cohabitation -- and virtual false intimacy pornography, movies, internet, literature.
5. Wisdom understands that the discipline of self-control leads to freedom. We are told to guard our heart for from t flow the streams of life, and to watch carefully the path of our feet. To live in moral purity is a decision we make.

There is a progression to addictive behavior which we can apply specifically to pornography.

- a) Uncontrolled cravings
- b) Obsessive thoughts about the addiction
- c) Energy focused on the addiction
- d) Absenteeism
- e) Increasingly affects relationships
- f) Changes of behavior
- g) Costly
- h) Affects and controls moods

7.1.3. The Virtuous Woman

Some women are inspired by this passage, but others feel condemned – they don’t measure up to the “perfect” standard.

Hayil is the term used to describe virtue. It means might, strength, Ability, virtue, valor, substance, wealth, military prowess, confidence, excellence, practicality.

Here is the character of the virtuous (*hayil*) woman.

- a) Faithful to her husband – completing, not competing, therefore her husband and children respect her. This may be a dynamic of cause and effect.
- b) She is industrious and foresightful.
- c) She is compassionate and wise, not self-indulgent.
- d) Her beauty starts within. She has internal strength founded on the fear of the Lord. (I Peter 3: 3-5).

e) She is a picture of the church, and as the closing acrostic of Proverbs where wisdom and folly are personified as women, she can be considered a personification of wisdom.

7.1.4. The Power of Words – The Key to Happiness

a) Words have the power of life and death.

Proverbs 16:24; 12 :25; 12:18; 21:23; 15:1,4; 25:5; 16:24; 25:11-12; 27:5

b) Words have the power of destroy.

Proverbs 16:16-18; 12:18; 16:27-28; 18:6-8; 20:19; 24:28; 25:18; 19:9

c) Much speech is non-verbal.

Proverbs 16:12-14; 16:30

d) Listening is as important as speaking. Proverbs 18:2,13,17; 19:20

Sources for Section VI:

Gleason Archer, A Survey of Old Testament Introduction, Chicago: Moody Press, 1964.

C. Hassel Bullock, An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books, Chicago: Moody Press, 1979.

Derek Kidner. *Proverbs: An Introduction and Commentary*. Downers Grove: Intervarsity Press, 1964.

7. The Book of Job

7.1. Date of Events, Setting, and Authorship

Based on internal evidence, the events of Job are probably pre-Mosaic, taking place during the patriarchal era. There are several indicators of this early date: 1) The existence of a clan family system; 2) Sacrifices offered by the head of household rather than the existence of the Levitical priesthood; 3) Mention of the *qesitah* an ancient name for a silver piece as a mode of monetary exchange.

Inasmuch as Job contains no references to historical events and reflects a non-Hebraic cultural background concerning which we possess little or no information, it is not easy to assign a probable date for the life time and career of Job. The district of Uz, in which the action took place, was located in Northern Arabia; the Septuagint refers to it as the land of the Aisitai, a people whom Ptolemy the geographer locates in the Arabian desert adjacent to the Edomites of Mount Seir. Job's friend Eliphaz came from Teman, a well-known locality in Edom. Elihu came from the Buzites, who probably lived adjacent to the Chaldeans in northeast Arabia (Archer, p. 464).

The author of Job does not claim to be present at the time of the events and probably was a Hebrew who used ancient sources under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. This is especially evident through the use of the Hebrew covenant name for God, *Yahweh*. Many date the final form of the book from the time of Solomon onward.

7.2. Divisions

1. Prologue (1-2)
2. Dialogue (3-37)
Three speech cycles followed by Job's closing discourse and monologues, Elihu's speeches.
3. Divine discourse (38:1-42:6)
4. Epilogue (42:7-17)

7.3. Theological Concerns

7.3.1. Theodicy: The question of the justice of God in light of human suffering, especially the suffering of the innocent. How can an almighty and just God permit or appear powerless in the face of human suffering? Theodicy (Job's plight) produces three questions a) Is God almighty? b) Is God evil, or does he have a demonic side? c) Is man innocent? (NIV Study Bible, Introduction: Job, p. 733). These questions are addressed in Job.

Theodicy is often rooted in suffering, especially the suffering of the seemingly innocent.. Job continually asks the question "why?" 3:12, 16, 20, 23. Job's plight: pain 3:26; wonders about God's character, wants to die 6:8 ff.; can I overcome this temptation? Even friends are undependable, 6:14-15, insomnia, 7:4 ff. meaningless despair, 7:15; God is seen as an enemy 9:19; Mortality 17:13-15; Anger 15:12-14 (Pastoral Counseling Insight re: grief); No posterity 18:17-19; Others are appalled 19:20-21; alienation from kin and friends 19:13-16; prosperity of the wicked 21:7-15, 29-31; 24:1 ff. A summary of Job's affliction chapter 30

7.3.2. The Doctrine of Satan: The book of Job teaches against dualism which states that there are two equal but opposite forces at work in the world struggling for pre-eminence. One force is good, the other evil. Job teaches that Satan's power is limited (1:7; 2:2;). He acts by permission (1:12; 2:6). His name (*Satan*) means adversary or accuser. He attacks the sacred relationship between God and Job. This is a typical pattern of Satanic activity. Genesis 3:1 ff.; Zech. 3:1-5; Luke 22:3-6, 31-32; Rev. 12:9-11; I Peter 5:8-11.

7.3.3. The Doctrine of Sovereignty and Creation; Chapters 1 and 2; 26:6-14; 38: 4 ff., 39:1 ff.

7.3.4. The Mediator, 9:33-35; 13:1-3, 15; 16:19-21; 17:3, 19:25-27; 27:1-6; 40:3-5; 42:1-6

7.3.5. The Resurrection; 14:14 ff., 19:25-27

7.3 6. Wisdom and Ethics; Chapter 28; Chapter 31

7.3.7. Pre-existent wisdom. The created order is no the seat of wisdom, but reflects wisdom. Wisdom is pre-existent.

7.4. Selected Passages

Outline of Contents: Prologue

Job's wealth and character

Satan's character: to accuse man to God and God to man (Gen.3; Zechariah 3; Gal. 3; Rev. 12)

God's permission

Job's trials

Comforters' speech on wisdom (5:19-25).

Job's faith in suffering (Advocate, 16:19; Resurrection, redeemer, 14:13-17, 19:25-27).

Elihu's speeches (Ch. 32 ff.)

Elihu re-shapes the doctrine of retribution. The righteous may suffer (whereas the comforters say it is always inherent weakness or sin); Suffering and dreams instruct and are designed to rescue the sufferer from a worse fate; What is important is present response, nor past transgression; Accept discipline;

Job's rebellious response is treason and may bring worse; learn from misfortune, God is just and no one gets away with evil. God is not accountable, He delivers the right response.

Sovereignty of God. (38:1ff.,40:1ff).

Job's vindication (42:1ff.)

7.5 Pastoral Concerns

Counselors approach; Anger, 15:12-14; Listening 21:2-3; Condemnation 22:4-11;

Sovereignty and Human responsibility

Theodicy

Testing (Luke 22:31; 11:4; I Cor. 10:13 ff., I Peter 5: 8 ff.; James 5:10-11)

Prayer: 42:7 ff.

Sources For Section 7:

NIV Study Bible, Introduction to Job, p.731-2

Gleason Archer. *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*. Chicago: Moody Press, 1964.

A. Hassel Bullock. *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1979.

David J.A. Clines. *Job 1-20 in Word Biblical Commentary*. Dallas: Word Books Publishers, 1989.

Gary R. Collins. *Christian Counseling: A Comprehensive Guide*. W Publishing Group, 1988.

Keil and Delitsch. *Old Testament Commentaries*. Vols. IV. Grand Rapids: Associated Authors and Publishers.

John E. Hartley. *The Book of Job in The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, R.K. Harrison, ed. Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1988.

Marvin Pope. *Job in The Anchor Bible*. Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1965.

8. Ecclesiastes

8.1. Introductory considerations: Hebrew title is *Qohelet* (Preacher), from *qahal*, to convene an assembly. The Greek name is Ecclesiastes, with the same meaning (so Archer, p.483). Purpose and theme (per Archer) "To convince man of the uselessness of any world view which does not rise above the horizon of man himself." Any view of life which places personal happiness or enjoyment of the created order at the pinnacle is false and foolish. The only adequate worldview is one which places God himself at the pinnacle as the highest value of all. He is the only one who can give meaning to life. (Eccl 1:1 ff., 12:13-14).

8.2. Authorship and Date: The author of Ecclesiastes has traditionally been viewed by Jew and Christian alike as Solomon. While the author does not clearly identify himself as Solomon, he clearly resembles him. He is the wealthy "son of David, king in Jerusalem." 19th century higher criticism and recent 20th century conservative scholarship have thrown doubts on this conclusion. It is suggested that Qohelet is later than Solomon, primarily on linguistic grounds. Archer, a co-editor of the Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament makes a very convincing case against this. Style and use of Aramaisms do not resemble any known biblical or non-biblical literature except the Song of Songs. He shows that contact with Phoenecian and Aramaic and even Indian culture and language would have been greatest during the height of the Solomonic empire, thus accounting for the international flavor of *Qohelet* including Aramaic, Phoenecian, and Persian loanwords. Archer supports the traditional view -- Solomonic authorship. (For another view see Roland Murphy, *Ecclesiastes* in the bibliography).

8.3. Contents: Chapter one contains the author's initial observation and complaint, "All is vanity." First eleven verses declare the vanity or circular nature of all things. Middle chapters tell of the king's effort to experience and attain great achievements and pleasures. He finds this to be vain, with the exception of the process of enjoying one's work. Chapter 3:1-8 is a classic poetic statement in antithetic parallelism regarding the seasons of life. In later chapters, particularly 11 and 12, he declares the importance of serving God in one's youth. Chapter 12 is a masterful poetic description of the process of aging and death -- the ultimate vanity. The author concludes with the exhortation to fear God and keep His commandments, thus highlighting the theme that life, even success and pleasure, are only meaningful in the context of the fear of God and the reception of His blessing.

8.4. Other Points of Emphasis

8.4.1. Activities under the sun which constitute meaninglessness or "chasing after the wind" (1:17; 2:11; 2:17; 2:26; 4:4; 4:16; 5:11; 6:2; 6:9; 8:10).

8.4.2. The value of toil and honest labor (2:24; 3:12-13; 3:22; 5:12; 5:18ff; 8:15; 9:8)

8.4.3. The ultimate futility of wealth (5:10-11; 5:13-17; 6:1-2)

8.4.3. Injustice (3:16-17; 4:1ff; 5:8-9; 7:15; 8:14; 10:5ff) (Wilberforce and the fight against slavery. How to relate to just and unjust church government, examples).

8.4.4. Aging (11:8-12:8)

- 8.4.5. Giving, investment, and industry (11:1-6)
8.4.6. Other themes are addressed briefly with short proverbs or segments (Chapter 7-8:1; , 10:1-20.

8.5. Preaching in Ecclesiastes

8.5.1. What to Ask Yourself Before You Teach the Bible by Jim Elliff

Have I prayed?

Do I consciously and desperately need the Spirit?

Do I believe that my hearers must hear what I have to say?

Am I attempting to live by the truths I am presenting?

Will my demeanor and my words reflect the beauty and significance of the passage?

Do I believe God will change my listeners through what I have to say?

In what practical way do I believe my hearers will be different because of this teaching?

How will this truth effect _____, _____, and _____.

Am I saying what the passage says, or am I using the passage to justify what I want to say?

Will the most mature Christian be challenged and will the least mature Christian understand?

In what ways am I remembering all who will be present (i.e. children, singles, retirees, those without Christian spouses, etc.)?

Am I using vivid word pictures and helpful illustrations to make my teaching memorable and clear?

Is there anything I am planning to say that I should not say?

Am I passionate about this truth and will my passion be evident to my listeners?

In what ways will I make Christ known (even from the Old Testament)?

8.5.2. Exercise:

Sample Passages for Preaching:

Psalm 1

Psalm 73

Psalm 37

Eccl. 2:24-26; 4:9-12; 5:1-7; 5:8; 5:10-17; 5:18-20; 8:10-13; 8:14-15; 9:13-16; 9:7-10; 10:5-6; 10:12-14; 10:8-11; 11:1-4,6; 11:9-10;

Sources for Section 8:

Gleason Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1964.

B. Hassel Bullock, *An Introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books*, Chicago: Moody Press, 1979.

R.E. Clements. *Wisdom in Theology*. Grand Rapids: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1992.

James L. Crenshaw, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature: An Introduction*: Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 1998.

- Michael A. Eaton. *Ecclesiastes, An Introduction and Commentary* in Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries, D.J. Wiseman, ed. Downers Grove: InterVarsity Press, 1983.
- Robert Gordis. *Koheleth, the man and his world, a study of Ecclesiastes*. New York: Schocken Books, 1951.
- Keil and Delitsch. *Old Testament Commentaries*. Vols. IV. Grand Rapids: Associated Authors and Publishers.
- Roland E. Murphy, *Ecclesiastes*. Dallas: Word Publishers, 1992.

9. Song of Solomon

9.1. Titles and Authorship: Sir HasSirim leSlomoh (Hebrew). Canticum Canticorum (Latin). The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's. Or The Best Song, which is Solomon's (English).

Authorship: Solomon is believed to be the author based on the title. Additional evidence points to Solomonic authorship: a) Geographical allusions in the text indicate an undivided kingdom. This is possible in the time of Solomon or before. b) The author's extensive knowledge of nature (fauna and flora). c) Solomon is known to have written over 1,000 songs. Solomonic authorship is objected to primarily on linguistic grounds similar to those of Ecclesiastes. Many commentators date the Song during the Solomonic era, however.

Some see the work as a satirical treatment of Solomon's attempt to woo a maiden from the Northern regions away from a common shepherd who was her first love. It extols her virtues and the virtue of pure love over that which can be wooed by the trappings of wealth and power. In such a case the author would not be Solomon and the meaning of the superscription would be that the song is of or about Solomon, rather than by Solomon. This interpretation places the author as a contemporary of Solomon or shortly after Solomon in the Northern Kingdom.

9.2. Schools (Methods) of Interpretation:

9.2.1. Allegorical: Some rabbis and early church. The Song is an artistic production or historical event which must be understood allegorically. That is every detail has a hidden meaning. This type of interpretation tends to be somewhat fanciful, i.e. imaginary. The primary figures are Christ and the church or Yahweh and Israel. Thus, the love relationship between God and his people is depicted.

9.2.2. Literal: This is a literal event in Solomon's life which poetically explains the power and the passion of romantic love. Objections to this interpretation is that Solomon is not a proper role model for the Biblical teaching on marital and sexual fidelity, and so a poor candidate to inspire a canonical teaching on that theme.

If we can agree that a book which celebrates virtuous love between a man and a woman deserves a place in the canon of Holy Scripture, then we will have no

difficulty in interpreting the song in its literal sense. The creation of mankind as male and female and their sexual relationship were part of the original order and not a post-Fall alteration. Paul's view of marriage was that it mirrored a much higher sphere of relationships, that between Christ and the church (Eph. 5:21-33) and John described the consummation of the redemption as the "marriage of the Lamb" (Rev. 19:7-9) (Bullock, p. 231)..

9.2.3. Typical: similar to number 1 above, but limiting the allegory to several primary symbols such as Christ, the church, the return of Christ and the wedding feast on the great day.

9.3. Genre

The Song of Solomon has been viewed in various ways regarding its genre. Some see it as a drama, or dramatic pastoral, others as a single song, and still others as a series of love poems or songs.

Delitzsch also followed the dramatic theory and called the song a "dramatic pastoral," recognizing . . . that it was not a drama in the theatrical sense since the theater was not a Semitic institution, but a development somewhere between lyrical poetry and drama (Bullock, p. 232).

9.4. Canonicity

There was apparently some vacillation on the matter of canonicity, but once received, no serious questioning of its place in the OT canon. The famous quote of Rabbi Aqiba (50 – 135 A.D.) throws some light onto the question of Canonicity for the Song. "Heaven forbid! – No Israelite man ever disputed concerning the Song of Songs that it imparts uncleanness to the hands (indicating sanctity). For the entire age is not so worthy as the day on which Song of Songs was given to Israel. For all the Scriptures are holy, but the Song of Songs is holiest of all. And if they disputed they disputed only concerning Qohelet." Evidence for canonicity for the Rabbis exists from the end of the first century and for the church from the end of the second century.

9.5 Celibacy and Sexuality: History of the Church's View

One of the most significant developments in the life of the early church is its insistence on the practice of clerical celibacy. Different practices emerged in the east and west. The practice of clerical celibacy has played a role in the life and controversies of the church until today.

Early Developments: Biblically, the issue of widowhood is addressed in various OT texts. "The Lord is defender of the widow and fatherless," and there is a duty to care for the widow from the offerings (Ex.22:22; Dt.14:29; 24:17; 27:19). This concern for orphans and widows is echoed in James 1:27. Jesus spoke of those who made themselves eunuchs for the sake of the kingdom of heaven (Matt. 19:12) In Luke, Anna is a widow of 84 years who remained in the temple to pray and fast (Luke 2:36-38). It is the overlooking of Grecian widows in the daily distribution

which causes the first internal crisis in the church (Acts 6:1ff.) thus establishing the fact that they had formed a group for whom care was expressed by the church. Acts 9: 39,41, indicates that there may have been an order of widows (*hai cherai*) in Palestine during the ministry of Peter. Paul encouraged the celibate lifestyle as one that offered freedom, but did not forbid marriage (I Cor. 7:8-9; 32-5). I Tim. 5:9-10ff. shows that widows were cared for and enrolled in a "list."

Order of widows : Polycarp of Smyrna, mentions widows and virgins. In particular, he refers to the widows as "the altar of God." Reference to widows and virgins as a designated class in the church grows in the Patristic literature. The unmarried state of widows is one which calls for special consideration in the church. The addition of younger unmarried virgins adds to the numbers of those with special status in the church. Canons concerning celibacy appear as early as the councils of Elvira, c. 305, and Ancyra, 314-319. Prior to this time I Tim. 3 and 5 (husband of one wife, wife of one husband), were interpreted to discourage or forbid digamy or remarriage after the loss of a husband or wife (e.g. the writings of Tertullian) and to extol remaining celibate after the death of a spouse. An order of widows and virgins appears in the Apostolic Tradition (c. 215) (Hamell, p. 83) of Hippolytus. Widows and virgins are mentioned as definite minor orders in the church at Rome. Cyprian, c. 250, (Augustine Reader, p. 530) refers to virgins as "the flower on the tree of the church." Augustine, writing in the fifth century, assigns a particular attainment of heavenly honor to virgins. It came to be believed that celibacy was a spiritually superior way of life. There are also canons prohibiting so-called "spiritual marriages" or virgins subintroductae. Eventually, some form of celibacy was required of all major orders. Celibacy was extolled because of the erroneous belief that the fallen nature was communicated through sexual intercourse.

Distinctives between east and west. Canon 33 of Elvira (West), "Bishops, presbyters and deacons -- indeed, all clerics who have a place in the ministry [of the altar] -- shall abstain from their wives and shall not beget children -- this is a total prohibition: whoever does so, let him forfeit his rank among the clergy."(NE, p.307).

Canon 10 of Ancyra,

As many as are being ordained deacons if at the time of ordination they have made a declaration and stated that they must marry and cannot remain celibate, such persons, should they marry thereafter can remain in their office, as the bishop had granted them the right to marry at their ordination. But if any held their peace and accepted celibacy at their ordination, and afterwards marry, such persons shall cease from their ministry.(NE, p. 312).

This issue continued to be a source of conflict in the church through the time of the Reformation even until today.

9.6. Themes: a) The power of emotional and passionate love. b) The love between God and His people.

Under the first heading Cheryl Exum comments:

The Song of Songs is a long lyric poem about erotic love and sexual desire – a poem in which the body is both object of desire and source of delight, and lovers engage in the continual game of seeking and finding in anticipation, enjoyment and assurance of sensual gratification. A love poem. The poem’s genius lies in the way it shows us as well as tells us that “love is strong as death” (8:6), and in the way it explores the nature of love. It looks at what it is like to be in love from both a woman’s and a man’s point of view, and it relies exclusively on dialogue, so that we learn about love through what lovers say about it (Cheryl Exum, *Song of Songs*. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2005).

9.7. Contents: Drawing from various passages we see at least three characters, the male lover, the beloved and the friends, or chorus. Readings: 1:1-12; 4:1-7; 5:10-16; 8:6-7. Interpretive discussions of the dynamics of emotional attraction, Christian view of marriage and sexuality, place of the covenant of marriage, sins against a Christian view of marriage and sexuality.

Duane Garrett’s Interpretation from the Word Commentary on The Song of Solomon:

1:2-4 Entrance

1:5-6 The Virgin’s Education

1:7-8 Finding the Beloved

1:9-2:7 First Song of Mutual Love

2:8-17 Invitation to Depart

3:1-4:15 Three Wedding Night Songs

 The Bride’s Anxiety

 The Bride Comes to the Groom

 The Flawless Bride

4:16-5:1 Consummation

5:2-6:10 Three Wedding Night Songs

(5:2-8) Pain and Transformation

(5:9-6:3) The Bride Recovers the Groom

(6:4-10) The Flawless Bride II

6:1-7:1 Leaving Girlhood Behind

7:2-8:4 Second Song of Mutual Love

8:5-7 Claiming the Beloved

8:8-12 The Virgin’s Education

8:13-14 Farewell

9.7. Pastoral Concerns

Advice to marriageable young people when pursuing a relationship which may lead to marriage:

- 1) Is this relationship leading me closer to or farther away from God, is it causing me to compromise my convictions?
- 2) Are we spiritually compatible?
- 3) Is this relationship based on physical or emotional attraction alone,?
- 4) On the other hand, are we physically and emotionally attracted to one another?
- 5) Do I have the means to support a marriage and future family at this time? Is pursuing a marital relationship realistic?
- 6) Do I get along with (appreciate/like) his or her extended family?
- 7) Pray and seek God's guidance, but do not over-spiritualize.

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