

## I. THE FIVE BOOKS OF WISDOM AND POETRY

### A. Introduction

1. The Poetic Books show us the passion, praise, and problems the Jewish people went through. They are unique in biblical literature because they express the worship of God's people—a worship that is given in the midst of seasons of blessing and seasons of suffering. We know more about the Jewish people and what they were like spiritually from these books than any others in the OT. Their theme portrays an aspiration of the Hebrews to truly know God and have an intimate relationship with Him. One could say the Books of History are nationally focused while the Poetic Books are more attune to an individual's spirituality and morality.

### B. The Psalms

1. The Psalms have a five-fold structure that is intended to echo the Pentateuch.<sup>1</sup> Seventy-three of the psalms have David in their titles, and there are strategic Davidic psalms in each section of the Psalter. In fact, you can see calculated groupings of these psalms at the beginning, middle, and end of the book (Psalms 3–9; 11–32; 34–41; 138–145).

2. Psalms 1 and 2 begin by connecting the book to the meta-narrative of Scripture. Entry into the Psalter first takes the reader to the significance of God's word; it is the blessed person, who meditates on it day and night, that will be like a tree planted next to living water (1:1–6). Then, in the second psalm we see a king's coronation with universal implications.<sup>2</sup>

*I will tell of the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my son; today I have begotten you. <sup>8</sup>Ask of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession. <sup>9</sup>You shall break them with a rod of iron, and dash them in pieces like a potter's vessel." Psalms 2:7–9*

3. The allusions to a Davidic king (messianic genealogy) ruling over the earth (geography) is near impossible to miss not only in the Psalms (e.g., Psa. 110:1–7; 132:11–18) but also in the Bible (cf. Gen. 49:8–10; Num. 24:17–18; Deut. 33:7; 1 Sam. 2:10; Jer. 23:5–6; Ezek. 34:22–24; Isa. 9:6; Hos. 3:5; Amos 9:11–12; Mic. 5:2–4; Zech. 9:9–10). This king from David's line is described in biblical Hebrew as māšîah, "messiah, anointed one," 2:2; melek, "king," 2:6; bēn, "son," 2:7; and the Aramaic bar, "son," 2:12. The Aramaic use of "son" in 2:12 is a remarkable syntactical move. By doing this, the text looks forward to a glorious figure who is like the bar ānāsh, "son of man" (Dan. 7:13–14).
4. To this end, the Psalms begin by reestablishing the main points we have been discussing in our previous sessions: (1) a desire to be obedient to God's call is the required heart posture to access the foundations of eternal hope, and (2) there is still to come an anointed conqueror who will rule over the earth. It is for this reason the Psalter is so heavily focused upon David—i.e., no matter the circumstantial or spiritual pain that

results in the life of one after God's own heart (as the laments within many of the psalms con(added)vey), God's divine plan for restoration, healing, and a final salvation will neither be hindered nor be interrupted.<sup>3</sup>

### C. Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes & Song of Solomon

1. These four books fall into the literary category of wisdom literature. The concept of kōkmā, "wisdom," signifies a mastery of a particular skill in a domain. As seen in the OT, people had 'wisdom' concerning how to perform various tasks, like making the priestly garments (Exod. 28:1–3; for other skills, cf. e.g., Exod. 31:1–3; Jer. 9:16–17; Psa. 107:27; 1 Kgs. 7:14; Isa. 10:13; Ezek. 27:9; Psa. 58:6). It is also interesting that it is David's son who is the author of three of these four books (i.e., Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon). He is also the one that possessed the ability to rule effectively over the kingdom of Israel. The Solomonian cast throughout the wisdom literature portrays the son of David as disseminating wisdom, "not for any particular skill or limited technical domain, but for life itself."<sup>4</sup> Thus, what we see transpiring in the wisdom literature is the practical and spiritual development of humanity's purpose: to live in fellowship with God and exercise dominion over His creation, which is first and foremost oneself.
2. In Job there are themes that remember the fall and reveal the fundamental inadequacy of human wisdom, but most of all the subject of the fear of the Lord is underscored<sup>5</sup>; a theme that also bookends Proverbs and Ecclesiastes (Prov. 1:7; 31:10–31; Eccles. 1:1–11; 12:13–14). As Prov. 1:7 states, "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge [wisdom]" (cf. 9:10). Thus, since fearing God is the most fundamental of principles to access wisdom, it is a gift that proceeds only from Him. Nonetheless, as one theologian notes, "that is not the end of the story, for the fear of the Lord is only the beginning of the acquisition and application of wisdom."<sup>6</sup> To fear God is to choose faith and apply it to our daily lives. This, in turn, creates the ground upon which wisdom's house is constructed (cf. Matt. 5–7; esp. 7:24–27).
3. Furthermore, it is this motif that also lifts these books of wisdom above their proverbial purpose into God's meta-narrative—it asks what it looks like specifically in everyday life, to live under the rule of an omniscient and omnipotent God.<sup>7</sup> Job captures this in an arresting way as the book unequivocally emphasizes that "God rules the world and that this rule is of a different order from what one might expect."<sup>8</sup>

4. The depiction given in Job is a continuation of the Gen. 3:15 narrative. It is an “outcropping” of that battle between God’s Anointed and the serpent.<sup>9</sup> Regardless, the power of God over Satan is put on display in inexplicable ways.<sup>10</sup> Thus, although Job broaches the age-old problem of theodicy, the story ends with the question of God’s benevolence in the midst of suffering, unanswered. Yet, “the message of God that he is absolute and does as He will without regard to man’s comprehension of His mysteries must constitute the real theme and provide the fullest measure of hope.”<sup>11</sup> The words of Thomas Schreiner serve us well here:  

Human beings are no match for Satan, but God is. The evil unleashed on the world by Satan does not transpire apart from God’s will. As the sovereign creator of all, he rules over the forces of insanity and evil as well. In the great cosmic conflict he is Lord.... The book of Job teaches that God is sovereign and just, but it does not explain why God allows such evil in the world in a way that answers all questions.... It leaves us with the truth that God as creator and Lord of the world knows what he is doing. As human beings, we are not given all the answers.<sup>12</sup>
5. Or, as another scholar articulates, “All is under God’s will in spite of the dark mystery that often surrounds his ways.”<sup>13</sup> This summarizes not only the book of Job, but also the overarching purpose of the wisdom literature—i.e., true wisdom is rooted in the fear of the Lord; it is fundamentally inaccessible by way of humanity’s intellectual ascent. It is the path of revelation and mystery!
6. Summarily, Proverbs affirms life; Ecclesiastes denies it. One of them sees the opportunity that life affords, while the other its limitations. Where in many ways the emphasis of the Psalms is on praising God, Proverbs focuses on fearing Him. Nonetheless, the two are not inharmonious. In fact, it is only those who fear God that will praise Him. Building on this fundamental premise, Ecclesiastes is focused upon the “irrationality and perverseness of life under the sun” (e.g., 1:9–11)—it looks beyond the natural as the means to true joy.<sup>14</sup> Proverbs points to this as well, although the benefits that come from doing what is right in God’s eyes is highlighted therein, it also emphasizes that “the righteous are not invariably spared from suffering; indeed, they sometimes suffer in agonizing and inexplicable ways.”<sup>15</sup> Thus, the personification of wisdom in the book of Proverbs as an image of an omniscient coming Messiah continues the biblical motif of a future hope (e.g., Prov. 8:1–36).<sup>16</sup>
7. Much like Proverbs, the Song of Solomon celebrates the blessings of God, specifically the blessing of marriage. When taken from a literal perspective, the two beloveds in in the book are praised as they journey down the path of transparency, which is, at times, candidly erotic. Nevertheless, it is set in an atmosphere of unmitigated vulnerability and openness between two covenanted individuals. In fact, it is this very point that has prompted some scholars to see the entire book as somewhat of a commentary on Gen. 2:25: “And the man and his wife were both naked, and were not ashamed.”<sup>17</sup>

8. All of that said, as signified by some of the prophets (e.g., Jeremiah, Hosea, and Ezekiel), and what the covenant at Sinai represented, the relationship between the bride and bridegroom in the book points to the relationship between God and His covenant keeping people.<sup>18</sup>

*Thus says the LORD: “I remember the devotion of your youth, your love as a bride, how you followed Me in the wilderness, in a land not sown.” Jeremiah 2:2*

*I spread the edge of my cloak over you, and covered your nakedness: I pledged Myself to you and entered into a covenant with you, says the Lord GOD, and you became Mine. Ezekiel 16:8 (cf. 16:1–58)*

9. The Song of Songs reminds the reader of the passionate love that God has for His people and their struggles on the journey of surrendering all to Him.

*Set me as a seal upon your heart, as a seal upon your arm; for love is strong as death, passion fierce as the grave. Its flashes are flashes of fire, a raging flame. <sup>7</sup>Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of one’s house, it would be utterly scorned. Song of Songs 8:6–7*

## II. INTRODUCTION TO THE PROPHETS

- A. Although the prophets do not necessarily advance the narrative of God’s plan, they do give commentary and insight into Israel’s history; providing us with details concerning why God is acting in such a way. Most of the prophets write before the Babylonian exile; warning God’s covenant keeping people about the dangers of forsaking the Lord and His ways. Some of the prophets write amid the exile, while others after. The latter focusing upon the state of Israel subsequent to their return.<sup>19</sup>
- B. The judgment of God seen through the Babylonian invasion was forewarned in Lev. 26:40–46 and Deut. 28:58–68. Repentance and obedience to the covenant is the only means to avoid God’s just action and/or to restore the relationship. This period is considered to be the “day of the Lord.” Nonetheless, this ‘day’ looks to another ‘final day’ that will be one of both judgment and salvation. Thus, the ultimate message of the prophets is that Yahweh reigns over all His creation and His glory is manifest in both judging and saving His people.
- C. Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Hosea describe the depth of their sin as that of whoredom.<sup>20</sup> The people of God have not only violated the law, but they have also committed adultery by abandoning the very One who created, nurtured, nourished, and sustained them in the most impoverished of circumstances (e.g., Ezek. 16:1–30). It is for this reason they were sent into exile. Nonetheless, the promises of Gen. 3:15, those given to Abraham and his lineage, and that of the coming Davidic king, convey a greater exodus is still to come. There will be a new covenant established with God’s people, accompanied by the law being written on their hearts and the outpouring and indwelling of His Spirit (Jer. 31:31–33; Joel 2:28–32).

- D. Although five-thousand Jews returned to the land of Israel from Babylon, that which was spoken of by the prophets remained unfulfilled. For example, although they rebuilt the temple, that which Ezekiel foresaw has not been realized (Ezek. 40:1–48:35; esp. 43:7; cf. Rev. 20:9–22:5). In fact, Daniel revealed their ‘exile’ as one that will continue beyond their time in Babylon (Dan. 2:24–45; 7:1–28; 8:1–27; 9:24–27). Other kingdoms will rise and fall before God’s kingdom will be established upon the earth. Albeit that there is a delay, the covenant keeping people of God are to remain steadfast while their exilic state continues (cf. Heb. 3:1–4:10).
- E. By ending the OT with the prophetic books, we are brought into the heart posture and dialogue between God and His people as their continued disobedience leads them into exile. The result is the day of the Lord being a time of judgment and disaster, instead of deliverance and prosperity (1–2 Kings and 1–2 Chronicles recount this story; cf. Isa. 2:11–22; 3:7, 18; 4:1–6; 13:6–13; Ezek. 13:5; 30:3; Joel 1:15–20; Hab. 1:1–11). Again, the prophets not only speak of this time in biblical history, but they all also give hope in the fulfillment of Gen. 3:15 and the Abrahamic promises (land, offspring, and global blessing).
- F. The Spirit-empowered Davidic king will be the One precipitating the new exodus, new creation, and new kingdom (Isa. 2:1–4; 9:6–9; 11:1–16; 48:20–21; 51:1–8; 60–62; 65:17–25; Psa. 2:6–12; 110:1–7; Deut. 8; 28; esp. Isa. 35:10; 51:11). Upon His arrival, He will take His rightful place as the Ruler of Creation, resulting in the fullness of the new covenant dawning upon the earth (Isa. 11:9; 56:7). This divine figurehead will establish His authority by shattering all worldly empires (Isa. 62:2; Dan. 2:45), shepherding His people with carefulness and love (Isa. 9:7), and as the Son of man, He will reign as the Spirit-anointed, new David (Isa. 9:2–7; 11:1–9; Dan. 7:9–10, 14). Summarily, the promises given to Abraham and David will be realized in the Son of David, the Son of Man, the Servant of the Lord, and Messianic King—all of whom the NT proclaims as culminating in the man, Jesus the Christ.
- G. In addition to the texts of the Major Prophets, Hosea to Malachi (Minor Prophets) speak of the Gentiles having hope and belief in the Davidic Messiah (Mal. 1:11, 14; Amos 9:11–15; Joel 2:28; Jonah 3:5). The Servant of the Lord will be a light for all nations, who will journey to Jerusalem to worship and hear Yahweh’s word (Isa. 2:1–4; 42:4, 6; 49:6; Mic. 4:1–5; cf. Hab. 2:14; Zeph. 3:9; Zech. 14:9, 16). Alongside Israel, Zephaniah testifies the entire world will sing because they see the King in His beauty as He takes his rightful place upon the eternal throne in the eternal temple within the new Jerusalem (3:14–20).<sup>21</sup>
- 1 The five books of the Psalms are, with 1–2 as the introduction, 3–41, 42–72, 73–89, 90–106, 107–150; For more details, see Stephen G. Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty: A Theology of the Hebrew Bible*, NSNT 15 (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2003), 194–95.
- 2 It is possible this psalm was originally used to coronate a new king in the line of David. Nevertheless, Psalm 2 clearly is depicting a king whose rule extends far beyond Israel and Jerusalem; cf. David C. Mitchell, *Messiah ben Joseph* (Newton Mearns, Scotland: Campbell Publications, 2016), 49–62.
- 3 For a more thorough analysis of this messianic king theme, cf. G. Wilson, *The Editing of the Hebrew Psalter*, SBL Dissertation Series 76 (1985).
- 4 Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 202.
- 5 An excellent introduction to the message and structure of Job can be found in the short book by J. Gerald Janzen, *At the Scent of Water: The Ground of Hope in the Book of Job* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2009).
- 6 Terrence E. Fretheim, *God and World in the Old Testament: A Relational Theology of Creation* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 2005), 200.
- 7 Thomas R. Schreiner, *The King in His Beauty: A Biblical Theology of the Old and New Testaments* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2013), 233.
- 8 Dempster, *Dominion and Dynasty*, 202.
- 9 Robert S. Fyall, *Now My Eyes Have Seen You: Images of Creation and Evil in the Book of Job*, NSBT (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2002), 189.
- 10 Cf. *ibid.*, 139–56, 168, who sees the OT’s testimony concerning the demonic and Satan is one that portrays his role as God’s “plaything” due to Yahweh’s sovereign power.
- 11 Eugene H. Merrill, *An Historical Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 1991), 220.
- 12 Schreiner, *King in His Beauty*, 249.
- 13 Fyall, *Now My Eyes*, 161.
- 14 Schreiner, *King in His Beauty*, 300.
- 15 *Ibid.*, 234. Proverbs does not necessarily view one’s external circumstances as a mark of blessing or judgment (cf. e.g., 17:8; 18:16; 19:22; 21:14; 22:22).
- 16 Cf. Bruce K. Waltke, *Book of Proverbs: Chapters 1–15*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 2004), 126–33. He is very thorough and clear in documenting how the personification of wisdom in Proverbs is supplanted by the Imminent One—i.e., the wisdom of Solomon and the image of created wisdom itself will succumb to the Wise One (e.g., God gave birth to wisdom, but Christ is the eternal Son; wisdom witnessed the creation, but Christ is the Creator; wisdom will laugh at the time of judgment, but Christ is the Judge; wisdom was begotten by God, but Christ is God).
- 17 Raymond R. Dillard and Tremper Longman III, *An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 265. Cf. Karl Barth, *Church Dogmatics 3: The Doctrine of Creation*, Part 2 (Edinburgh: T&T Clark, 1960), 293, who sees this as a type of Magna Carta or charter for humanity that parallels Genesis 2.
- 18 In fact, Jewish weddings to this day are representative of that which transpired between the Israelites and God at Mount Sinai.
- 19 A *general* dating and audience for each of the prophets is as follows (all dates are BCE): Obadiah, c. 840–830, Edom; Joel c. 830–820, Judah; Jonah, 785–775, Nineveh; Amos, 765–775, Israel; Hosea, 755–715, Israel; Isaiah, 739–680, Israel and Judah; Micah, 735–700, Israel and Judah; Nahum, ca. 650–620, Assyria; Zephaniah, 635–625, Judah; Jeremiah, 627–575, Judah; Habakkuk, 620–610, Judah; Daniel, 605–536, Nations; Ezekiel, 593–560, Judah; Haggai, 520, Jews; Zechariah, 520–518, Jews; Malachi, 470, Jews (adapted from Merrill, *Survey of OT*, 249).
- 20 As Schreiner clarifies, “...the prophets warn Israel and Judah that they are living like the pagan nations, and hence the day of the Lord will be one of darkness, not light. They will not rejoice on the day of the Lord; rather, they will be filled with gloom unless they turn from their sin. The prophets repeatedly warn the people of their sin, especially indicating prophets, priests, and kings for failing to shepherd and reach the people well. These leaders promised peace when there is not peace, safety when disaster is coming, assurance when Israel should be scared to death” (*King in His Beauty*, 420).
- 21 The day of the Lord is a major theme in the twelve books of the Minor Prophets (e.g., Joel 1:15–20; 2:11; 5:18–20; Zeph. 1:7–10, 14–16, 18; 2:2, 3; 3:8; Obad. 11–15; Amos 1:3–2:3; Nahum 1:1–8; Hab. 1:5–2:1; 2:14–20; Zech. 12:1–14:21; Mal. 1:11).



**BIBLE**

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