

God's Big Picture Bible Overview



No. 6 The Wisdom Literature Job - Song of Songs

An important section of the Old Testament that we need to consider in our overview of the Bible is what the Hebrew Old Testament called *The Writings*. The Hebrew Old Testament is ordered slightly differently to our English Old Testaments. By opening your bibles to the *Contents* page and comparing that list with the list below, which details the order of the Hebrew Old Testament, what differences can you see?

Torah

Genesis
Exodus
Leviticus
Numbers
Deuteronomy

Former Prophets

Joshua
Judges
Samuel
Kings

Later Prophets

Isaiah	Obadiah	Haggai
Jeremiah	Jonah	Zechariah
Ezekiel	Micah	Malachi
Hosea	Nahum	
Joel	Habakkuk	
Amos	Zephaniah	

The Writings

Psalms	Nehemiah
Job	Chronicles
Proverbs	
Ruth	
Song of Songs	
Ecclesiastes	
Lamentations	
Esther	
Daniel	
Ezra	

What can be observed from this? Like our English Bibles, the Hebrew Old Testament by unfolding in chronological succession the books of Genesis to Kings embarks to record the history of Israel from her beginning to the exile.

The Prophets follow with divine comment upon the situation. As we shall see next week, much of the Prophets ministry speaks to the situation in the book of Kings. In the Hebrew Old Testament you can't miss this connection, the Prophets directly follow the Kings. This is not to say that the order within our English Old Testaments is problematic but just that

The Writings contain a variety of literary genres. Poems, proverbs, narrative, apocalypse and history are all represented. The Writings also cover a broad amount of time – there are psalms of Moses, the book of Ruth is set within the period of the Judges, Lamentations describes the exile, Esther is a story from within the Persian period, Nehemiah covers after the exile when the community rebuild the temple and then the book of Chronicles closes the Hebrew Old Testament with a recap of Judah's history.

So with some books of The Writings, historical context is important – yet with other books it doesn't appear to be as important. A number of Psalms, the books of Job, Proverbs, Song of Songs and maybe Ecclesiastes illustrate this.

Again God's promise to Abraham is integral to these books. At times the promise is at the very heart of the book, like for example Chronicles. At other times a book like Proverbs may seem silent on the significant points of Israel's history. This variety appears to be a part of The Writings.

In this study we will be surveying *Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs*.

Study Questions

When you get to reading the Wisdom Literature, what struggles do you have in understanding these books? What encouragement do you receive from these books of the Bible?

It might be worth beginning your study with a review and discussion of the sermon.

What surprised you from Proverbs 9?

Read James 5.13-18; what accompanies wisdom? How might this help us see the value of wisdom.

What was one of the features of Song of Songs, and Paul's (possible) use of it (1 Cor 7.3-4, cf. Song of Songs 2.16, 6.3, 7.10), that sets a Biblical view of love and sex in contrast to the surrounding cultures? Do you think this is still true today? What do you think Song of Song means by the phrase repeated at 2.7, 3.5?

Read Ecclesiastes 1.16 –2.26. What were some of things that the Author of Ecclesiastes was struggling with?

How might 'transience' or 'vapor' be better than 'meaningless'?

To say that life as a Christian is now free of the frustrations the author of Ecclesiastes struggled with doesn't do justice to Romans 8.18-21 (particularly, v.20), and yet to say that the Gospel brings no difference seems to run in the face of 1 Corinthians 15.55-58 (particularly, v.58). Discuss as a group what you think *continues* from Ecclesiastes and what *differences* the Gospel might make.

How would you define 'fear' in the phrase

"The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom" (Prov 1.7)?

From reading the speeches of God in Job, how might this help our definition (cf. Job 38-41)

Paul's first letter to the Corinthians has a great deal to say about wisdom, Godly and worldly. Read 1 Cor 1.18-2.16 and discuss who the Cross is foolish to, why and how does anyone come to understand 'God's secret wisdom' (1 Cor 2.7)?

Share examples of when people have thought you were 'foolish' for your Christian beliefs.