

# "GET WISDOM: WISDOM LITERATURE IN THE BIBLE."

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First Christian Reformed Church, Lynden, WA

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**Text for Sermon: Job 28:12-13, 20, 28; Proverbs 4:5-9**

## **Introduction.**

Arguably the most famous highway in America is Route 66 from LA to Chicago. It is called the Mother Road, and it is featured in countless movies, songs and television shows. It is studded with iconic, unique tourist sites and stops. Our sons Christian School in Oklahoma City was on Route 66. Nearby was a famous round red barn and the world largest soda pop bottle in front of Pops 66 soda stand, over 700 brands of soda.

What's my point? We are traveling another famous road through the 66 books of the Bible. We passed mile marker 17 and we have seen some great sites. This is in some ways the most important road trip we can ever make, through the 66 Holy Spirit inspired Books of God's holy Word.

Highway 66 passes through eight states from California to Illinois. So do the books of the Bible.

The OT passes through the Law, History, Wisdom (Poetic), and Prophets.

The NT passes through the Gospels, History, Letters, and Revelation (prophetic).

Each of these states are the different genres of literature in the Bible. Each genre has its own style and substance which reveals something unique about the person and character of God and we need them all to see what God is revealing about Himself.

We have journeyed through the Law (the 5 Books of Moses, Torah, Pentateuch) and the 12 histories. So we arrive now at the next state, the poetic section or the wisdom literature. These are the five books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon (Song of Songs).

Before looking at each of these five books, I have decided to take a forest and trees approach. This evening will be the forest, before we get to the five trees.

## **The Wisdom Books, The Poetic Books. The Writings.**

These five books are unique in that they step outside of the chronological narrative history of Israel that we have in the Law, the histories and the prophets that are all a part of that history. These five books transcend the history or stand above it. They reflect and reveal the God of all history, but without reference to any particular part of the history.

These books are timeless in that they apply to all humanity at all times and address what it means to live well and live wisely. The rest of the OT is historical, these five are experiential. The other books have to do with the nation of Israel, these five are concerned with the individual and his spiritual life. The other books are about the Hebrew race, these five are about the human heart.

Other than Psalms these books are largely overlooked, and yet these are the books that speak most profoundly to the depths of our souls and our daily lives and experiences, how we live, behave, suffer, love and worship.

These five books are the emotional heart of the OT grappling with the most profound issues and biggest realities of life people have struggled with from the beginning of time.

“The collection covers the broadest spectrum of human feeling, from the timeless comfort of “The Lord is my shepherd” to the existential despair of “Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is meaningless!” (Subby Szterszky).

How can I get you to take seriously these five books and to soak your heart, mind and soul in them? These books reflect on the problems, experiences, beliefs, attitudes and actions that are frequent to the common man, they have universal appeal.

*Job* gives us wisdom for suffering, how to fear the Lord despite what happens to us.

*Psalms* gives us wisdom for worshipping, how to pray and praise God.

*Proverbs* gives us wisdom for living, how to act and behave wisely, how to fear the Lord.

*Ecclesiastes* gives us wisdom for thinking, how to enjoy life even in its meaninglessness.

*Song of Solomon* gives us wisdom for loving in the context of covenant marriage.

### **What is wisdom?**

Wisdom is the discipline of applying truth to one’s life in the light of experience. Wisdom is not theoretical or abstract, it is personal and practical. It is not just intellectual but moral.

I spoke this morning about the battle for the family. Related to this is the destruction of the family in America and the decline in moral and family values, integrity, ethical behavior and character.

While all of Scripture addresses these issues, the wisdom literature in the Bible gives us concentrated wisdom and help.

Wisdom literature deals with the way the world “works.” God created the world and He is the best one to give us true insight into how His world works and how to live well within it.

The goal of wisdom and the Wisdom Literature is not that we show others how clever we are, but to show us what it means to please God.

Do we desire competency, ability, skill? It can only begin with knowledge of God. It begins with worship. The more you worship God, the better you will be at everything else.

### **What is the source of wisdom?**

**Job 28:12-13, 20, 28** But where can wisdom be found? Where does understanding dwell?

13 No mortal comprehends its worth; it cannot be found in the land of the living.

20 Where then does wisdom come from? Where does understanding dwell?

28 And he said to the human race,

“The fear of the Lord—that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.”

Where can wisdom be found? Is it the fruit of intellectual pursuit and endeavor? God of course is the ultimate source of all wisdom. Only God is wise. Wisdom is the gift of God. It is never an unaided human achievement. It comes from God whether acknowledged or not.

We are completely taken in by and absorbed with the physical realm. We think about *what*.

We miss the spiritual and moral depths of creation and life. We should think more about *why*.

Behind everything is the Word, the Word of God what breathes all things into existence.

God sees all, knows all, understands all.

Wisdom flows out of God’s great power.

True wisdom is divine wisdom and that is found only in God.

True wisdom is a gift from God, it is only by grace.

Vs. 28 the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

**Proverbs 9:10** The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

**Proverbs 4:7, 13** The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight. 13 Keep hold of instruction; do not let go; guard her, for she is your life.

*If you are a worshipper of God, you are wise and will be wise.*

The surest path to wisdom is found in the knowledge of God. Read, study, pray to know God.

These books are meant to give prudence, discretion, instruction, practical common sense to the simple, the unlearned, the immature and young.

### **Things to remember when reading Wisdom books.**

All truth is God's truth and all Scripture is God's Word. Even the hard parts, even the confusing parts, even the parts we don't understand. God is God, so we must expect His revelation of who He is and how He thinks to be above our thoughts and ways. We are challenged to think deeply and learn to trust God in all the ambiguities of life.

Much of wisdom literature is written in poetry and that brings its own set of challenges for interpreting and understanding. It uses poetic techniques that are different from our western and classical way of doing poetry.

### ***Poetry.***

We live in a time when poetry is not particularly appreciated. We are influenced by smartphones and texts and soundbites and Twitter posts, so we have little appreciation or patience for communication that forces us to slow down and reflect. Poetry by its nature often cannot be fully grasped on the first reading.

Nearly one-third of the Bible is written in poetry. Whole books of the Bible are poetic including four of the so called Wisdom (Poetic) books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon. Ecclesiastes is the exception being mostly in prose. A majority of OT prophecy is poetic in form.

Poetry is more memorable and repeatable; and poetry is used to express strong emotions and to evoke strong emotions. It seeks to awaken something within us.

In poetry we expect to hear figurative language, similes, metaphors, figures of speech, exaggeration and hyperbole. It uses word pictures, vivid imagery, sights and sounds and colors. It is often emotional and evocative, seeking to draw out our hearts. As I said, wisdom literature is the emotional heart of the Old Testament.

Poetry is an effort to share a moving experience by using language that is structured differently from ordinary prose.

God's response to Job is soaring poetry, as is Psalm 23 and Proverbs 31 and Ecclesiastes 3.

Within the Wisdom literature we see three different kinds of poetry.

(1) lyric poetry, which was originally accompanied by music on the lyre (the Psalms).

(2) didactic poetry, which uses maxims/general principles to teach the basics of life (Proverbs, Ecclesiastes).

(3) dramatic poetry, which used dialog to communicate its message (Job and Song of Songs).

English poetry is based on sounds using rhyme and rhythm. English poetry is not easily translatable into other languages, much is lost in the translation of rhyme and rhythm.

Hebrew poetry is based on ideas and concepts. Hebrew poetry repeats and rearranges thoughts rather than sounds. It does this through the means of several kinds of parallelism. Parallelism uses couplets or parallel phrases to state truths.

Such is the wisdom of God that Hebrew poetry is translatable into any language.

***Synonymous or repetitious or identical parallelism.***

**Isaiah 1:3** Israel does not know; my people does not understand.

**Psalms 33:2** Praise the Lord with the lyre;  
Make melody to him with the harp of ten strings.

**Psalms 51:2** Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity;  
And cleanse me from my sin.

***Antithetical or contrasting parallelism***

**Psalms 1:6** For the Lord knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.

**Proverbs 15:1** A soft answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.

***Synthetic parallelism.***

Adds something, adds emphasis.

**Proverbs 3:5** Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not lean on your own understanding.

**Proverbs 4:7** The beginning of wisdom is this: Get wisdom, and whatever you get, get insight.

**Psalms 19:7** The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple.

**Jesus.**

Wisdom is not abstract or impersonal, wisdom is personal, it has a name and that name is Jesus. Jesus is the wisdom of God in us. To gain it we must be born again.

**Luke 24:27** Beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he interpreted to them in all the Scriptures the things concerning himself.

**Luke 24:44** Then he said to them, “These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.”

All wisdom is fulfilled and embodied in Christ. Jesus is the fullest expression of God’s wisdom. We cannot gain godly wisdom outside of life in Jesus.

“Solomon spoke God's wisdom. Jesus is the wisdom of God (1 Corinthians 1:24, 30). Others had spoken truth; he is the truth. Others had pointed the way to life; he is the way and the life (John 14:6). In him are "hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge" (Colossians 2:3). Therefore, the command, "Get wisdom," means first and foremost "Come to Jesus! Come to Jesus!" in whom are hid all the treasures of wisdom” (John Piper).

### **Implications and application.**

Get wisdom. Why?

*First*, because we are proud and too wise in our own eyes and opinions. We think we can be wise and have autonomy from God.

**Proverbs 3:7** Be not wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.

12:15 The way of a fool is right in his own eyes, but a wise man listens to advice.

28:11 A rich man is wise in his own eyes, but a poor man who has understanding will find him out.

Christians must always be teachable.

*Second*, do you want to flourish like a tree planted by streams of living water? Get wisdom.

*Third*, seek the Lord’s wisdom and discernment to know how best to act for His glory.

The staggering thing about the wisdom literature in the Bible is that though it was written over three thousand years ago it is still fresh, real, relevant and modern. The human condition hasn’t changed.

In Scripture, the Lord has provided believers with a great wealth of wisdom teaching, and has promised the Spirit’s blessing to those who humbly ask (Luke 11:13).

James 1:5-8 contains the incredible promise that the Lord will give wisdom to all who sincerely ask Him for it in faith. As we study the Wisdom Literature and seek the Lord's face, He will make us wise if we ask Him for wisdom.