

**Xenos Christian Fellowship**  
**Christian Ministry 2**  
**Week 9 – Old Testament Poetry and Wisdom**

**Old Testament Poetry and Wisdom**

- Job – making sense of undeserved suffering.
- Psalms – honest prayer and praise to God.
- Proverbs – the value of true wisdom based on the fear of God.
- Ecclesiastes – the possibility of finding meaning and significance during our short life on earth.
- Song of Songs – celebrating love between husband and wife.

Common features:

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**Key features of Hebrew poetry**

1.

- a. Synonymous parallelism. The second or subsequent line repeats or reinforces the sense of the first line.

“For he satisfies the thirsty  
and he fills the hungry with good things.” – Psalm 107:9

“He turned rivers into a desert,  
flowing springs into thirsty ground .” – Psalm 107:33

- b. Antithetical parallelism. The second or subsequent line contrasts the thought of the first.

“The upright see and rejoice,  
but all the wicked shut their mouths.” – Psalm 107:42

“A wise son brings joy to his father,  
but a foolish son grief to his mother.” – Proverbs 10:1

c. Synthetic parallelism: The second or subsequent line provides more information about or completes the thought in the first line.

“Others went out on the sea in ships,  
they were merchants on the mighty waters.” – Psalm 107:23

“Blessed is the man  
who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked  
or stand in the way of sinners  
or sit in the seat of scoffers.” – Ps. 1:1

Notice how each line advances the meaning of what is being said. The verbs “walk,” “stand” and “sit” show the gradual progression of the wicked man—he moves from a casual to a settled relationship with sin.<sup>1</sup>

Implication for the reader:

“Some people never learn anything because they understand everything too soon.”  
– Alexander Pope

Good questions to ask:

“How are these lines related to each other?” “Are they saying the same thing?”  
“Are they saying the opposite thing?” “What additional information is being  
communicated in this line about the one preceding it?”

2.

“Let them give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men.” – Psalm 107:8,15,21,31

**Implication for the reader:**

3.

“As the deer pants for the water brooks,  
So my soul pants for Thee, O God.” – Psalm 42:1

“I will say to God my rock, ‘Why have you forgotten me?’” – Psalm 42:9

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<sup>1</sup> Tremper Longman, *Reading the Bible With Heart and Mind* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1988) p. 133.

Good questions to ask:

“Who does this image describe?” “What does it say about the person or group being described?” “What does this image tell you about the way God relates to people?”

Compare narrative and poetry:

Exodus 14:26-31; Exodus 15:1-5

## **Psalms**

What are the Psalms?

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(Tremper Longman) “Here we have one hundred fifty separate poems, constituting a book that functioned as the hymnbook of the Old Testament people of God.”<sup>2</sup>

Who wrote the Psalms and how are they organized?

**Authors:** One Psalm was written by Moses, 73 by David, 12 by Asaph, 10 by the sons of Korah, one or two by Solomon, and one each by Heman and Ethan. The rest are anonymous. The Psalms are often called the Psalms of David because he is the principal author.

**Organization:** The book of Psalms is a collection of smaller collections. In the Hebrew Bible, the Psalms are grouped into 5 smaller books: Psalm 1-41; Psalm 42-72; Psalm 73-89; Psalm 90-106; Psalm 107-150. Within these books there are hints of additional groupings.

## **Different Kinds of Psalms**

### **Psalms of Praise and Thanksgiving**

Structure:

- A call to praise or thank God.

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<sup>2</sup> Tremper Longman, *Reading the Bible with Heart and Mind* (Downers Grove, Illinois: InterVarsity Press, 1988), p. 130.

(Psalm 103:1) “Bless (praise – NLT, NIV) the LORD, O my soul; And all that is within me, bless His holy name.” (103:1)

(Psalm 107:1\*\*) “O give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, For His lovingkindness is everlasting.”

- An explanation of why God should be praised or thanked.
  - Because he cares for the oppressed (103:6).
  - Because he is compassionate and gracious (103:8).
  - Because he is sovereign and rules over all (103:19).
  - Because he has delivered us. See Psalm 107:6,13,19,28. Each of these verses summarizes a section describing God’s deliverance.
- Conclusion – usually a word of praise or closing command.

(Psalm 103:22) “Bless the Lord, O my soul.”

(Psalm 107:43) “Whoever is wise, let him heed these things and consider the great love of the LORD.”

The importance of thanksgiving:

(Psalm 95:2) “Let us come before his presence with *thanksgiving*, let us shout joyfully to him with Psalms.”

(Psalm 107:1) “Oh *give thanks* to the Lord, for He is good, for his lovingkindness is everlasting.”

(1 Chronicles 16:8) “Oh *give thanks* to the Lord, call upon his name; make known his deeds among the peoples.”

(Colossians 3:15) “Let the peace of Christ rule in your hearts, to which indeed you were called in one body; and *be thankful*.”

(Hebrews 12:28) “Therefore, since we have received a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us *show gratitude*, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe...”

(Ray Locke) "Next to Christianity, advertising is the greatest force in the world. And I say that without sacrilege or disrespect. Advertising makes people discontented. It makes them want things they don't have."<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Former advertising executive Ray Locke quoted in *Selling Discontent* by Anna White in the New American Dream a web magazine located at <http://www.newdream.org/newsletter/discontent.php>.

Application:

1.

2.

(J. I. Packer) “(The cross) is the measure of the goodness of God; lay it to heart. Ask yourself the Psalmist’s question – ‘What shall I render unto the LORD for all his benefits toward me?’ See grace to give this answer – ‘I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the Lord... O Lord, truly I am thy servant... I will pay vows unto the Lord now...’ (Psalm 116:12ff).”<sup>4</sup>

3.

### **The importance of praise:**

(Psalm 29:2) “Give honor to the Lord for the glory of his name. Worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness.”

(Psalm 135:1) “Praise the LORD. Praise the name of the LORD; praise him, you servants of the LORD...”

(Hebrews 13:5) “Through Jesus, therefore, let us continually offer to God a sacrifice of praise--the fruit of lips that confess his name.”

Why would God be so intent on receiving praise from us?

1.

“For great is the LORD and most worthy of praise;  
he is to be feared above all gods.

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<sup>4</sup> J.I. Packer, *Knowing God* (Downers Grove, Illinois: Intervarsity Press, 1977) p. 150.

For all the gods of the nations are idols,  
but the LORD made the heavens.  
Splendor and majesty are before him;  
strength and joy in his dwelling place.  
Ascribe to the LORD, O families of nations,  
ascribe to the LORD glory and strength,  
ascribe to the LORD the glory due his name.”  
– 1 Chronicles 16:25-29

2.

(C. S. Lewis) “I think we delight to praise what we enjoy because the praise not merely expresses but completes the enjoyment; it is its appointed consummation... the delight is incomplete till it is expressed... the worthier the object the more intense this delight would be . . . “To fully enjoy is to glorify. In commanding us to glorify Him, God is inviting us to enjoy Him.”<sup>5</sup>

3.

4.

Application:

1. Start your own time of prayer with praise.
2. Praise God together in your home group prayer meeting.

### **Psalms of Lament**

Structure:

- Address to God
- Complaint
- Request for help
- Expression of trust / vow to praise

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<sup>5</sup> C. S. Lewis, *Reflections on the Psalms* (New York, New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1986), pp. 95-97.

## Psalm 42 & 43\*\*

An *individual* lament meant to be read together as one Psalm.

What is the situation of the author?

- He is in despair. (42:5,11; 43:5)
- He has suffered oppression at the hands of his enemies. (42:9; 43:1)
- He longs to be with God (42:1,2), but feels abandoned. (42:9)
- He is surrounded by people who taunt him about the impotence of his God. (42:3,10) He used to lead joyous processions to the temple (42:4), but does so no longer. This may suggest he is in exile.
- He longs to praise God in the temple. (43:3,4)

Importance and Application

(Athanasius) “Most of the Bible speaks to us. The Psalms speak for us.”<sup>6</sup>

1. God wants us to \_\_\_\_\_ for help.

(Psalm 121:1-2) “I lift my eyes to the hills- where does my help come from? My help comes from the Lord, the maker of heaven and earth.”

2. God wants us to relate \_\_\_\_\_ with him.

Reverence and respect: (Psalm 5:7) “But I, by your great mercy, will come into your house; in reverence I will bow down toward your holy temple.”

Shame: (Psalm 44:15a) “My disgrace is before me all day long and my face is covered with shame....”

Anger: (Psalm 109:9-10) “May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow, May his children be wandering beggars; may they be driven from ruined homes.”

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<sup>6</sup> Athanasius was Bishop of Alexandria (297-373 A.D.).

Sorrow: (Psalm 6:6) “I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears.”

Doubt: (Psalm 73:3-5) “I envied the arrogant when I saw the prosperity of the wicked. They have no struggles. . . . Surely in vain I have kept my heart pure; in vain I have washed my hands in innocence.”

3. God wants us to \_\_\_\_\_ even in the midst of pain.

(Psalm 42:5) “Why are you in despair, O my soul?  
Why have you become disturbed within me?  
Hope in God, for I shall again praise him.  
For the help of his presence.”

(Psalm 73:3) “For I was envious of the arrogant  
As I saw the prosperity of the wicked.”

(Psalm 73:15) “If I had said, ‘I will speak thus,’  
behold, I would have betrayed the  
generation of Your children.”

(Psalm 73:27,28) “For, behold, those who are far from  
you will perish; you have destroyed all those who are unfaithful to You. But  
as for me, the nearness of God is my good; I have made the Lord God my  
refuge, that I may tell of all your works.”

4. Pray in a \_\_\_\_\_ way.

## **Proverbs**

Definition of a proverb:

The purpose of the book of Proverbs:

## Proverbs 1:1-6.

(Fareed Zakariah) "Diffusion of knowledge is the dominant trend of our time... But knowledge is not the same thing as wisdom. Knowledge can produce equally powerful ways to destroy life, intentionally and unintentionally. It can produce hate and seek destruction. Knowledge does not by itself bring any answer to the ancient Greek question 'What is a Good Life?' It does not produce good sense, courage, generosity and tolerance. And most crucially, it does not produce the farsightedness that will allow us all to live together—and grow together—on this world without causing war, chaos and catastrophe. For that we need wisdom."<sup>7</sup>

Wisdom is not just the accumulation of information.

Wisdom is the \_\_\_\_\_ of information.

A key concept in Proverbs: the fear of God.

(Proverbs 1:7\*) "The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; Fools despise wisdom and instruction."

To fear God is to \_\_\_\_\_.

(Proverbs 14:26) "In the fear of the LORD there is strong confidence, and his children will have refuge."

(Proverbs 23:17) "Do not let your heart envy sinners, but live in the fear of the LORD always. 18 Surely there is a future, and your hope will not be cut off."

(Proverbs 8:13a) "The fear of the LORD is to hate evil..."

The opposite of fearing God is \_\_\_\_\_.

(Psalm 14:1) The fool has said in his heart, "There is no God."

Implication for the reader: Solomon's emphasis on fearing God has obvious implications for the reader... Are you willing to humbly entrust yourself to God's power and faithfulness? Do you see him as a source of truth, someone whose counsel should be heeded? Are you willing to act on his wisdom and trust him that his way is best?

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<sup>7</sup> Fareed Zakaria, "The Earth's Learning Curve," *Newsweek*, Issues 2006 (see <http://www.msnbc.msn.com/id/10206249/site/newsweek/>)

(Proverbs 14:12, 16:25) “There is a way which seems right to a man, but its end is the way of death.”

### **Job’s friends: an example of misusing proverbial wisdom**

(Job 11:13,15) "If you devote your heart to him and stretch out your hands to him...you will surely forget your trouble, recalling it only as waters gone by.”

(Job 11:20) But the eyes of the wicked will fail, and escape will elude them; their hope will become a dying gasp."

(Job 13:4,12a) You... smear me with lies; you are worthless physicians, all of you... your maxims are proverbs of ashes.

### **Conclusion**

### **Memory Verses**

Psalm 42 & 43\*\* – Why are you downcast, O my soul? Put your hope in God, for I will yet praise him.

Psalm 107\*\* – God rescues those who cry out to him. Give thanks to the LORD for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for men.

Proverbs 1:7\* – “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.”

### **Assignment**

Study for the exam.