

FEAR GOD AND BE WISE

Studies in Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon

*The fear of the LORD
is the beginning of wisdom:
and the knowledge of the holy
is understanding.
Proverbs 9:10*

Trinity Bible Church
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Introduction

The Old Testament can be divided into four parts: Pentateuch, History, Poetry and Prophecy. The Pentateuch reveals the beginning of human history and focuses upon the beginning of the nation Israel. The historical books describe the history of Israel from its entry into the Promised Land, through the glory days of the Davidic Kingdom, to captivity and restoration. The books of prophecy contain God's assessment of the course of the rebellious nation with pronouncements of judgment and hope of restoration. The common thread through all of these books is the Promise that God will deliver from the curse and bring salvation to God's creation. These books anticipate the deliverance from sin and establishment of the Kingdom of God under the dominion of the Seed of the woman, the Seed of Abraham, the Son of David, the Son of God.

In the middle of this amazing revelation of the Blessing of God through history we find the poetic books – five books which are unique among the Old Testament Canon. They consist of the Psalms (Israel's hymnbook), the wisdom literature (Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and some of the Psalms) and the enigmatic Song of Solomon (or Song of Songs). In contrast to the rest of the Old Testament, they do not direct our attention to the history of Israel and, with the notable exception of some of the Psalms, actually seem to ignore the Covenant Promise. Rather, they focus upon the interpretation of life and teach how one may live wisely in an incomprehensible and often hostile world.

Of these books of poetry, the longest, and probably most familiar to the Bible reader, is the Book of the Psalms. Here we find 150 psalms which focus our attention on worship and praise of God. The psalmists draw our attention to the Person and Work of Almighty God.

The wisdom literature directs our attention to the mystery of life, and particularly the mystery of the life of the true believer in a fallen world. In the first and longest of these books, Job addresses the problem of intense suffering by the righteous. In a series of conversations, Job's friends explain suffering as the consequences of personal sins. Job rejects this explanation, but still does not have an explanation for his distress. In a dramatic conclusion, God appears to Job and tells him that he is not able to understand the ways of the Almighty. He must simply trust God in such things that are too wonderful for him.

Without denying the value of the Psalms and Job, this study booklet will lead us into a study of the other three of the poetic books: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon.

In Proverbs, Solomon (and others) presents life as a choice between wisdom and folly. In an initial "Song of Wisdom," Solomon presents to his son the incomparable worth of wisdom which arises from the fear of God. He pictures wisdom as a woman who is calling out for the simple to hear and receive her counsel. Those who heed her call will find life and obtain favor from the LORD. Over against this is folly, which he pictures as a harlot seeking to entice with false, but alluring, promises of pleasure which ultimately lead to death (Proverbs 8:32-36). This Song of Wisdom is followed by a series of Proverbs which demonstrate the way of wisdom and the way of folly. Proverbs concludes as it began by using the imagery of the relationship between a man and a woman. The one who departs from wisdom is likened to a man who heeds the call of the harlot and falls into the trap and destructive consequences of adultery. In sharp contrast, the one who has heard wisdom's call and laid hold of its blessing is likened to one who has found a virtuous woman.

In Ecclesiastes, the writer describes himself as

Introduction (continued)

a wise Preacher. He has discovered the futility or absurdity of life. There is no ultimate satisfaction in the common experiences of life – wisdom, pleasure, wealth and work. The course of life for those who diligently pursue these is the same as those who do not. There is no guarantee that the experience of life will be better for the wise than for the fool. In fact, he sees that the wicked often seem to prosper more than the righteous. However, the wise Preacher understands that there is a God Who directs all the affairs of life. He will bring to all men in the end the justice that seemed absent in their lives of vanity. Therefore, he concludes that man must live wisely with joy in the fear of God.

The last of these books, the Song of Solomon, appears to be distinctly different from the other poetic books, and perhaps out of place in all of Scripture. Superficially, the story is simply a romance between a commoner, the Shulamite, and the King, with comments by the Daughters of Jerusalem. Its explicit descriptions are

surprising in Holy Scripture. However, this book rightfully belongs in the Wisdom Literature, for this historical courtship and marriage depicts the blessing of a life in communion with the King of Kings. The other writers of the Wisdom Literature affirm the joy of wise living, while this book illustrates it in a way that is understandable to all. It is not just a way of life, but the undeserved love of the Sovereign One and a life of rich communion that gives satisfaction and value to the life of wisdom.

While perhaps among the most neglected of Divine revelation, these books are a gold mine of truth about living as the people of God in a world that does not make sense and where experience seems to suggest that there is no truth or justice. In the pursuit of pleasure and fulfillment, the temptation of folly is strong. The writers of the Wisdom Literature show how the fear of God leads to wisdom in daily living, whereby we live with joy and satisfaction in union with our loving Sovereign God.



Outlines

Proverbs

1. Introduction (1:1-7)
2. The Song of Wisdom (1:8-9:18)
3. The Proverbs of Solomon (10:1-22:16)
4. Thirty Sayings of the Wise (22:17-24:22)
5. More Sayings of the Wise (24:23-34)
6. The Proverbs of Solomon Collected in the Days of Hezekiah (25-29)
7. The Words of Agur (30)
8. The Words of King Lemuel from his Mother's Instruction (31)

Ecclesiastes

1. The Prologue (1:1-11)
2. The King's Search for Value (1:12-2:26)
3. Reflections on Finding Meaning in this Vain Life (3:1-12:8)
4. The Epilogue (12:9-14)

Song of Solomon

1. The Beginning of Love (1:1-5:1)
 - a. Courtship (1:1-3:5)
 - b. Wedding (3:6-5:1)
2. The Communion of Love (5:2-8:14)
 - a. Communion Broken (5:2-7:10)
 - b. Communion Restored (7:11-8:14)



2006 Fall Schedule

Proverbs

September 3	Lesson 1: The Beginning of Wisdom Proverbs 1
September 10	Lesson 2: The Blessedness of Wisdom Proverbs 2-3
September 17	Lesson 3: The Pursuit of Wisdom Proverbs 4-5
September 24	Lesson 4: The Warnings of Wisdom Proverbs 6-7
October 1	Lesson 5: The Call of Wisdom Proverbs 8-9
October 8	Lesson 6: The Proverbs of Solomon, Part 1 Proverbs 10-16
October 15	Lesson 7: The Proverbs of Solomon, Part 2 Proverbs 17:1-22:16
October 22	Lesson 8: The Words of the Wise and More Words of the Wise Proverbs 22:17-24:34
October 29	Lesson 9: More Proverbs of Solomon Proverbs 25-29
November 5	Lesson 10: The Words of Agur and King Lemuel Proverbs 30-31

Ecclesiastes

November 12	Lesson 11: Vanity of Vanities! All is Vanity! Ecclesiastes 1-2
November 19	Lesson 12: A Time for Every Purpose Under the Sun Ecclesiastes 3-4
November 26	Lesson 13: Fear God! Ecclesiastes 5-6
December 3	Lesson 14: The Work of God on the Earth Ecclesiastes 7-8
December 10	Lesson 15: The Hand of God Ecclesiastes 9-10
December 17	Lesson 16: The End of the Matter Ecclesiastes 11-12

Song of Solomon

December 24	Lesson 17: The Beginning of Love Song of Solomon 1:1-5:1
December 31	Lesson 18: The Communion of Love Song of Solomon 5:2-8:14

Scripture Memorization

Proverbs 1:7

The fear of the LORD *is* the beginning of knowledge;
but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 3:11-14

My son, despise not the chastening of the LORD;
neither be weary of his correction:

For whom the LORD loveth he correcteth;
even as a father the son *in whom* he delighteth.

Happy is the man *that* findeth wisdom,
and the man *that* getteth understanding.

For the merchandise of it
is better than the merchandise of silver,
and the gain thereof than fine gold.

Ecclesiastes 1:2

Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher,
vanity of vanities; all is vanity.

Ecclesiastes 3:14

I know that, whatsoever God doeth,
it shall be for ever:
nothing can be put to it,
nor any thing taken from it:
and God doeth it,
that *men* should fear before him.

Ecclesiastes 7:13-14

Consider the work of God:
for who can make *that* straight,
which he hath made crooked?

In the day of prosperity be joyful,
but in the day of adversity consider:
God also hath set the one over against the other,
to the end that man should find nothing after him.

Scripture Memorization (continued)

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter:
Fear God, and keep his commandments:
for this is the whole *duty* of man.

For God shall bring every work into judgment,
with every secret thing,
whether *it be* good, or whether *it be* evil.

Song of Solomon 2:4

He brought me to the banqueting house,
and his banner over me *was* love.

Song of Solomon 8:7

Many waters cannot quench love,
neither can the floods drown it:
if a man would give all the substance of his house for love,
it would utterly be contemned.

In the Sweet Fear of Jesus

Alexander Ewing, 1853

1. In the sweet fear of Je - sus Let me be - gin each day,
2. In the sweet fear of Je - sus Let me be - gin each day,

Fear - ful lest I should grieve Him, Fear - ful lest I should stray,
Serv - ing or rest - ing, al - ways Un - der His gen - tle sway;

Fear - ful lest earth - ly long - ings E - ver my heart should share,
All that I say, di - rect - ed, All that I plan con - ceived,

Tak - ing the throne of Je - sus Plac - ing an i - dol there.
With the re - mem - brance pre - sent Je - sus must not be grieved. A - men.

Lesson 2: The Blessedness of Wisdom Proverbs 2-3

MEMORY: Proverbs 3:11 and review

HYMN: "In the Sweet Fear of Jesus"

SUMMARY: *Wisdom is a great treasure. It arises from the fear of the LORD and discovers the knowledge of God. It leads into the good path of righteousness and justice, and away from the ways of darkness and death. The way of the wise is prosperous. The wise will live in expectation of this blessing of God and will not despise the discipline which God gives to those whom He loves. The wise will value the blessedness of the LORD'S ways and not envy the house of the wicked.*

1. What does Solomon ask his son to do?
2. If he obeys Solomon's admonition, what will his son understand?
3. What two things will Solomon's son be delivered from?
4. How does the life of wisdom compare with the life of the wicked?
5. What blessings did Solomon promise to his son, if he would not forget his teaching?
6. What is promised to those who trust, fear and honor the LORD?
7. What did Solomon teach about discipline?
8. How did Solomon describe the blessedness of wisdom?
9. Why is wisdom important to the LORD and to us?

Lesson 3: The Pursuit of Wisdom Proverbs 4-5

MEMORY: Proverbs 3:11-12 and review

HYMN: "In the Sweet Fear of Jesus"

SUMMARY: *Solomon calls for his sons to receive and hold fast to wisdom. He emphasizes the value of wisdom for daily living with a particular emphasis upon walking in the path of righteousness. In contrast, he likens departure from wisdom to consequences of an adulterous relationship.*

1. What did Solomon say about a father's instruction?
2. What should be our attitude toward wisdom, and why?
3. Contrast the path of the wicked with the path of the righteous.
4. What advice is given about our ear, our sight, our heart, our speech and our feet?
5. Where does the forbidden woman lead?
6. Why are the sons warned to stay away from the forbidden woman?
7. What is the way of blessing?
8. What is the outcome of the iniquities of the wicked?

Lesson 4: The Warnings of Wisdom Proverbs 6-7

MEMORY: Proverbs 3:11-13 and review

HYMN: "In the Sweet Fear of Jesus"

SUMMARY: *Solomon emphasizes the consequences of unwise behavior and states particular conduct which is abhorrent to the LORD. Once again he turns to the imagery of prostitution and adultery to illustrate the way of those who do not keep and treasure the words of wisdom.*

1. What did Solomon tell his son about saving himself?
2. What lesson can be learned from the ant?
3. What is the conduct and outcome of a worthless person?
4. What seven things does the LORD hate?
5. Twice in these two chapters, Solomon tells his son how to avoid adultery. What did he say?
6. What is the outcome of adultery?
7. How did Solomon describe the young man he saw passing along the street?
8. What kind of speech did the harlot (prostitute) use to persuade the young man to sin?
9. What are the consequences of adultery?

Lesson 6: The Proverbs of Solomon, Part 1

Proverbs 10-16

MEMORY: Ecclesiastes 1:2 and review

HYMN: "In the Sweet Fear of Jesus"

SUMMARY: *Using brief, contrasting statements of observation, Solomon begins to describe the lifestyle and ultimate outcome of the lives of both the wise and the fool. Woven throughout these descriptions is an obvious exhortation to righteous living and a warning of the shame awaiting those who reject it.*

1. Describe the speech of the righteous as portrayed in chapter 10.
2. According to chapter 11, where are both deliverance and guidance found?
3. Based on chapter 12, what are the results of righteous living?
4. According to chapter 13, in what ways are needs supplied and riches increased?
5. What does chapter 14 have to say about the fear of the LORD?
6. Describe the speech of the righteous as portrayed in chapter 15.
7. Based on chapter 16, what involvement does the LORD have in everyday living?

Lesson 7: The Proverbs of Solomon, Part 2

Proverbs 17:1-22:16

MEMORY: Ecclesiastes 3:14 and review

HYMN: "In the Sweet Fear of Jesus"

SUMMARY: *The Proverbs of Solomon continue to paint a mental portrait of the life of the wise and the life of the fool. Solomon describes each person's speech, attitude in the workplace, treatment of the poor, and other everyday actions that indicate the condition of the heart.*

1. How do chapters 17 and 18 describe the effects of the spoken word?
2. Based on chapter 19, what kinds of behavior call for punishment?
3. What does chapter 20 have to say about good leadership?
4. According to Proverbs 20:1-21:2, how does man view his own heart? How is the Lord's involvement with the human heart described?
5. Based on chapter 21, who are warned of the consequences for their behavior, and who will find life, righteousness and honor?
6. What does Proverbs 22:1-16 have to say about poverty and riches?
7. What principles for prosperity or failure do we find in Proverbs 22:1-16?

Lesson 8: The Words of the Wise and More Words of the Wise Proverbs 22:17-24:34

MEMORY: Ecclesiastes 7:13 and review

HYMN: "In the Sweet Fear of Jesus"

SUMMARY: *Descriptive statements ended, the "words of the wise" begin, instructing the listener on how to live the life of the wise described in the previous chapters. Once again, wisdom calls for listening ears, and a father instructs his son to keep his heart with all diligence.*

1. Why were the words of the wise written?
2. In the concluding verse of chapter 22, what observation is made about the effects of diligence?
3. What does chapter 23 have to say about gluttony and drunkenness?
4. Based on a father's instructions given in chapter 23, describe the direction the heart should be inclined.
5. Based on chapter 24, what are the results of wisdom, knowledge and righteousness?
6. As the words of the wise continue in Proverbs 24:23-34, how does the wise person treat the wicked?
7. In conclusion, what observation is made about the effects of slothfulness?

Lesson 9: More Proverbs of Solomon Proverbs 25-29

MEMORY: Ecclesiastes 7:13-14 and review

HYMN: "In the Sweet Fear of Jesus"

SUMMARY: *The last of Solomon's proverbs, copied by Hezekiah's men, are a combination of statements and instructions covering a wide range of practical issues, from relationships to child-rearing. Solomon admonishes his readers to observe the reputation of a fool and to note the blessing that comes to those who walk the way of the wise.*

1. What does chapter 25 have to say about pursuing proper relationships with one another?
2. How does chapter 26 describe the reputation of a fool?
3. What does chapter 26 have to say about gossip and deceitful speech?
4. How does chapter 27 describe a good friend?
5. What warnings are given in chapter 28 regarding the accumulation of riches and the treatment of the poor?
6. According to chapters 28 and 29, what effect does the character of a leader have on the people?
7. What instructions are given in chapter 29 for correcting misbehavior?

Lesson 10: The Words of Agur and King Lemuel Proverbs 30-31

MEMORY: Ecclesiastes 12:13 and review

HYMN: "In the Sweet Fear of Jesus"

SUMMARY: *Proverbs concludes with the words of Agur and King Lemuel. Agur emphasizes the sinful condition of the human heart and the inability to know wisdom or understand God apart from the intervention and Word of God. King Lemuel shares instructions given to him by his mother and presents the portrait of a woman who embodies what it is to lay hold on wisdom and to heed her call in daily living.*

1. What does Agur admit, and what does he present as the solution to his problem?

2. What two requests does Agur make? Why does he make them?

3. What kinds of behavior does Agur observe in Proverbs 30:11-15?

4. List four examples for each of the following categories as Agur lists them:
Things that are never satisfied:

Things that are hard to understand:

Things that disquiet the earth:

Things that are little, yet wise:

Things that are comely (stately) in going:

5. What instructions does King Lemuel's mother give him regarding women, wine and the weak?

6. Describe the virtuous woman's relationship with:
Her household –

Her society –

Her God –

Lesson 11: Vanity of Vanities! All is Vanity! Ecclesiastes 1-2

MEMORY: Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 and review

HYMN: "In the Sweet Fear of Jesus"

SUMMARY: *The Preacher proclaims the futility of life. He sees this in the cycles of nature where nothing is new but mere repetition. The study of life "under the sun" and the pursuit of pleasure do not bring satisfaction. While wisdom is better than folly, the fortunes of life are the same for both the wise and the fool. Even the seeming benefits of diligent labor do not necessarily come to those who toil. Enjoyment does not come from human efforts, but are a gift from God.*

1. Who was the Preacher, and what assertion did he make?
2. What observations from the natural world did he make that led him to this conclusion?
3. What observations from human experience supported his conclusion?
4. What did the Preacher learn by seeking wisdom?
5. What did the Preacher learn from the pursuit of pleasure?
6. How did the Preacher pursue greatness, and what did he conclude about it?
7. What did the Preacher conclude about wisdom, madness and folly?
8. How did the Preacher respond to his own labor (toil), and why?
9. What was the Preacher's conclusion about what he had learned?

Lesson 12: A Time for Every Purpose Under the Sun Ecclesiastes 3-4

MEMORY: Song of Solomon 2:4 and review

HYMN: "In the Sweet Fear of Jesus"

SUMMARY: *There is a time for everything in life. God so orders this that man may fear him, enjoy life and do good. This does not obscure the fact that life does not make sense. There is no vindication of the righteous or judgment of the wicked. The oppressor and the oppressed lack comfort. Man deprives himself of pleasure to do his work, but is not satisfied and does not know who will benefit from his labor. Companionship is better than being alone, and wisdom is better than power. Nevertheless, it is all vanity.*

1. What did the Preacher mean when he said, "There is a time for every purpose under the sun"?
2. What is God's gift to man?
3. What did the Preacher learn about the work of God?
4. What is God's plan and purpose for mankind?
5. How do man and animals compare?
6. What did the Preacher observe about oppression, and what did it lead him to conclude?
7. Why does a man work, and what does he get for it?
8. What is the advantage of two or three working together?
9. What did the Preacher observe about the poor wise youth and the old foolish king?

Lesson 13: Fear God! Ecclesiastes 5-6

MEMORY: Song of Solomon 8:7 and review

HYMN: "In the Sweet Fear of Jesus"

SUMMARY: *Let the fear of God direct your conduct before Him Who is in heaven and able to destroy the work of your hands. There is no justice for the poor. The rich are not satisfied with riches. It is a gift of God to be able to find enjoyment in the labors of life. God also can prevent the enjoyment of wealth, possession and honor. Ultimately, death terminates the benefits of material gain.*

1. What advice did the Preacher give about going to the house of God?

2. What warning did the Preacher give about making vows?

3. What observations did the Preacher make about the following matters?
Oppression of the poor:

Love of money:

Accumulation of wealth:
4. What is the gift of God?

5. What evil did the Preacher observe among men?

6. Why did the Preacher perceive an advantage to the "untimely birth" (stillborn child)?

7. Why did the Preacher raise the questions at the end of chapter 6?

Lesson 14: The Work of God on the Earth Ecclesiastes 7-8

MEMORY: Review

HYMN: "In the Sweet Fear of Jesus"

SUMMARY: *It is better to live wisely and righteously, but the outcome is determined by God and not personal wisdom or righteousness. Man cannot find out the work of God.*

1. The Preacher concluded several things that are "better" than another. What are they?
2. What did the Preacher say about the work of God?
3. Why did the Preacher advise against being overly righteous or overly wicked?
4. How should we react to what people say about us?
5. What did the Preacher learn when he sought to know wisdom and the reason of things?
6. What did the Preacher observe about the following matters?
Wisdom:

The king's command:

The day of death:
7. What did the Preacher learn when he saw the wicked buried?
8. What vanity did the Preacher observe taking place upon the earth?
9. What did the Preacher conclude about the work of God?

Lesson 15: The Hand of God Ecclesiastes 9-10

MEMORY: Review

HYMN: "In the Sweet Fear of Jesus"

SUMMARY: *The lives of all men are in the hand of God. All come to a common end, and it is a great evil. Nevertheless, wisdom is better than folly. Do your work with zeal. Live prudently and with joy all the days of your life which God has given you.*

1. What did the Preacher say about the hand of God?
2. What great evil did the Preacher observe "under the sun"?
3. Why is a living dog better than a dead lion?
4. What advice did the Preacher give about how we should live?
5. What did the Preacher learn about time and chance?
6. What did the Preacher learn about wisdom from the poor wise man?
7. What did the Preacher say about folly and fools?
8. What great evil did the Preacher see under the sun?
9. What did the Preacher say about the king?

Lesson 16: The End of the Matter Ecclesiastes 11-12

MEMORY: Review

HYMN: "In the Sweet Fear of Jesus"

SUMMARY: *God orders the events of life. Man cannot understand the work of God, but should live with joy and with the full recognition that there is a coming judgment day. Remember your Creator in the days of your youth. It is vanity that life begins with vigor and ends in frailty and death. Nevertheless, the wise Preacher calls men to fear God and keep His commandments, because God will ultimately render true justice for all men.*

1. What principles did the Preacher present in Ecclesiastes 11:1-4?
2. How did the Preacher make his point about our inability to understand the work of God?
3. Despite the uncertainty of life, what advice did the Preacher give?
4. What advice did the Preacher give to the young man in his youth?
5. Why should the young man remember his Creator in his youth?
6. How did the Preacher describe old age?
7. What did the Preacher conclude as he considered the end of life?
8. How did the Preacher describe his work?
9. What is the end of the matter?

Lesson 17: The Beginning of Love Song of Solomon 1:1-5:1

MEMORY: Review

HYMN: "In the Sweet Fear of Jesus"

SUMMARY: *The Song of Solomon is a dialogue between the Shulamite and King Solomon interspersed with observations by the Daughters of Jerusalem. The identification of the speaker is based upon the gender and number of the Hebrew pronouns. Initially, most of the speaking is that of the Shulamite expressing her desire for the King. This is followed by an account of the wedding and a statement of Solomon's love for his bride.*

1. Outline the text according to who is speaking.
2. How does the Shulamite describe herself?
3. How do Solomon and the Shulamite view each other in Song of Solomon 1:2 to 2:2?
4. In Song of Solomon 2:3-17, the Shulamite speaks of Solomon. How does she express her love for him?
5. In Song of Solomon 3:1-5, the Shulamite has a dream. What is her dream?
6. How is the wedding described in Song of Solomon 3:6-11?
7. In Song of Solomon 4:1-5:1, Solomon is speaking about his bride.
What was Solomon's final impression of her personal appearance?

How did he respond to her?

What did he say about her love for him?

Lesson 18: The Communion of Love

Song of Solomon 5:2-8:14

MEMORY: Review

HYMN: "In the Sweet Fear of Jesus"

SUMMARY: *The last half of the book begins with a separation and the Shulamite's response to it. After their reunion, the two express their love for one another.*

1. Outline the text according to who is speaking.
2. In Song of Solomon 5:2-8, what happens, and how did the Shulamite respond?
3. How did the daughters of Jerusalem respond in Song of Solomon 5:9?
4. How did the Shulamite respond to the daughters of Jerusalem?
5. How did Solomon express his pleasure with his wife in Song of Solomon 6:4-10?
6. In Song of Solomon 7:1-9, what is Solomon trying to say about his wife?
7. In Song of Solomon 8:1-6, the Shulamite again speaks of Solomon. What does she want?
8. What did the Shulamite say about love?
9. What did the Shulamite mean by her statement at the end of Song of Solomon 8:10?