



The Patience of Job by Gerard Seghers (1591-1651)

THE SEARCH FOR WISDOM

A Study of Job through the Song of Solomon

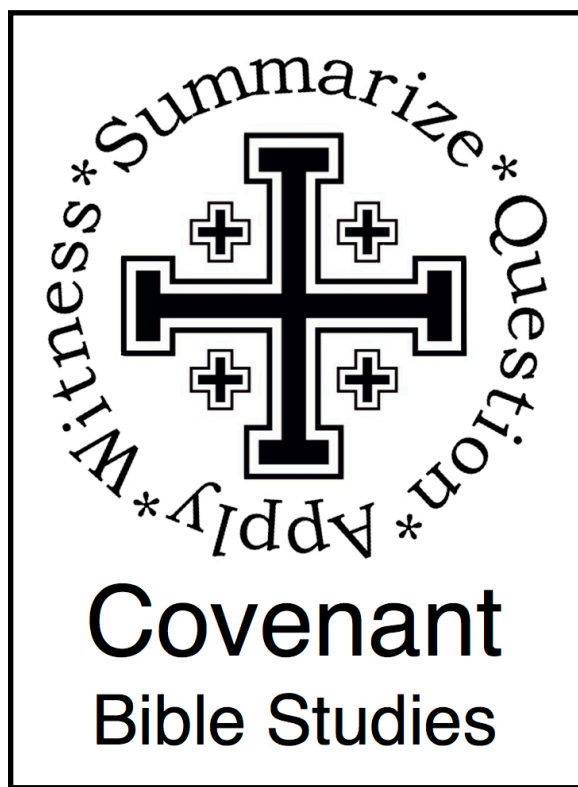
by

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Covenant Bible Studies

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Dedicated

to

My Wife

Barbara

who is wiser than she knows.

Rev. Dr. James T. Reuteler, Ph.D.

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COVENANT BIBLE STUDY

Background

Having majored in the Humanities in College (which had a good dose of Religion and Bible Courses), Systematic Theology and New Testament in Seminary, and Social Ethics and Missiology in Graduate School, I expected to emerge Biblically literate. I was wrong.

One day in my office, I came to the realization that I was Biblically illiterate, after I had earned a Bachelor of Arts, Bachelor of Divinity, and a Ph.D. The first step to becoming Biblically literate is to confess that you are Biblically illiterate. That is precisely what I did in the summer of 1979. My first step out of illiteracy was to read the Bible for an hour each morning before I began my workday, but I found that lonely and unsatisfying.

This led me to a second step that changed me, and my ministry forever. It also enabled me to see how little the Church knows about the Book it claims as its source for faith and morality. The tragic thing is that most people do not recognize that they are Biblically illiterate, and so they go on quoting Scripture as though they know what they are talking about. In my second step I invited members of my congregation to join me in the study of Scripture on Sunday evenings. I was not sure what I was going to do, but I knew that I had to do something. About a dozen parishioners were willing to confess that they were also Biblically illiterate, and so we entered into a Covenant to study the Bible every Sunday evening at 6:00 p.m. It took us six years to study from Genesis through Revelation, taking a major section each year. Below is a list of the way in which we proceeded:

- The Books of Law (Genesis through Deuteronomy)
- The Books of History (Joshua through Esther)
- The Books of Wisdom (Job through the Song of Solomon)
- The Books of Prophecy (Isaiah through Malachi)
- The Gospels and Acts
- The Letters and Revelation
- The Apocrypha

The most difficult part was not working through all those laws, but through one hundred and fifty Psalms. By the time we finished there were two groups meeting with me. The second group met on Thursday mornings at 9:30 a.m. As both groups reflected on our ordeal through the Psalms, we decided not to do that again. There had to be a better way.

Not yet realizing what that better way might be, I moved to another congregation, where I started four groups, the two new ones meeting on Sunday night at 7:30 p.m., following the 6:00 p.m. group, and another one on Wednesday afternoon at 1:00 p.m. As we began our journey through the Bible, some of the participants suggested studying the Apocrypha as well. That gave me an idea. I included the Apocrypha with the Wisdom Books, and began using a Psalm as a meditation prior to beginning each session. Occasionally, I

selected a Psalm to fit what we were studying; but at other times, I just used the Psalm for the week.

In spite of our difficulty with the Psalms, I still believe in studying the Bible just the way it is written. After we have done that, we may begin to explore its themes and topics, but not before. We must first do our homework. This holds for youth as well as for adults. The following reason was given in the October, 1985 issue of *The Christian Herald*:

For teens, studies of Bible books are preferable to studies of topics. Teenagers accustomed to only thematic Bible Studies may find themselves and their friends in a vulnerable and dangerous spot when they get to college. Cults that focus on reaching college students use topical-style Bible studies that select verses throughout the Bible to “prove” their false doctrines. A solid foundation in Bible-book studies will help young people not to be taken in by cultic teachings. Studies on topics are helpful after a group has done a number of Bible-book studies.

The difficulty with Bible Study in the manner that I am proposing is the tendency to get bogged down, or to spend too much time on a few passages. I would like to suggest that you keep moving. That is why I have broken each book into a number of lessons. You should move on, even if you have not finished your discussion. All this assumes, of course, that you are studying with other people, which I believe to be an absolute necessity. Very few people continue studying the Bible on a regular basis without the discipline of meeting with others. This is necessary because others contribute to your understanding and they keep you honest about your conclusions.

Methodology

At first I called what I was doing *In-depth Bible Study*, but after proceeding through the Bible three times, I decided to change the name to *Covenant Bible Study*. My goal had been to take six to twelve chapters in an hour or hour and one-half session. I liked the longer sessions better, but I am aware of the contemporary expectation to finish everything within an hour. Covering that much material in such a short time can hardly be called dealing with it in depth. My goal was however to get the stories or passages on the table, answer questions about them, and apply them to modern life. This required a Covenant between pastor and people. We covered each major section in nine months, meeting around thirty times in the course of that time. I am not worried that we did not spend enough time on a section, for I have found many themes coming up again and again. Our purpose was to study the whole Bible in Covenant together, trying to understand how the various components relate to one another.

One thing I insisted upon from the beginning—everyone has a right to their own opinion without having to fear criticism from anyone in the group. I have also advertised what we were doing in the newspaper, and have managed to pick up people from all kinds of traditions. Their contributions have greatly enriched the Bible Study Groups, keeping us honest about their traditions. Without their presence, we would not have treated their traditions fairly. One tradition that was never represented, although I wish it were, was

modern Judaism. Covenant Bible Study is best done in an Ecumenical context, but that of course, raises some other questions. Does it mean that we are trying to win or convert people of other traditions to our own? My answer has always been, “No!” Their traditions need to be treated with respect, and they are encouraged to stay within their own traditions. The purpose of Covenant Bible Study is to expand our understanding of the whole Bible, and the only way we can do this is to include people of other traditions, without trying to convert them.

Dr. Harrell Beck, from Perkins School of Theology at Southern Methodist University suggested some principles I have used. He was addressing a group of pastors at a School for Christian Ministry, and he stressed how important it was to teach the Old Testament to children, believing that it could be done. His methodology was very simple, tell them a story, give them an opportunity to ask questions about the story, and work together on the practical application of that story. This gave me the idea for working with adults.

Summarizing the Material

In a typical session, I make assignments to those who will accept them. Not everyone is willing to accept an assignment, and that is okay. I try to encourage those who are too shy to take on an assignment, that it is okay just to sit there. I keep assignments to one or two chapters. The breakdown of assignments is listed right below the title to every session, and I generally pass a sheet of paper with the breakdown around the table, asking those who would take an assignment to simply write their name down next to the assignment they would like to choose. Their task is to read those one or two chapters more carefully than the rest of the assigned material for a session. When we begin our session, I ask those who have accepted assignments to simply summarize their chapters to the group. They may refer to a few scriptures now and then, but they are not to read everything in class. They are to highlight the story, or if there is no story, the essence of what they have read. They are to recognize that someone else might handle it differently, but that is okay. Their assignment is to get the story or the essence of the material on the table.

There are always some people who, though they are unwilling to take an assignment, are willing to read in class. In the assignments I handle myself, I try to find a verse or two in each section, which summarizes things. I then ask persons, who do not take assignments, to read those verses. In the charts that accompany the Bible Studies, you will *sometimes* find these brief references, which point to the essence of things. These are the portions I ask people to read in class. The first third of our session is dedicated to the above task. We may run over, but our intention is to get the content on the table for further discussion.

Questions and Answers

In the second third, our purpose is to ask questions. This does not mean that I answer all the questions. Sometimes, while I am thinking, someone else answers the question, having discovered it in a Study Bible, or commentary. While I do not encourage everyone to use commentaries, I do encourage the use of a good Study Bible. I have also written

my own commentary, which I pass out in advance to all participants. I did not do this the first year, but I found people wanting to know where I was getting some of my information, and so I decided to pass the material out. Those who accepted assignments seemed to feel more comfortable when they knew what I knew ahead of time. Some people had a tendency to read only my commentary, but I have always told them, “If you do not have enough time to prepare, read the Bible rather than my commentary.” Most people have done that.

Practical Application

The final third of the session has to do with making a practical application of the material that we have studied together. To help people along, I prepare two things: a one page chart of all the material so that they can see it in its entirety, and no more than two pages of my own thoughts on the practical application of what we have studied. These two things seem to be enough to get the discussion moving. All of my materials are made available prior to our meeting. Everyone has them while they are doing their own studying. It is difficult to give enough attention to this final third when you meet for only one hour. This is why I prefer an hour and one-half. As the discussion moves along, it is difficult to stop and there is a tendency to move beyond the allotted time. The group should stop on time. There will always be some people with other commitments. The issues will come up again, and so they should not force you to extend the time of a session.

Leadership

I have found the above method of studying the Bible with groups very rewarding. This method does not need a clergy person. The problem lies in the willingness of other laity to accept a layperson as their leader. Many of the participants in my Bible Studies were competent people, fully able to lead sessions. You do not need an expert to lead you. All you need is a good Study Bible, a couple of good commentaries, and four or five other people willing to enter into a Covenant to study the Bible. It will be helpful to set up some questions for discussion. *The Serendipity Study Bible*, which contains 20,000 questions, will help you; but even without it, you can assign different persons to think up questions on chapters or sections to be studied. You do not have to aim at becoming Bible Scholars. The purpose of Bible Study is not knowledge, but reverence for God and discipleship. Do not be too worried if you cannot remember everything. “Its authors,” wrote Frederick Herzog, “never expected to provide literalistic guidelines for the 20th century. But they did want to communicate the power of God (cf. I Cor. 4:20).”

Among some groups I have found resistance to taking assignments. When I have felt this resistance, I have used a different approach. Instead of asking people to summarize chapters, I have asked them to mark their Bibles in a certain way. The following scheme has been used, and it always inspires much more discussion than time permits:



Mark those verses with a heart that offer special insight into religious experience.



Mark those verses with a lamp or light bulb, which offer special insight or illumination.



Mark those verses with a star, which might be used to give guidance or application to daily living.



Mark those verses with a cross, which are difficult to follow or obey.



Mark those verses with a check, which are important to you, but do not fall under any other categories.



Mark those verses with a question mark that you do not fully understand.

When I ask people to mark their Bibles as discussed above, I begin each session with an introduction and a brief video segment. We then attempt to answer questions, share insights, talk about applications, and discuss how to deal with the difficult passages.

Final Comments

The Use of Videos and DVDs

Two final comments need to be made. The first has to do with the use of video, which can add much to a Bible Study session. I have found a number of videos helpful, but I always limit the amount of video that I might use to less than fifteen minutes. This requires previewing video sources, which is very time consuming; but I think that it is very important to limit the use of video to illustrating relevant points. I am reluctant to list the most helpful videos because new ones are being introduced all the time.

The Need for Balance

My second comment has to do with balance. John Wesley called for that balance when he said, “Let us now unite the two so long divided, knowledge and vital piety.” This is my purpose in Covenant Bible Study. Some will think that I give too much attention to the academic side of things, while others will say that I do not give it enough attention. The attempt to apply what we learn is aimed at vital piety. I think that the two must be held together, but I do not view the Bible as a book of rules. For me, “The Bible,” to quote Luther, “is the manger in which we find Christ, the swaddling clothes in which he is wrapped.” Covenant Bible Study helps us sort through all that straw in the manger to discover the Christ, who reveals God and his Will to us. For those who only want to use the Bible devotionally, I say, “You must first study it, hear what its characters are really saying, and then learn the lessons of history, in which God really is present.” These are the tasks of Covenant Bible Study.

The Purpose of Bible Study

One participant, overwhelmed by the pessimism of the prophets, asked, “Is there anything that we can do to break the vicious cycle of the rise and fall of nations (and individuals)?” I firmly believe that there is something we can do. Our first obligation is to study the Scriptures to find out what they are really saying. We have spent enough time manipulating them to say what we want them to say, New and Old Testaments alike; it is now time to enter into Covenant with one another to study them completely, allowing them to speak to us. That is a task that will take us the rest of our lives, but we can begin the journey now. The second step in this journey is to begin applying the truths we learn from our study. Jesus, in Matthew 7:24-25, told us that we should be building our houses (nations and lives) on solid rock, on foundations that will stand. Not to do this, says Psalm 73:18, would be to set our feet “in slippery places.” The purpose of Covenant Bible Study is to help us find our way back to the God of the Bible and build our lives and nation on the solid rock. In the Scriptures we can discover the steppingstones of history, which will enable us to walk on the waters of faith.

Discovering the Main Points

As I wrote my commentary on the Bible, I wrote a short article, which can be found at the end of each lesson. My purpose in doing this was to focus on what I thought was the main point in each of the lessons. Obviously, there is more than one point; but I thought it might be helpful for someone to look for a theme. That is what I have attempted to do.

Studying the Bible is like looking at the many sides of a diamond. Light comes from unexpected places. I would recommend that everyone in a Bible Study Group look for that which sparkles most and attempt to describe what they see. That is what I am attempting to do here. It is only one person’s opinion, but it is worth doing, even if only for that one person.

Not everyone will feel capable of doing what I have done, but everyone should be able to raise a couple of questions about the section to be studied. If that is all you can do, go with it. You will be surprised at how much you will learn, even by asking questions. Remember how, according to Luke 2:46-47, Mary and Joseph found Jesus, “...sitting among the teachers, listening to them and asking them questions. And all who heard him were amazed at his understanding and his answers.” As you grow in knowledge, understanding, and wisdom, people will be amazed at your questions and answers as well.

My only advice is that my commentary and these articles are not to be studied in place of the Bible. Your textbook should be *the Bible*. If this commentary and these articles can help you understand and apply what you read there, then they will have contributed to their purpose. Just keep in mind that they do not represent the last word on the subject. They are but descriptions of the light shining from the diamond, which is God’s Word as it has been communicated through human authors.

The Purpose of Bible Study

When we read the Bible, we are really asking two questions:

1. Do I expect to meet God?
2. Am I willing to obey God?

Applying the Bible

1. Is there an example for me to follow?
2. Is there a sin for me to avoid?
3. Is there a command for me to obey?
4. Is there a promise for me to claim?
5. What does this passage teach me about God or Jesus Christ?
6. Is there a difficulty for me to explore?
7. Is there something in this passage I should pray about today?

A Covenant for Studying Together

Entering into Covenant to Study the Bible together is one of the most important decisions we can make in our lives, and it requires a special Covenant, which will not be easy to follow. Of all the Covenants I have read concerning studying together, I like the one proposed by Augustine:

Let us, you and I lay aside all arrogance.
Let neither of us pretend to have found the truth.
Let us seek it as something unknown to both of us.
Then we may seek it with love and sincerity
when neither of us has the rashness nor
presumption to believe that he (she) already
possesses it.
And if I am asking too much of you,
allow me to listen to you at least,
to talk with you as I do with beings whom,
for my part,
I do not pretend to understand.

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOKS OF WISDOM

The Books of Wisdom are the most difficult to study. This is particularly true of the Psalms, the largest book in the Bible. It also contains the longest chapter in the Bible. It's like studying the Hymn Book. The Book of Job may be a short story, but it goes on and on through all too many chapters. Studying Proverbs is like reading one short saying after another. At least Ecclesiastes gets to the point in a reasonable amount of time. When it comes to the Song of Solomon, one wonders why it's included in the Books of Wisdom.

Just what is wisdom? Although I find it easy to define wisdom, there are parts of the definition that trouble all too many people. I would define a wise person as follows: *A wise person fears God, obeys the commandments, and flees from evil.* This definition can be found in every one of the Books of Wisdom, except for the Song of Solomon. I have listed a few examples below:

1. Job 28:28: The fear of the Lord, that is wisdom; and to depart from evil is understanding.
2. Psalm 111:10: The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom; all those who practice it have a good understanding. His praise endures forever.
3. Psalm 112:1: Praise the LORD! Happy are those who fear the LORD, who greatly delight in his commandments.
4. Proverbs 3:7: Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD, and turn away from evil.
5. Proverbs 9:10: The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.
6. Ecclesiastes 12:13: The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone.

Most people have difficulty with “fearing” God. They would rather change the word to “reverence” for God, but nowhere in the Bible does anyone do this. The wise person fears God. While very few of us object to obeying the commandments, we have great difficulty in actually obeying them. We're not even sure which commandments need to be obeyed. Most of us would like to simplify them by emphasizing Jesus' great commandment, but even that leaves us with many questions. How far does love go when it has to confront evil, and what does fleeing evil really mean?

Job learned a lesson we all need to learn. Only the humble can be wise. Arrogance blinds us to the meaning of wisdom. In the end, God fills suffering with his presence. That is the answer to the theodicy question. Only when we are humbled, do we understand this.

JOB ACCORDING TO HAROLD KUSHNER

The Book of Job is probably the greatest, fullest, most profound discussion of the subject of good people suffering ever written. Part of its greatness lies in the fact that the author was scrupulously fair to all points of view, even those he did not accept. Though his sympathies are clearly with Job, he makes sure that the speeches of the friends are as carefully thought out and as carefully written as are his hero's words. That makes for great literature, but it also makes it hard to understand his message. When God says, "How dare you challenge the way I run my world? What do you know about running a world?", is that supposed to be the last word on the subject, or is that just one more paraphrase of the conventional piety of that time?

To try to understand the book and its answer, let us take note of three statements which everyone in the book, and most of the readers, would like to be able to believe:

1. God is all-powerful and causes everything that happens in the world. Nothing happens without His willing it.
2. God is just and fair, and stands for people getting what they deserve, so that the good prosper and the wicked are punished.
3. Job is a good person.

As long as Job is healthy and wealthy, we can believe all three of those statements at the same time with no difficulty. When Job suffers, when he loses his possessions, his family and his health, we have a problem. We can no longer make sense of all three propositions together. We can now affirm any two only by denying the third.

If God is both just and powerful, then Job must be a sinner who deserves what is happening to him. If Job is good but God causes his suffering anyway, then God is not just. If Job deserved better and God did not send his suffering, then God is not all-powerful. We can see the argument of the Book of Job as an argument over which of the three statements we are prepared to sacrifice, so that we can keep on believing in the other two.

Job's friends are prepared to stop believing in (3), the assertion that Job is a good person. They want to believe in God as they have been taught to. They want to believe that God is good and that God is in control of things. And the only way they can do that is to convince themselves that Job deserves what is happening to him.

Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Schocken Books) 1981.

JOB

1. The Endurance of Job

*Have you considered my servant Job?
There is no one like him on the earth,
a blameless and upright man who fears God
and turns away from evil.*

Job 2:3

Job 1:1—2:13 and 42:7-17

1. THE ENDURANCE OF JOB (1:1—2:13 and 42:7-17)			
THE SIGNS OF JOB'S RIGHTEOUSNESS (1:1-5)			
Job's Character (1:1) Fear's God Shuns Evil	Job's Family (1:2) Seven Sons Three Daughters	Job's Possessions (1:3) 7,000 Sheep 3,000 Camels 500 Oxen 500 Donkeys Many Servants	
THE FIRST TEST: Take everything but Job's life (1:12)			
The Four Messengers and What They Reported (1:13-22)			
War	Sabbeans	Stole Oxen & Don-	Killed Servants
Nature	Fire of God		Killed Sheep/Servants
War	Chaldeans	Stole Camels	Killed Servants
Nature	Wind of God		Killed Children
<p>Job's Response: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked shall I return there; the LORD gave, and the LORD has taken away; blessed be the name of the LORD." (1:21)</p>			
THE SECOND TEST: Take Job's health, but not his life. (2:4-6)			
<p>Wife's Response: (2:9) "Do you still persist in your integrity? Curse God, and die."</p>		<p>Job's Response: (2:10) "You speak as any foolish woman would speak. Shall we receive the good at the hand of God, and not receive the bad?"</p>	
JOB'S FRIENDS: Not recognizing him, they stand in silence for seven days (2:12-13)			
Eliphaz (God is fine gold)	Bildad (God has loved or Son of Hadad)	Zophar (Singing Bird)	
THE RESTORATION (42:7-17)			
Eliphaz's Sin (42:7) 7 Bulls 7 Rams	Job Prays (42:8)	Material Restoration Silver Coin/Gold Ring 14,000 Sheep, 6,000 Camels 1,000 Oxen	New Family 7 Sons and 3 Daughters Jemimah, Keziah, Keren-Happuch

1. THE ENDURANCE OF JOB

Job 1:1—2:13 and 42:7-17

ASSIGNMENTS				
The Righteousness of Job 1:1-5	The Conspiracy in Heaven 1:6-12	The Loss of Servants, Possessions, and Children 1:13-22	The Loss of Health 2:1-13	The Vindication of God 42:7-17

INTRODUCTION TO JOB

The Name

The name given to this book comes from the name of its central character. The book is based on an ancient folktale of a righteous man named Job (1:1—2:13; 42:7-17; and James 5:11). The King James Version of the Bible calls Job patient; however, the long poetic middle section of the book does not describe Job as being very patient. The New Revised Version of the Bible speaks of the endurance of Job and not of his patience.

The Authorship

The author or editor is unknown. The Talmud, the compilation of rabbis between 200 B.C.E and 500 C.E., suggests Moses as the author, but this cannot be verified. Was one editor involved, or were there many? We simply don't know. There is some justification for saying that the editors were well educated, well bred, and well traveled Jews.

The Date

Although the ancient folktale was circulated orally among the oriental sages in the second millennium B.C.E. it was not written down in Hebrew until after the time of David and Solomon, or even as much as a century later (1000-800 B.C.E.).

Ezekiel referred to Job (Ezekiel 14:14) and an anonymous poet of the Exile used what was known of the Book as a setting for a discussion between an impatient Job and his three friends; hence, the large middle section of poetry (3:1—42:6), which includes the Lord's discourses from the whirlwind (38:1—42:6). A later poet contributed Elihu's speeches (32:1—37:24).

If there were only one editor, then some of the above would be in error. The latest date for the final compilation of Job would be around 250 B.C. The Sira already knew of *The Book of Job* (Ecclesiasticus 49:9).

The Setting and Value of the Book

If we could place Job within Jewish history, it would have to be in the Patriarchal age prior to Joseph's journey into Egypt. This was a time when wealth was counted in the number of cattle one owned and men acted as their own priest. Both of these can be found in Job.

The Book of Job however is not set only in a Jewish setting. Most of the characters are not even Jews. About the most that can be said about the Land of Uz is that it must have been a region southeast of Judah, the land with a reputation for wise men.

The time period cannot be given with certainty, therefore, it is not important to place Job within history. Indeed, C.S. Lewis writes:

The Book of Job appears to me unhistorical because it begins about a man quite unconnected with all history or even legend, with no genealogy, living in a country of which the Bible elsewhere has hardly anything to say; because, in fact, the author quite obviously writes as a storyteller not as a chronicler.

The theological issues raised however are of eternal significance. Job is not an historical book; it is a book of wisdom and poetry. Martin Luther said that *The Book of Job* is "magnificent and sublime as no other book of Scripture." Thomas Carlyle called *The Book of Job* "the most wonderful poem of any age and language...." "There is nothing written," he continued, "in the Bible or out of it of equal literary merit." Tennyson said essentially the same thing when he called Job "the greatest poem of ancient or modern times."

The Purpose

Job is a protest against the religious idea found in the historical books that the righteous will prosper and that the wicked will face misfortune. It does not explain the mystery of suffering or justify the ways of God with his created beings; rather, it probes the depths of faith in spite of suffering. It concludes that both good and evil come to the righteous person.

The question is: "God, see what is happening to me, can you help me?" Job is finally satisfied, without self-vindication, by an experience of immediate communion with God, very similar to those experiences of the prophets: "now my eye sees you." (42:5) Instead of answering Job's question about suffering, or eliminating it, God fills it with his living presence.

Job 1-2	Job 3-31	Job 32-37	Job 38—42:6	Job 42:7-17
The Prologue	The Debate	Elihu Speaks	God Speaks	The Epilogue

The Outline

- A. Prologue. (1:1—2:13)
- B. Job and his Friends. (3:1—31:40)
 - 1. Job's Complaint. (3:1-26)
 - 2. The First Dialogue. (4:1—14:22)
 - 3. The Second Dialogue. (15:1—21:34)
 - 4. The Third Dialogue. (22:1—27:23)
 - 5. In Praise of Wisdom. (28:1-28)
 - 6. Job's Final Statement. (29:1—31:40)
- C. The Speeches of Elihu. (32:1—37:24)
- D. The Lord Answers Job. (38:1—42:6)
- E. Epilogue. (42:7-17)

THE RIGHTEOUSNESS OF JOB (1:1-5)

In the opening scenes of *The Book of Job* we discover that Job came from Uz. Uz might have been in Edom or in the desert northeast of Edom and east of Palestine. At any rate, Job was considered a foreigner. *Job* means “hostile” or “penitent.” He is described as a righteous man. That means that he is a man of faith and morals. As a man of faith he “feared God” and as a man of morals he “turned away from evil.”

Job is also described as a man of means. In addition to his seven sons and three daughters, he had the following possessions:

7,000 Sheep
 3,000 Camels
 500 Oxen
 500 Asses
 Many Servants

While his sons and daughters may have engaged in irreverent conduct, Job attempted to make up for that behavior by making burnt offerings on their behalf. The feasts described may have been celebrations of their birthdays.

THE CONSPIRACY IN HEAVEN (1:6-12)

The sons of God (angelic beings) gathered in heaven and Satan was among them. *Satan* means “adversary,” but this does not make him the fiendish devil of later centuries. Satan challenged Job’s piety and morality. He suggested that Job was pious and good because there was profit in it for him. Without the profit, he would be neither pious nor good. God gave permission to Satan to test Job in any way he desired, but in all the testing, Job’s life had to be spared.

THE LOSS OF SERVANTS, POSSESSIONS, AND CHILDREN (1:13-22)

In four decisive acts, Job lost his servants, his possessions, and his children. While his servants were eating and drinking in his eldest son’s home, the Sabeans (from Sheba in the south) fell upon them and killed the servants. One servant escaped to report the news to Job. In the next act fire (lightning) from heaven burned up his sheep and servants. In the third act the Chaldeans (from Babylonia in the east) took his camels and slew his servants. In the final act a great wind destroyed his eldest son’s home and all his children were killed. In each of these four acts a servant reported the news to Job, who finally tore his clothes, shaved his head and worshiped God. In spite of his losses he neither sinned nor accused God of any injustice.

THE LOSS OF HEALTH (2:1-13)

A second gathering of the sons of God (angelic beings) took place in heaven. God asked Satan how Job was doing. Satan replied that Job was still faithful only because his life was not threatened. God reminded Satan of their agreement, that only Job’s life was to be spared; so Satan afflicted Job with some loathsome sores (not necessarily leprosy), which Job scraped with a potsherd (broken piece of pottery) as he sat among the ashes. Job’s wife criticized him for holding fast to his faith, but Job called her a foolish woman. A foolish woman in those days was a woman who did not believe in divine intervention in human affairs. In spite of the fact that his wife told him to curse God and die, Job continued to be faithful.

Finally Job’s three friends, (1) Eliphaz the Temanite, (2) Bildad the Shuhite, and (3) Zophar the Naamathite came from the northwest Arabia to mourn with him and share their wisdom. Northwest Arabia was renowned for its sages.

Eliphaz means “God is fine gold,” and Temanite refers to Tema, a town known for its commerce. *Bildad* means “God has loved” or “son of Hadad.” He may have come from the tribe of Shuah, who was the youngest son of Abraham and Keturah (Genesis 25:2). *Zophar* means “singing bird,” and he came from Naameh, a region in northwest Arabia. Apart from The Book of Job, Naameh is unknown.

When these three friends arrived, they said nothing for seven days, the appointed time for mourning (Genesis 50:10 and I Samuel 31:13); then, in the long poetic section which follows, they suggested to Job that he was being punished for some sin he committed. They were simply expressing the traditional theology and ethics of their time.

THE VINDICATION OF JOB (42:7-17)

This conclusion belongs to the first two chapters. The poetic middle section is an addition to an ancient story. In the end, God supported and vindicated Job, and criticized Eliphaz, Eliphaz was told to take seven bulls and seven rams, make a burnt offering and ask Job to pray for him and his friends. After this was done, Job received restitution. His brothers and sisters gathered at his house and they all ate bread. They gave Job a piece of money (qestitah) and a ring of gold. His possessions were doubled from what they had been. He now had:

14,000	Sheep
6,000	Camels
1,000	Oxen
1,000	Asses

There is however no mention that God healed disease, nor were his children restored. Instead he fathered seven new sons and three new daughters. The daughters were named: (1) Jemimah (dove), (2) Keziah (Cinnamon), and (3) Kerenhappuch (Horn of Eye-Shadow). There were no other women in all the land that were as fair. The sons, who are not named, were given their inheritance; and Job lived another 140 years, long enough to see four generations succeed him.

Is this a fairy-tale ending disconnected from the rest of *The Book of Job*, or is this a final theological statement. I believe that it is the latter. In the end, justice demands restitution, and Job gets it only as he forgives his three friends for their bad theological and moral analysis of his situation (42:10). Yes, Job has his material prosperity restored, but he has learned a valuable lesson as well. He has discovered God in the midst of his suffering. William Neil finished his commentary on *The Book of Job* with the following statement: “We have reached the heart of the message of Job when we can say: ‘Nothing in my hand I bring, simply to thy Cross I cling’ or echo Paul’s words in Romans 8:35-39.”

WHEN SHOULD WE QUESTION GOD?

If God is just, powerful, and loving, then why does evil, or suffering, exist? This has been called the “theodicy” question. Jürgen Moltmann tried to clarify the question in his book, *The Trinity and the Kingdom*.¹

It is a practical question, which will only be answered through experience of the new world in which “God will wipe away every tear from their eyes.” It is not really a question at all, in the sense of something we can ask or not ask, like other questions. It is the open wound of life in this world. It is the real task of faith and theology to make it possible for us to survive, to go on living, with this open wound.

¹Jürgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, Publishers, 1981), p. 49.

None of us wants to wait until the end of history to find out what the answer to this question is, and so we continue to ask it, usually framing it with the words, “Why is this happening to me?” In good times, we rarely ask the opposite question, which would be, “Why is this not happening to me?” We just assume that everything is going well with us because we are essentially good, and after all, God loves us and rewards our goodness. Why should we ask any questions when our lives are intact?

The question usually gets asked when our world begins to collapse. As Job’s world collapsed with the loss of his servants, his possessions, his children, and finally his health, he refused to draw the conclusion that his wife and three friends had already drawn—that he had sinned and deserved what he was getting. It was true that he had sinned, at least he, like every other wealthy person, was guilty of the sin of omission. With such wealth he might have been able to do more for the less fortunate, but even God does not accuse him of the sin of omission. He was guilty of sin, but either he does not realize it, or else he does not think it serious enough to be responsible for his suffering. He insists upon taking this position throughout his entire ordeal, as do many of us. When things started to go wrong, he blamed God, demanding an answer to the “theodicy question.”

Harold Kushner, in *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, also demands an answer. It was the death of his son that caused him to struggle with the question and a possible answer. He concluded that God can be just, powerful, or loving, but not all three. One characteristic must be rejected, and for Kushner it is his “power” that must be denied.² The presence of evil and suffering in the world proves that he is not powerful enough to overcome it. Our first response to Kushner might be: “God is all-powerful, but he withholds his power out of respect for human freedom.” We do not have to reject one of the three characteristics of God—justice, power, or love. Human freedom is the reason why good people—if there is any such thing as a completely good person—suffer. Job’s suffering is never attributed to his sinfulness. God never brings it up. Job’s friends are wrong when they try to attribute his suffering to sin. His suffering can be attributed to war and nature. The latter is definitely harder to explain than the former. It seems to have nothing to do with human freedom, unless of course, one brings into the question how people foolishly ignore the signs of nature that are easily discerned. Why would anyone, for example, want to live in a known earthquake zone when it could be avoided. When the inevitable finally happens, can it be blamed on God, or must it be blamed on human foolishness.

There are two answers to the theodicy question in *The Book of Job*. One is that things will work out in the end. Job, for example, has his possessions returned, and fathers seven new sons and three new daughters. Nothing is said about the restoration of his health, but one might assume that in light of his new family, that he was in pretty good shape. This of course does not bring back the children that he lost. Did they deserve to die, or were they innocent victims? Even though he has a new lease on life, the theodicy question must still be asked on their behalf.

²Harold Kushner, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* (New York: Schocken Books, 1981), pp. 37ff.

The second answer is really given first, and It makes the most sense. To experience the presence of God is an answer in itself. When that happened to Job, he no longer asked his question. He simply repented and submitted, confessing his ignorance and asking forgiveness. This illustrates that one does not have to wait until the end of time to receive an answer. The answer, however, can only be expressed in faith and hope. It cannot be articulated rationally. All of our attempts to explain evil fall short. God has created a world, in which he has limited his power, but he still is in control, and the promise is that he withholds his power because of his love. Meanwhile, operating in freedom, we are allowed to mess up the world, and it is never clear how human sinfulness affects the natural order of things. There may be a closer connection than we realize.

If *The Book of Job* teaches us anything it informs us that God struggles with us, not against us. We sometimes struggle against him, but he is always trying to break through and communicate with us. It is as C.S. Lewis has suggested: “God whispers to us in our pleasures, speaks in our conscience, but shouts in our pains: it is his megaphone to rouse a deaf world.”³ He does not create the suffering and pain, but he does use it as a means to communicate with us. It is unfortunate that suffering is the only time in which we are prepared to listen; and even then, it takes us a long time to hear him speak. Some of our friends will get in the way, others will help us, but we alone are responsible for struggling and listening to God. What we do not want to do is put off the “theodicy” question until our world collapses; but for some of us, that is exactly what will have to happen. At such moments we will have to stand by silently, trying to guide them in their questioning, until God is able to overcome their blindness and break through their deafness.

³C.S. Lewis, *The Problem of Pain* (New York, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc, 1977), p. 93

JOB

2. The First Cycle of Speeches

*O that you would hide me in Sheol,
that you would conceal me until your wrath is past,
that you would appoint me a set time,
and remember me!*

*If mortals die, will they live again?
All the days of my service I would wait
until my release should come.*

Job 14:13-14

Job 3:1 — 14:22

2. THE FIRST CYCLE OF SPEECHES (3:1—14:22)

JOB'S CURSE (3:1-26) (2:9; 3:1 & 11)

He did what his wife told him to do but he did not curse God. He cursed the day he was born.

ELIPHAZ'S FIRST SPEECH (4:1—5:27)	BILDAD'S FIRST SPEECH (8:1-22)	ZOPHAR'S FIRST SPEECH (11:1-20)
<p>APPROACH: (4:1) <i>Sympathetic Friend</i></p> <p>SOURCE: (4:12-17) <i>Revelation</i></p> <p>ADVICE: (5:8 & 17) <i>Accept God's correction</i></p>	<p>APPROACH: (8:2-6) <i>Fiery Preacher</i></p> <p>SOURCE: (8:8-10) <i>Tradition</i></p> <p>ADVICE: (8:20-21) <i>Repent and experience joy</i></p>	<p>APPROACH: (11:2-3) <i>Confronting Counselor</i></p> <p>SOURCE: (11:4-7) <i>Wisdom</i></p> <p>ADVICE: (11:13-17) <i>Repent and experience light</i></p>
JOB'S REPLY (6:1—7:21)	JOB'S REPLY (9:1—10:22)	JOB'S REPLY (12:1—14:22)
<p>FEELINGS: (6:1-4 & 14-15) <i>Shot by arrows Loss of support</i></p> <p>RESPONSE: (6:24) <i>Teach me!</i></p> <p>ACTION: (7:11) <i>Complains from the soul</i></p> <p>PETITION: (7:20-21) <i>Answer me!</i></p>	<p>FEELINGS: (9:14-15 & 32-35) <i>Powerlessness</i></p> <p>RESPONSE: (9:2) <i>Agreement</i></p> <p>ACTION: (10:8-9) <i>Questions the meaning of it</i></p> <p>PETITION: (10:18-20) <i>Leave me alone!</i></p>	<p>FEELINGS: (12:4) <i>Ridiculous</i></p> <p>RESPONSE: (13:1-5) <i>Be silent!</i></p> <p>ACTION: (13:15) <i>Hopelessness</i></p> <p>PETITION: (13:20-22) <i>Stop the suffering! Answer my questions!</i></p> <p style="font-size: small;">1. About Sin (13:23) 2. About Life (14:14)</p>

2. THE FIRST CYCLE OF SPEECHES

Job 3:1—14:22

ASSIGNMENTS			
Job's Complaint to God 3:1-26	Eliphaz's Speech and Job's Reply 4:1—7:21	Bildad's Speech and Job's Reply 8:1—11:30	Zophar's Speech and Job's Reply 11:1—14:22

JOB'S COMPLAINT TO GOD (3:1-26)

As the long poetic middle section begins we encounter a different Job. His suffering has caused him to curse the day he was born (3:1-3) and to wish that he had been born dead (3:11). He even calls upon those skilled to rouse Leviathan to curse the day of his birth with him (3:8). We must remember that in Job's time there was no concept of life after death. Life was considered to be a special gift, which was to be lived to the full. To wish that one were never born or to have died in or after childbirth can only be seen as a complete rejection the gift of life.

Leviathan symbolizes all the powers of chaos and confusion. Those who have power to rouse him are the magicians, astrologers, and calendar-makers, which were believed to produce, as well as announce, eclipses. Leviathan was believed to have engulfed the created order and the succession of days and nights, especially during the eclipses of the sun or moon. At the dawn of creation Yahweh subdued him (Psalm 74:14 and Isaiah 27:1), but Job's world of order seems to have disappeared. Is this why he calls upon those skilled in raising Leviathan to join with him in his curse?

Out of his suffering Job lashes out at God, who seems to act like his prosecutor. Job hopes that his three friends will act like his defense attorneys, but this does not happen. If life were going to consist of suffering, then death would be welcomed. For different reasons, Francis of Assisi also welcomed death, saying: "Thou, most kind and gentle death."

ELIPHAZ'S FIRST SPEECH (4:1—5:27)

After Job finished complaining, Eliphaz spoke in defense of God. In his opening words he was very courteous, for he knew the kind of man Job was and the example he had set. Eliphaz does not speak from experience or from tradition; rather, he claims an almost prophetic source of authority. His authority was almost supernatural (4:12ff). He seems to

be saying that his words are based on a supernatural vision or dream, that is, observation (4:8 and 5:27) and revelation (4:12-17).

In what follows there is no logical or rational development to his speech. We have several word images, which serve as windows through which we can begin to understand Eliphaz's religious and moral thought. For Eliphaz history made sense, for the universe was ruled along moral lines. Below are some of his word images:

1. God destroys the guilty, not the innocent (4:7-9)
2. No one is blameless before God (4:17)
3. Trouble is an inevitable part of life (5:7)
4. It is best to turn to God (5:8)
5. Accept God's reproof and chastisement (5:17)
6. Wait to be restored to God's favor (5:18)

JOB'S REPLY (6:1—7:21)

Job feels like he has been shot with the poison arrows of God (6:4), and he responds by crying out for his own death (6:8-9), which he says would make him happy. He would still try to maintain his faithfulness to God (6:10), but he can never be patient. Why should he be patient (6:11)? One might be patient if one could find a purpose in it, but Job cannot.

Job accuses his friends of deserting him, and in that desertion, he claims that they have given up their religious faith. Religious faith and kindness to one's friend cannot be separated from one another (6:14). On the other hand, his friends are afraid to take his side, for that might put them against God, who has the power to do the same to them.

Job was willing to be convinced that he had done something wrong, but nothing his friends have said thus far has been very convincing. He still cannot understand what he has done to deserve his lot (6:24ff). Until he can understand, all he can do is cry out in anguish and complain (7:11), for he feels like he is being treated like a sea monster (the personification of evil) for no reason (7:12).

It was difficult for Job to believe the Psalmist (Psalm 8:4) that God really cares for his creature when he was treating him so badly (7:17-18). Job was willing to confess his sin if only it would be revealed to him; but if sin was the problem, then why does God not reveal it to him and forgive him (7:20-21)? Instead of feeling loved by God, he feels punished, and does not know why.

Job does not have the insight of Christianity, that even small sins cause God deep pain. If Job knew how Jesus suffered on the cross for human sinfulness, his language would have been different. Job clearly does not deserve the suffering he is going through, but he ought not to take sin as lightly as he does. Even the small sins cause God intense pain. Job will ultimately come to understand how great God is, but first he has to struggle with his own pain.

BILDAD'S FIRST SPEECH (8:1-22)

Having heard Job's arrogant speech, Bildad dispensed with oriental etiquette and began his speech with a defense of God and the traditional concept of morality. He illustrates his point with Job's own children, who got what they deserved (8:4). God, he said, does not pervert justice. The good are rewarded and the wicked are punished, and to say otherwise is to accuse God of injustice (8:3, 5-6). Even the wisdom of the ages has taught this (8:8-10).

While Eliphaz comes across as a very sensitive teacher, Bildad lays into Job like a fiery preacher. Both of them have Job's best interest at heart, but both of them draw too simple a conclusion. If Job would repent, they say, God would restore his health and his fortunes.

JOB'S REPLY (9:1—10:22)

Job did not reply directly to Bildad; instead, he continued his complaint against God. He agreed that God is just, but insisted that it is impossible to argue with him. In any dispute, God always has the advantage. If even the smallest sin is serious in God's eyes, then how can anyone ever be just? (9:1-2)

Job continues to claim that he is innocent of anything that would require such punishment, but he realizes that would not make him innocent in the eyes of God, who can destroy both the blameless and the wicked (9:20-23). What he saw as unfortunate was the lack of an objective umpire (9:33) who might mediate between him and God. He therefore appealed to God on the basis that the artist ought not to destroy his handiwork (10:3, 8-9).

Because of his suffering Job again complained that God even allowed him to live (10:18-19). What possible sense could it make to suffer from the womb to the grave? Even though Job desired death because of his suffering, he still lamented the inevitability of death, crying out for a little relief (10:20-22).

ZOPHAR'S FIRST SPEECH (11:1-20)

Zophar got directly to his point. Not only is God's justice at work, Job got less than he deserved (11:6). The thing for Job to do is to admit it and set his wickedness aside (11:13-14).

There is a clear logical outline in Zophar's speech. First, he condemns Job (11:1-6), then he lifts up the knowledge and justice of God (11:7-12), and finally he offers a conditional solution to his plight (11:13-20). If Job would repent, God would restore everything, and his life would be brighter than the noonday and its darkness would be like the morning (11:17).

There is, however, an inconsistency in Zophar's thought. First, he insisted that neither Job nor anyone else could understand the ways of God (11:4-12); and then he presumed to make his own rigid mathematical calculations about how God dispenses his justice on human beings (11:13-20). In the end Job had a more profound and adequate view of how God deals with people than did his three friends.

JOB'S REPLY (12:1—14:22)

Job challenged his friends' wisdom. There was nothing new in it. It was all part of the tradition he grew up with and even nature testifies to that (12:1-3 and 7-9). Job understood it, but he found no help in it (13:1-2). He wished his friends would keep silent. As for himself, he preferred to argue his case with God (13:3-5). (See also 13:15 and 22) God should just show him what sins he has committed to deserve his suffering.

Chapter 14 fluctuates between despair and hope. Human beings are not as fortunate as trees. Trees are able to put forth branches like a young plant, but human beings breathe their last and are no more (14:1-2 and 7-10). "If mortals die," asks Job, "will they live again?" (14:14) In spite of his hope for reconciliation with God, he sees nothing that supports such hope.

CONCLUSION

The real question in the conversations between Job and his friends is this: "What should one say to one who is suffering?" All three of Job's friends decide that their responsibility is to defend God. Eliphaz does so by appealing to revelation, Bildad by appealing to tradition, and Zophar by appealing to knowledge. The best response is not to defend God at all. Sincere opposition to him is better than misguided support, and this is the contrast that we see between Job and his friends. The best answer to why one suffers might be simply, "I don't know." Job does the right thing by carrying his argument to God, for in him alone lies the answer or resolution to the question.

WHAT SHOULD I SAY?

We often wonder what we should say to a friend who is either suffering or dying. This question is only asked by those bold enough to visit someone in such a predicament. There are many others who stay away from such difficult circumstances, and do not even bother to ask the question. The question still confronts them and us in other ways. Illness and death are not the only circumstances that make us speechless. What do we say to people who have lost everything in a tornado, earthquake, or other act of nature? If we ourselves are caught in such a predicament, we cannot avoid the question. Sometimes we are even asked directly, "Why did this happen to me?" In such circumstances, what are we to say?

We know why Job suffered. He was being tested. Would that answer have been acceptable to him? Is it acceptable to us? Why should anyone who has been so faithful to God be tested? Testing should be something reserved for those who are not faithful, and

yet, some of the greatest persons of faith were tested, including Jesus and his temptation in the wilderness, where Satan tested him. Even if it is Satan who has initiated the test, the answer is not easily accepted. Why would God allow such a test? It makes us feel like pawns being moved on a chessboard. We do not know who will ultimately win, God or Satan?

When Job's friends tell him why he is suffering, they do not seem to be aware of Satan's involvement, or the bargain made between him and God. They talk about their understanding of a moral universe in which God rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. Their initial silence was out of respect, but when they speak, they know what to say. Suffering, whether it has a natural source or human source, is the result of sin. The first of Job's friends, Eliphaz, approaches the opportunity with oriental etiquette, but he feels compelled to speak (Job 4:1), as do Job's other friends, Bildad and Zophar. They are not lost for words. Job, who is the one suffering, wishes that they would remain silent (Job 13:5). That would be the greatest wisdom they could offer.

The first two tragedies that I had to face in my life could easily be explained. When I was on the verge of my teenage years, a group of us used to play ice hockey under a street lamp in front of our house in the evenings after supper. One morning, as I was going to school on the bus, we became aware of a terrible fire across a field. Later that day, I discovered that one of the boys who used to play with us was burned to death that morning. They went through the burned out house to find not only his body but also the reason why the house burned down. Although I cannot remember what it was, would it have made any difference? It might help to prevent the next fire, but my friend would remain dead. No one asked me why it happened, but since my father was the fire chief, I was aware of the questions being asked.

Years later I visited a friend in Brooklyn, and I met his parents and sister. I remember the incident well. I was young and single, and his sister was the most beautiful girl I had ever seen. The family was one of the most loving I had ever known, and I thoroughly enjoyed the week I spent with them. They all possessed a deep faith in God. My friend's father was the pastor of a congregation in Brooklyn which served the poor, and my friend was so impressed with his father's example, that he entered Wesley Theological Seminary in Washington D.C. to prepare himself for the ministry. His sister was not only beautiful in appearance, but she also possessed an inner beauty. One night, a few weeks after I had returned home from my visit, she was killed instantly in a head on collision. While I do not know all the details, an answer could be given. All they had to do was to examine the details of the accident, but would any answer relieve the pain of the loss to this family. I think not. My friend was so crushed by the loss of his sister, that he dropped out of school for an entire year, during which time he questioned both his faith and call into the ministry.

The best answer to why these two young people died is to say nothing, at least in regard to why people suffer and die. We can give reasons, but reasons do not relieve the pain. We should not even give reasons when they are known, and particularly if we can name people responsible. This is not to say that the legal system should not punish those

responsible for inflicting suffering and death; only, that dwelling on getting even with those responsible does not bring about healing. When suffering and death are caused by so-called “acts of God,” we do not want to direct that hostility towards God.

What then can be said? In most cases nothing. In every case comfort and hope. One’s presence alone symbolizes this. If Job’s condition did anything, it at least pushed him closer to asking a question that the Old Testament seldom asks: “If mortals die, will they live again?” (Job 14:14) Even though none of us knows the answer to this question with certainty, the resurrection of Jesus Christ gives us good reason for saying, “YES.” We do not know why God allows suffering and death, but we do have hope that RESURRECTION will overcome sin and death. Job’s friends may not have had this insight, but we do.

JOB

3. The Impatience of Job

*O that my words were written down!
O that they were inscribed in a book!
O that with an iron pen and with lead
they were engraved on a rock forever!*

*For I know that my Redeemer lives,
and that at the last he will stand upon the earth,
and after my skin has been thus destroyed,
then in my flesh, I shall see God,
whom I shall see on my side....*

Job 19:23-27

Job 15:1 —27:23

3. THE IMPATIENCE OF JOB (15:1—27:23)

<p style="text-align: center;">ELIPHAZ'S SECOND SPEECH (15:1-35)</p> <p>APPROACH: (15:2-9)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Direct</i></p> <p>SOURCE: (15:10-13)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Tradition and Experience</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">ADVICE</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>General Warning</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">BILDAD'S SECOND SPEECH (18:1-21)</p> <p>APPROACH: (18:2-4)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Impatient</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">SOURCE</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>No Reference</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">ADVICE</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>General Warning</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ZOPHAR'S SECOND SPEECH (20:1-29)</p> <p>APPROACH: (20:2-3)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Troubled</i></p> <p>SOURCE: (20:4-5)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Tradition</i></p> <p>ACCUSATION: (20:19)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Oppression of the Poor</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">JOB'S REPLY (16:1—17:16)</p> <p>FEELINGS: (16:2, 7, 12)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Weary of Friends and God</i></p> <p>RESPONSE: (16:15-17, 18-21)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Tears and Prayer</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">JOB'S REPLY (19:1-29)</p> <p>FEELINGS: (19:14-19)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Forsaken by Everyone</i></p> <p>RESPONSE: (19:23-27)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Written Record Living Redeemer</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">JOB'S REPLY (21:1-34)</p> <p>FEELINGS: (21:7, 13, 19)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Life is Unfair</i></p> <p>RESPONSE: (21:34)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Stop Lying</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">ELIPHAZ'S THIRD SPEECH (22:1-30)</p> <p>SIN: (22:5-11)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Oppression</i></p> <p>ADVICE: (22:21)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Submit and regain Prosperity</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">BILDAD'S THIRD SPEECH (25:1-6 & 26:5-14)</p> <p>SIN: (25:4)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>No-one is Righteous</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">ADVICE</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>None</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">ZOPHAR'S THIRD SPEECH (27:7-23) Possibly (24:18-25)</p> <p>SIN: (27:11 & 13-15)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>The Wicked Suffer</i></p> <p style="text-align: center;">ADVICE</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>None</i></p>
<p style="text-align: center;">JOB'S RESPONSE (23:1—24:25)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Desires to Confront God (23:3-6 & 8-9)</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">JOB'S RESPONSE (26:1-4 & 27:1-6)</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>Maintains Righteousness (27:3-6)</i></p>	<p style="text-align: center;">JOB'S RESPONSE</p> <p style="text-align: center;"><i>None</i></p>

3. THE IMPATIENCE OF JOB

Job 15:1—27:23

ASSIGNMENTS				
Eliphaz and Job 15:1—17:16	Bildad and Job 18:1—19:29	Zophar and Job 20:1—21:34	Eliphaz and Job 22:1—24:25	Bildad, Zophar and Job 25:1—27:23

ELIPHAZ'S SECOND SPEECH (15:1-35)

In the second cycle of speeches, Eliphaz dispensed with oriental etiquette and challenged Job directly. He accused him of contradicting traditional wisdom and the very justice of God (15:2-6). Eliphaz insisted that the justice of God is accomplished and that the wicked eventually are judged.

Eliphaz seems to indicate that the wicked even feel the pain of their conscience for having done wrong. This is too simple an answer. We have seen the wicked suffer no pangs of conscience whatsoever in our century. People have an amazing way of justifying their actions, and they do not always suffer in this world.

JOB'S REPLY (16:1—17:16)

Job's friend moves him to outrage (16:2-4). At the same time he began to see God as a demonic beast, which did him in (16:7-9), and set him up for target practice (16:11-12). He became estranged from the God he once knew as a friend, and yet he cried out to him. He felt staggered by the contradiction between his suffering and his innocence (16:16-17) and hoped that his blood would cry out (16:18), as did the blood of Abel (Genesis 4:10). In ancient times blood that soaked into the ground became silent; whereas, blood that lay on a rocky place cried out perpetually for vengeance. Job still wanted to believe that he had a witness in heaven (16:19-20), but it was difficult in light of the certainty of death (16:22).

Although Job hoped for a heavenly redeemer beyond Sheol, he was not too optimistic. Chapter 17 expresses his despair. Without any future, he has only a meaningless present (17:11-16). In the first cycle of speeches, Eliphaz had been the most sympathetic; but the whole mood has changed. Eliphaz no longer expresses compassion, and Job's response gravitates between anger towards Eliphaz and anger towards God.

BILDAD'S SECOND SPEECH (18:1-21)

Bildad was angered by Job's refusal to listen to him; therefore, he asked him how long he would continue his presumption of innocence (18:2). Job, according to Bildad, should not expect God to change the moral laws of the entire universe just to suit him (18:4). God punishes sinners (18:5) and that is, as it should be, his way.

JOB'S REPLY (19:1-29)

In Job's reply he expressed feelings of isolation. Everyone has deserted him, his closest relatives, and even his wife (19:14-19). In the midst of his isolation he cried out for his innocence to be written in stone forever and for his Vindicator (Redeemer) to appear to bear testimony to it.

Vindicator (Redeemer) is not a reference to Christ, or a testimony to his belief in eternal life; rather, it is related to the role of one's kinsfolk who are bound to insure justice for him because of their blood relationship to him. In the end God will have to take note of his Vindicator's witness and Job's innocence. In this way Job insists on his innocence and the strength of his case. It is God who finally will have to admit it and eventually support him.

There is a great deal of confusion over Job's calling out to his Redeemer. Is he calling out to a human being or to some kind of divine being? If the latter is true, is this divine being some form of angel or God himself? He has called out for an intercessor before. In Job 9:33 he called out for an umpire, and in Job 16:19 he called out for someone to be his witness. Although many Christians have understood Job 19:25 as an affirmation of faith in eternal life, it is more likely to be another appeal for someone to side with Job in his difficulty with God, for he seems to have lost faith in the justice of God (19:7). If only someone would intercede for him, then reconciliation with God might be possible.

ZOPHAR'S SECOND SPEECH (20:1-29)

Zophar accused Job of not listening to traditional wisdom (20:4-5), and then assured him that, though the wicked prosper, their time is coming (20:6-7). Wickedness does not fulfill one's life, and what was once sweet will eventually turn bitter (20:12-14). The wickedness that might have gotten Job in trouble, suggests Zophar indirectly, is social in nature. Maybe he did not do anything against God, but perhaps he oppressed the poor (20:19).

After Zophar finished this speech he was not heard from again. Either his third speech was lost or else it is found in Job 27:7-23. This passage is identified as part of Job's reply, but it sounds strange coming from Job. Could it be Zophar's third speech.?

JOB'S REPLY (21:1-34)

Job disagreed with his friends' theology. It is all very well to say that the wicked will finally be judged, he says, but he does not see it happening that way in this life (21:7-9). Besides, when they die, they get a good funeral (21:13).

To say, as Job's friends imply, that God's judgment will finally catch up with their children is not fair. They should be judged themselves, not their children (21:19).

All Job can see is that the wicked prosper and the good do not; and when death overtakes them, they are both dead (21:23-26). The whole thing is irrational and demonstrates to Job that his friends are only talking about God, as they would like him to be. They ought to observe him as he really is. Job too, would like to see the wicked punished immediately, but that is not what his observation of life has taught him. All that he can conclude is that his friends are lying to him (21:34), even if it is unintentional and they are not consciously aware of it.

ELIPHAZ'S THIRD SPEECH (22:1-30)

In Eliphaz's last speech he named Job's sins for him (22:5-9). They are the sins of oppression against the poor. Although Eliphaz did not have the insight of Christ, he did draw a similar conclusion to that of the early Christian preacher, Chrysostom, who said: "To grow rich without injustice is impossible." Eliphaz simply drew the conclusion that Job's former wealth made him an oppressor of the poor.

Job is then asked why he continues to think that God could be indifferent to what he has done. All of traditional wisdom has claimed that the righteous will be rewarded, and the wicked punished (22:13-15). Why should Job's case be an exception? The thing for Job to do is to repent and rely on God to deliver him (22:21, 27, 29-30).

JOB'S REPLY (23:1—24:25)

Job wished that he could find God, but no matter where he looks, he cannot (23:3-10). If God could be found, with or without a mediator, he would understand and acquit Job. In response to his friends, Job pointed out that the cries of the oppressed do not seem to be heard (24:12), and the wicked seem to get away with their evil deeds (24:14-17). Job sinks into deep depression, but he does not lose hope (23:17). Part of his pain lies in the fact that God does not seem to care. If only he would express his love in some concrete way, then Job's suffering would not hurt so much.

Some commentators say that Job 24:18-25 belongs to the third speech of Zophar and belongs with Job 27:7-23. In this section the writer seems to say that although God's justice might be delayed, it never fails. The word "saying" is inserted in Job 24:18 in order to indicate that these lines are a quotation from Job's friend, although it might well be that Job is saying them within the context of his speech.

BILDAD'S THIRD SPEECH (25:1-6)

The text now becomes very confused. In chapter 25 Bildad said nothing new. He merely repeated what was said in previous chapters; mainly that no one is one hundred percent perfect in God's sight. This did not help Job, who simply could not understand why he had to suffer while other people, who were more wicked, escaped it. This kind of treatment on the part of God destroys people's motivation for being good.

JOB'S REPLY (26:1-4)

Some commentators believe that only verse one represents Job and that all of chapter 26 belongs to Bildad. If these few verses do belong to Job, he seems to be accusing his friends of having fellowship with evil spirits (26:4).

BILDAD'S THIRD SPEECH (CONTINUED) (26:5-14)

Bildad interrupted Job, accusing him of trying to hide himself in the underworld (14:13), where Job thought he might be free of God; but says Bildad, God's power reaches even to Sheol and Abaddon (26:6). Abaddon is another name for Sheol and means "place of destruction." (See Proverbs 15:11. Other relevant verses might be Psalm 88:11 and Revelation 9:11.) God is so powerful that he can even destroy the Dragon of the Sea (Rahab) (26:12).¹ We have not even begun to comprehend that power (26:14). Certainly we cannot escape from it if we have done wrong. Bildad believed that no one could claim complete innocence.

JOB'S FINAL REPLY (27:1-6)

Job continued to maintain his innocence no matter what his friends said. Nothing could make him put away his integrity. He would hold on to his righteousness until death (27:3-6).

ZOPHAR'S THIRD SPEECH (27:7-23)

These verses are not attributed to Zophar, but scholars think that these verses, along with 24:18-25, make up Zophar's third speech. Perhaps the words are intentionally placed on Job's lips. The content of this speech is another description of traditional wisdom, which says that the wicked along with their children will suffer. All the trophies amassed by the wicked will be taken away from them in the end (27:11-19).

¹Rahab is the name of a mythological dragon which had been conquered by Yahweh.

HOPING AGAINST HOPE

The most painful part of poverty is to see children suffer, and when someone else tells you that you are to blame, it is like being stabbed with a knife, which is then twisted. The only thing that could be worse is for those children to be your own.

Job's friends were finally specific about his sin. Zophar pointed this out to him in 20:19 and Eliphaz in 22:4-11. Job's unwillingness to give adequate help to the poor is given as his reason for suffering. It is also given as the reason why his children were taken from him. That children should be punished for the sins of their parents is beyond comprehension to Job, and probably to most of us.

Just prior to and immediately after these accusations, Job cries out in deep despair, hoping against hope for either a mediator or a direct confrontation with God himself. We have usually interpreted his first cry as a profession of faith, but it is a cry of hope against hope. It is found in Job 19:23-27:

O that my words were written down! O that they were inscribed in a book! O that with an iron pen and with lead they were engraved on a rock forever! For I know that my Redeemer lives, and that at the last he will stand upon the earth; and after my skin has been thus destroyed, then in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see on my side, and my eyes shall behold, and not another.

This is a cry of hope against hope because Job has no reason at all for believing that he will ever get such an opportunity or that anyone will take up his case. All his friends have sided with traditional theology, which places God against Job. In spite of all that Job hears to the contrary, he still hopes that God will be different than his friends describe him. Out of this despair, hoping against hope, Job cries in 23:3-7:

Oh, that I knew where I might find him, that I might come even to his dwelling! I would lay my case before him, and fill my mouth with arguments. I would learn what he would answer me, and understand what he would say to me. Would he contend with me in the greatness of his power? No; but he would give heed to me. There an upright person could reason with him, and I should be acquitted forever by my judge.

Job cannot see the possibility of ever getting the personal opportunity to confront God. The best he can hope for is for someone to do it for him long after he has died. He would like for that to happen and so he expresses this in hope against hope.

Hoping against hope means moving ahead even when it seems as if everyone else is against you, including God. One can only do this when one is trying to live honestly and truthfully. It cannot be done by listening to what everyone else is saying, or by accepting the traditions and teachings of the past without testing them in the present. Scientific truth is not achieved by accepting the passed uncritically. Everything had to be tested. The same is true for religious truth, and Job is testing everything his friends have passed on to

him in way of explanation for his suffering. Without suffering, he might never have tested traditional wisdom and he might have continued to teach what his friends were teaching, that God blesses the righteous in a material manner and makes the wicked suffer. Knowing that he had always tried to be righteous, Job is not willing to accept traditional wisdom, and so he hopes for vindication, refusing to accept anything that does not make sense to his personal experience. That this puts him in conflict with God makes it seem as if he is hoping against hope. Little does he realize at this time that this will actually bring him face-to-face with God.

The practical value of Job's hoping against hope demonstrates the truth of what Jürgen Moltmann said about the Bible: "...every page and every word is concerned with the burning question, 'What may I hope?'"² While hoping does not make what we hope for come true, it does force us to look beyond what has been handed to us. We should never be satisfied until our experience is consistent with our understanding, and this pushes us ever onward. Underlying this simple truth is that which connects religion and science, which is the search for truth, wherever it leads. Faith does not require that we accept answers that are inconsistent with experience and reason. Job will not give up until he can understand, and neither should we. That is precisely what it means to hope against hope. In the end, that hope will be transformed into faith.

²Jürgen Moltmann, *The Gospel of Liberation*, (Waco: Word Books, 1973), p. 30.

JOB

4. The New Wisdom

*I know that you can do all things,
and that no purpose of yours can be thwarted.
“Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge?”
Therefore I have uttered what I did not understand,
things too wonderful for me, which I did not know.*

*“Hear, and I will speak;
I will question you declare to me.”
I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear,
but now my eye sees you;
therefore I despise myself,
and repent in dust and ashes.*

Job 42:2-6

Job 28:1—42:6

4. THE NEW WISDOM (28:1—42:6)				
IN PRAISE OF WISDOM (28:1-28)				
Where can wisdom be found? (28:12)		Wisdom is only in God! (28:23-24)		Fear God and shun Evil! (28:28)
JOB'S FINAL DEFENSE (29:1—31:40)				
Job recalls Happier Days (29:2-3)		Job laments his Present Misery		Job makes his Final Challenge (31:35-37)
ELIHU'S YOUTHFUL WISDOM (32:1—37:24)				
Revelation gives him the right to speak (32:6-9)				
FIRST POEM (33:1-33)	SECOND POEM (34:1-37)	THIRD POEM (35:1-16)	FOURTH POEM (36:1-23)	FIFTH POEM (36:24—37:24)
Job has sinned! (33:8-9)	Job scorns God! (34:7-9)	Sin accuses Job (35:6-8)	Elihu defends God (36:3-4)	God speaks through the Natural World (36:27-33)
God speaks through <i>Dreams</i> (33:14-15) and <i>Suffering</i> (33:19)	God is Just (34:12)	Job lacks Understanding (35:16)	God teaches Sinners	Revere Him! (37:24)
God corrects Sinners (33:29-30)	Job is guilty of... <i>Ignorance</i> and <i>Rebellion</i>			
Moral Discipline aims at CORRECTION , not at PUNISHMENT.				
FIRST SPEECH FROM THE WHIRLWIND (38:1—40:2)		SECOND SPEECH FROM THE WHIRLWIND (40:6—41:34)		
God asks the Questions: Inanimate Nature (38:4-7ff) Animate Nature (38:39-41ff)		God continues the questioning on Chaos (40:7-8) Behemoth (Land) (40:15 & 24)		
JOB'S FIRST RESPONSE (40:3-5)		JOB'S SECOND RESPONSE (42:1-6)		
Admission of Unworthiness (40:4-5)		Submission and Repentance (42:3 & 5-6)		

4. THE NEW WISDOM

Job 28:1—42:6)

ASSIGNMENTS				
The Hymn to Wisdom 28:1-28	Job's Final Defense 29:1—31:30	Elihu's Poems (1-2) 32:1—34:37	Elihu's Poems (3-5) 35:1—37:24	The Wisdom of God 38:1—42:6

THE HYMN TO WISDOM (28:1-28)

Who made this speech? It is difficult to say. It may have been the writer of the Book of Job. The author does not seem to be one of Job's friends, nor does it seem to be Job's reply to Zophar's third speech. This hymn to wisdom has been compared to the eighth chapter of Proverbs and called the most magnificent poetical piece in the whole range of wisdom literature.

Wisdom lies beyond human discovery and comprehension (28:12-13). It cannot be discovered as one discovers gold or silver or some other mineral. Only God can grasp its mysteries. We should be grateful for the revelation of divine wisdom. It comes as a gift from God. It is identified in Job 28:28 with human piety (fear of the Lord) and human morality (departure from evil). Following the Babylonian Exile, Job 28:28 became the orthodox wisdom of Jewish sages.

THE FINAL DEFENSE FROM JOB (29:1—31:40)

The Remembrance of Happier Days (29:1-25)

In these verses Job looks back at happier times when he enjoyed the fruits of a righteous life (29:2-6). Some of those fruits are prosperity, children, respect, and good health.

"In the months of old" is a phrase, which means "in earlier times." This reference does not refer to his "old age." The traditional picture of Job as an old man has no support in scripture. In his reminiscence Job would like to think that he could have lived out his days under the blessings of God rather than in pain and suffering. Such would have made moral sense (29:14-20).

The Reality of Present Misery (30:1-31)

Chapter 30 deals with the hard reality of Job's present condition, which consists of social alienation, physical agony, and spiritual despair. In his suffering he cried out to God, but God seems to turn a deaf ear and the suffering continues (30:20-22). He confidently insists that he does not deserve his present suffering, for he was concerned about and gave aid to the poor and the oppressed. His reward seems to be misery (30:24-26).

The Final Challenge to God (31:1-40)

This is Job's final challenge to God. He reviewed all his past behavior to convince everyone, including God, that he was innocent of any immorality, oppression, idolatry, or any other secret sins. All his life he has tried to help people and was generous in relieving human need. No Lazarus was ever allowed to lie at his gate unnoticed and without help (Luke 16:20).

His intense desire was to see God and obtain an answer to his plight. He did not want to approach God like a worm, but like a Prince, whose self-confidence remained unshaken. His final challenge to God leads quite naturally into God's reply; but first, there is Elihu's long-winded response.

ELIHU'S YOUTHFUL WISDOM (32:1—37:24)

Most scholars suggest that a new author has added Elihu's speeches. This author tries to build a bridge between Job's final challenge and God's final response. Elihu is mentioned neither in the Prologue nor in the Epilogue. This whole section contains style and linguistic differences from all the other materials in the Book of Job.

The speeches of Elihu prepare us dramatically, psychologically, and theologically for the final response and intervention by the Lord. The youthful wisdom of Elihu is that Job's suffering is a moral discipline from God. Rather than punishment for sin it has to do with correction and God's attempt to reconcile Job to himself.

Elihu's Right to Speak (32:1-22)

Elihu is described as a Buzite, which suggests that he was an Aramean living in the city of Buz not far from Edom. His name means: "My God is He." After Job and his friends stopped speaking, Elihu felt compelled to speak. He waited because of his youthfulness. Now he became angry with Job's friends for failing to get to the heart of the matter and with Job for not recognizing what God was trying to teach him. Wisdom could not be related with age (32:9), and so Elihu believed that he had something new to offer. His intent was not just to share human wisdom and tradition, but also "revealed knowledge" from God (32:8).

Elihu's First Poem (33:1-33)

This poem has to do with how God communicates with us and tries to correct and restore us to himself. Elihu accused Job of declaring himself an innocent victim of God (33:9-12), who would not even answer his complaint (33:13).

Elihu reminded Job that God has indeed spoken to him. God speaks in two ways: (1) through dreams and visions (33:15-18), and (2) through pain and suffering (33:19-22). He speaks in these ways not to destroy Job, but to correct him and reconcile him to himself (33:29-30). Herein lies the difference between the answer given by Job's three friends and the answer given by Elihu. Job's friends see God punishing Job, but Elihu sees God loving Job. The insight is significant enough to compel Elihu to speak in the company of older and supposedly wiser men.

Elihu's Second Poem (34:1-37)

In the second poem Elihu addressed Job's three friends, whom he thinks have not understood the way in which God's justice operates. He accused Job of blaming God for being unjust and in the wrong (34:5-9). It is God alone, insisted Elihu, who is absolutely just (34:10-12). He shows no partiality (34:19), and he destroys the wicked and hears the cries of the afflicted (34:24-28). According to Elihu it is Job who has added to his other sins that of rebellion and theological arrogance (34:36-37).

Elihu's Third Poem (35:1-16)

Elihu saw God high above human beings. He cannot be affected nor coerced by the wicked or the righteous. People who cry out to him are more concerned about their own needs than they are about God (35:9-12). This is why he does not answer them. If one cries (35:13) out to God for help and no answer is received, this is not so much a slur against God's justice as it is a sign that the victim lacks genuine religious feeling and understanding (35:16).

Elihu's Fourth Poem (36:1-23)

Elihu saw himself as the perfect defender of God's righteousness and justice (36:2-4). He claimed that God blessed the righteous and brought down the arrogant (36:5-12). According to Elihu God is a teacher who uses suffering to open his people's ears to listen and learn wherein they have gone wrong. Job should learn his lesson and stop accusing God of injustice (36:22-23).

Elihu's Fifth Poem (36:24—37:24)

Elihu summoned Job to turn and magnify the God whose works are beyond description and understanding. God commands the thunder and lightning, rain and snow. He spreads out the clouds and the shining skies. The lightning brings God's judgment. The clouds

reveal flashes of his anger or dispense showers of his blessings (37:11-13). Human beings are nothing before God’s awesome splendor and holiness. They are too far from God. He pays no attention to conceited people like Job, who have grown too big for their own britches (37:24).

The question raised in these last two speeches is this: “Does God teach through human suffering and the natural world?” If we give an unqualified “Yes” to this question, then we are agreeing with Elihu that he inflicts pain on us and causes the earthquake in order to teach us the consequences of our sins. The disturbing part of such an affirmation is that those who prosper and are not plagued with natural disaster are thereby considered to be righteous. We know that this is not true. There is some implication in these chapters that the righteous might be oppressed, but that God, in his time, will deliver them. This is something we would like to believe, but we know that the deliverance may not come in our own lifetime. That does not seem fair to us, unless of course, there is life beyond the grave, which includes punishment and reward. This is the Christian affirmation, along with the belief that in this world the rain falls upon the wicked and the righteous alike, just as the sun shines upon the wicked and the righteous.

THE WISDOM OF GOD (38:1—42:6)

The First Speech from the Whirlwind (38:1—40:2)

Finally God broke his silence and spoke to Job out of the whirlwind. The whirlwind was a frequent setting for divine appearances. (See 1 Kings 19:11; Psalms 18:7-15; 50:3; Ezekiel 1:4; Nahum 1:3; Habakkuk 3:14; and Zechariah 9:14.) Job had wanted to approach God as a prince (31:37), but God scaled him down in this speech, trying to instill in him a sense of awe and reverence. In commenting on this passage, John Wesley said that God’s words were spoken “that all of them [the friends and Job] might be more deeply humbled.”¹

The whirlwind increased the distance between Job and God. It was now unbridgeable because God put Job on the defensive. Job asked the questions before but now God was asking them. He proceeded to ask Job where he was when the world was created, when light was separated from darkness, when wind and rain were created, and when the constellations were placed in their courses.

What does Job know about the creatures of the wild, such as: the lion, raven, goat, ass, ox, ostrich, horse, hawk, and eagle? Does he have the wisdom to create all these things? If not, then he better temper his criticism of what God has made and how he keeps everything going.

In all of God’s questioning he never condemned Job for any moral faults, but he implies that Job is guilty of arrogance. If Job could not answer God’s questions, how could he

¹ John Wesley, *Notes on the Entire Bible*, Notes, Job 38:1.

possibly understand the answers God might give to him? The point being made is that the universe is larger and more wonderful than Job and his friends imagined.

God speaking out of the whirlwind is not something Job expected, and it runs contrary to everything his friends taught. According to their teachings God would only speak to the righteous, and they did not believe Job to be righteous. His condition proved that. All of Job's friends gave philosophical answers to his suffering. Job wanted a confrontation with God, not philosophical explanations. God is a person, not an idea. Finally, Job got what he wanted, but not what he expected. He wanted to do the questioning, but God would not allow that. As God speaks he asks all the questions, for he is trying to replace the arrogance in Job with humility.

Job's First Reply to God (40:3-5)

Job was humbled. He refused to challenge and continue to argue against God. He could not answer God's questions; all he could do was to be silent and listen.

The Second Speech from the Whirlwind (40:6—41:34)

The central problem for Job is this: Self-righteousness leads one to condemn God (40:8). In response God humbles Job by describing two mythological creatures, which are but playthings to God. They are Behemoth (hippopotamus), and Leviathan/Rahab (crocodile). Behemoth is not merely any hippopotamus, nor is Leviathan an ordinary crocodile. One is the monster of the land and the other the monster of the sea. They are associated with chaos, which Job is unable to control, much less understand (Psalm 104:26).

In these chapters the greatness of God as creator is lifted up, as is true of most of the wisdom literature. The way in which this applies to Job's problem, however, has to do with chapter 40:10-14, where the implication is: "If you are so smart, you take control and we will see if you can do any better." The answer of course would be that Job could not.

Job's Second Reply to God (42:1-6)

These verses make up the high point of the whole book. Job finally acknowledges his finiteness. He recognizes that there is more to wisdom than his understanding of it. Having contemplated the activity of God, he now perceives that God must have a purpose in what he does, but God does not exist to justify himself to Job.

The problem of suffering was not solved for Job, at least not in a philosophical or moralistic sense. It was however solved theologically. He could not understand the reason for suffering with his finite mind, but he was enabled to feel the presence of God in his heart. God filled his suffering with his presence and that was the beginning of wisdom. Following that experience, Job was compensated.

THE FIRST DIMENSION OF WISDOM

"Truly, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom;" says some unknown poet in Job 28:28, "and to depart from evil is understanding." When one fears the Lord it is quite natural to depart from evil. One can fear evil however without fearing God. That was the problem for Job's friends, and it is our problem as well. We are too quick to explain why the wicked suffer and why we think the righteous ought to prosper. One can appear to be righteous without fearing God. The first dimension of wisdom is to fear or have reverence for God.

At the beginning of the Book, Job is described as one who "feared God and turned away from evil." (Job 1:1) His friends suspected that because he had lost everything but his health, that he had not properly turned away from evil. All their wisdom focused on its second dimension, not on its first—that of fearing God. Job did not appear to fear God. In fact he wanted to meet him face to face to discuss openly his plight, even if it meant doing so through an intercessor, one who could speak on his behalf.

When Job responds to his friends' traditional wisdom, he refuses to accept their secondary understanding of wisdom, and pushes for a deeper understanding. "The invariable mark of wisdom," said Paul Tillich, "is to see the miraculous in the common." "Most removed from wisdom," he continued, "are not those who are driven by desire for pleasure or power, but those brilliant minds who have never encountered the holy, who are without awe and know nothing sacred, but who are able to conceal their ultimate emptiness by the brilliant performances of their intellect."¹ Even though Job may have approached God in a combative mood, it was because he realized that traditional wisdom was lacking. It had the cart before the horse. It assumed that righteous people prosper and wicked people suffer, and it failed to take into account wisdom's first dimension. Everything is understood in the divine encounter.

When Job finally enters into that encounter, he submits, repents, and cries in Job 42:5-6, "I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes." What happened in that encounter to overwhelm Job? First, he discovered that in the presence of God, who is holy, no one is without sin; and secondly, he who has created the universe knows how to run it. He can be depended upon to exercise both his justice and his love. Job's experience of reality was closer to the truth than his friends' comprehension of wisdom. But even Job had much to learn. Wisdom is never expressed by the arrogant who, think they know it all; but only by the humble who, in their fear of God come to realize that they know very little.

How does one gain the kind of experience described in this final chapter of Job? The experience was not easy for Job, and it is certainly not easy for us; but the message is clear. The best place to look for God is in the common, that is, in the ordinary, where we

¹Paul Tillich, *The Eternal Now* (New York: Charles Scribner's), p. 168.

least expect to experience him. When God finally reveals himself to Job it is out of a whirlwind, that is, a storm. This being an act of nature is in itself something very common. The practical lesson we can learn here is that we stand on holy ground no matter where we are, and that fearing God is something that should be happening all the time in our lives. It is necessary for the rich and the poor alike. It is also necessary for the righteous and the wicked. No wisdom is possible without fearing God and sensing his presence in the common and ordinary events of our daily lives.

When God felt the need to reveal himself to us in some special way, he did so through Jesus Christ. He revealed himself through a person. Not everyone recognized that they were encountering God in Jesus, but some did, even if it was difficult for them. Jesus was too human, and that is what led to his crucifixion. Those who crucified him had no idea that they were dealing with God himself. The same holds for those of us today who use his name in vain. While we ought to fear God, we actually end up blaspheming him. Job has taught us that fearing God does not mean accepting everything that others tell us about him. One can fear God and be angry with him at the same time. There is nothing wrong with demanding that God help us to understand what he is doing in this world. Such a spirit will lead us into the divine encounter. Accepting traditional wisdom about things does not lead us into this experience because it assumes that God works in ways that can be comprehended. In the end, Job discovered that he could not fully comprehend God. That is the first dimension of wisdom.

PSALMS

5. Hymns of Praise I

*When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers,
the moon and the stars that you have established;
what are human beings that you are mindful of them,
mortals that you care for them?
Yet you have made them a little lower than God,
and crowned them with glory and honor..*

Psalm 8:3-5

Psalm 8, 19, 33-34, 100, 104-105, 111

CLASSIFICATION OF THE PSALMS

1. **Hymns.** Hymns include three basic elements: (1) a call to praise, (2) a statement concerning the reason for praise, and (3) a renewed summons to praise.
2. **Songs of Thanksgiving.** These Psalms are extensions of the laments. The period of alienation is still very vivid, but the bitterness has been removed by restoration of communion with God. A fourfold structure can be found: (1) an introduction which blesses God for his saving power, (2) a poetic narrative recalling the distress, but also the deliverance, (3) an acknowledgment of the saving love of God as the source of the Psalmist's restoration and joy, and (4) a conclusion of thanksgiving and praise. These Psalms were used in the Temple ritual just before the thank offering was made. They were public testimonies of the individual or community to the goodness of God, which had touched and transformed both the individual and the nation.
3. **Songs of Trust.** In these songs the assurance of salvation is so strong that suffering and despair are brushed into the background and almost out of the picture. The mood is halfway between lamentation and thanksgiving. Individuals, for the most part, sang these psalms. As a group they illustrate how humanity anchors its hope in the divine.
4. **Hymns of Zion.** The hymns of Zion are hymns that praise the Temple as the "dwelling place" of God on earth. It is recognized that the Temple cannot contain God, but it is seen as the point of contact with God for humanity.
5. **Pilgrim Psalms.** Some of these psalms also appear in other categories, but two of them are so distinctive that they must be placed in a category of their own. Psalm 84 illustrates the delight of the pilgrims as they arrive in Jerusalem, and Psalm 122 describes the song of departing pilgrims, radiant with love for Zion, God's earthly dwelling place.
6. **Enthronement Psalms.** The cultic setting for many hymns is the New Year festival in which the sovereignty of God is proclaimed. Since the King is seen as God's representative on earth, these psalms are related to the Royal Psalms. God, and his representative on earth, will overcome all who oppose his universal rule.
7. **Royal Psalms.** The reigning king was considered the adopted Son of God, that is, God's representative on earth. Through the king the divine blessing was channeled to the nation. What happened to the king happened to all his subjects. His two principal functions were (1) to maintain the covenant law, which was the revelation of God's will and justice, and (2) to defend Israel against her enemies. The monarch's status was conferred on him when the sacred oil of anointing was poured on his head during his coronation. When the king died his successor was not formally crowned until the New Year so that his coronation could be in close conjunction with the enthronement of the Lord.
8. **Liturgies.** The ritual setting for many of these orders of worship is not always precisely defined.
9. **Laments.** The Psalms of Lament make up the largest category. There are both individual and community laments. These laments move from despair to confidence, and there may be several such oscillations within the same Psalm. The purpose of the Psalm is not the disaster itself, but the alienation from God, which it produces. The lament, sung by an individual, was usually related to personal crises, while the community lament had to do with national disaster. The laments usually have four sections: (1) an invocation, even if it is only the divine name, (2) a cry to be heard or for help, (3) a statement concerning the nature or cause of the misfortune, and (4) a prayer for deliverance.
10. **Wisdom Psalms.** The aim of these Psalms is to teach the idea that the faithful obedience to the revealed will of God brings material and spiritual prosperity. Rejection of his will means destruction, even if there seems to be a delay in the carrying out of such punishment. Psalm 73 deals with the prosperity of the wicked on a deeper level than the other Psalms and reminds us of the Book of Job.
11. **Mixed Psalms.** These are all those Psalms that contain two or more literary types loosely joined together.
12. **Unclassified.** They contain a free composition that almost defies classification.

5. HYMNS OF PRAISE I

Psalms 8, 19, 33-34, 100, 104-105, 111

ASSIGNMENTS			
Psalms 8 and 19	Psalms 33-34	Psalms 100 and 111	Psalms 104-105

INTRODUCTION TO PSALMS

Name

“Psalms” comes from the title of the Book in the Septuagint (Greek Version), which is “Psalmoi.” It simply means “songs.” The ancient Jews referred to the book as “Tehillim,” which means “hymns.” The word “Psalter” means “Stringed instrument.”

Author

Since seventy-three of the Psalms bear David’s name, we can assume that some of the Psalms were written by him, but we know that he did not write all of them. Some may have been dedicated to him and others collected by him. We do know that David, who had poetic gifts and musical talent (1 Samuel 16:16-18 and 2 Samuel 1:17-27; 6:5), took the first step toward creating a hymnody for Israel’s worship. This does not mean, however, that Israel was the first to use songs and hymns in worship. Others were already doing this. Some of the Psalms do bear the names of other people, but there are also Psalms, which bear no one’s name. Many were written by one person; others by several persons.

Date

The date of the Psalms seems to range from about 1000 B.C. (David’s time) to the second century before Christ (The Maccabean period). The latter date represents their final collection for use in public and private worship.

Purpose

The Psalms reflect many aspects of the religious experience of Israel. It is a treasury of resources for both public and private worship. They express the whole range of feeling: from dark depression to exuberant joy. They make up the hymnbook for Israel and early Christianity. David seems to have introduced the idea into the worship of Israel when he

placed the Ark inside the Tabernacle (1 Chronicles 16:8ff). When the Temple was built the Psalms were used there. The Psalms were also used in the Synagogue, but only for praying and singing. They were never used for one of the lessons. Jesus was nourished on the Psalms (Matthew 26:30; Mark 15:34; and Luke 23:46). Paul urged the Christians at Colossae to sing Psalms and hymns and spiritual songs with thankfulness” in their hearts to God (Colossians 3:16). Martin Luther called the Psalms “a Bible in Miniature,” but that can only be understood in poetic terms. C.S. Lewis underlined their purpose when he wrote: “The psalms are poems, poems intended to be sung: not doctrinal treatises, nor even sermons.... They must be read as poems if they are to be understood.... Otherwise we shall miss what is in them and think we see what is not.”

The Psalms stirred John Wesley, shaping and ordering his experiences of divine grace. On May 24, 1738, hours before he felt his “heart strangely warmed,” Wesley felt his own heart cry out as he listened to the choir at Saint Paul’s Cathedral sing from Psalm 130, “Out of the deep have I called unto thee, O Lord. Lord, hear my voice....” Later a Psalm confirmed his experience in the face of doubt. Wesley wrote, “I...lifted up my eyes (121:1), and he sent me help from his holy place” (20:2). Prompted by experiences of God’s grace mediated through the Psalms, Wesley called the Psalter “a rich treasury of devotion.” The Psalter ordered a faithful community in Jerusalem; they also ordered the earliest Methodist Societies. The Wesleys learned that singing has a unique power to instruct the community, convey its deepest emotions, and bind it under the Lordship of God.

Outline

While they contain no logical arrangement, they are divided up into five books. This is an imitation of the division of the Pentateuch (five) or Torah (Law). At the end of each book there is a doxology. Psalm 150, the last Psalm, is a doxology to the whole collection. The division of the five books is as follows:

1. Book I (1-41)
2. Book II (42-72)
3. Book III (73-89)
4. Book IV (90-106)
5. Book V (107-150)

The Book of Psalms can also be divided up according to their literary style. We shall study them in this context rather than in their chronological order. The most common types of Psalms are listed below:

1. Hymns
2. Songs of Thanksgiving
 - a. Community Songs
 - b. Individual Songs

3. Songs of Trust
4. Hymns of Zion
5. Pilgrims Psalms
6. Enthronement Psalms
7. Royal Psalms
8. Liturgies
9. Laments
 - a. Community Laments
 - b. Individual Laments
10. Wisdom Psalms
11. Mixed Psalms
12. Unclassified Psalms

Definitions

Selah

This word, which appears in a number of Psalms, is a liturgical direction, which may indicate an instrumental interlude in the singing of the Psalm. It can also be an instruction calling worshipers to lift up their voices or instruments in refrain.

Higgaion

This word, like selah, calls for music. In some cases it calls for the sound of stringed instruments.

Miktam

The meaning of this word is uncertain. In Isaiah 38:9 it is translated as “writing.” Some scholars say that it means “to cover, or to expiate.” This would mean that this is a Song, which covers or expiates sin.

HYMNS OF PRAISE

PRAISE TO THE GLORY OF GOD AND HUMAN DIGNITY (8:1-9)

This familiar HYMN of David’s belongs to the evening service of the Temple, which was sung when the night sky was visible above the open courts. It was sung responsively. The people sang verses 1-2. They describe the glory of God about which the stars in the sky and the children of the earth both sing. Verses 3-8 were sung by a solo voice, and they contemplate the dignity bestowed on humanity to be created in God’s image (Genesis 1:26). “Son of man” (8:4) means “individual man.” Human beings are Godlike in their ability to control the rest of the creative order, but this mastery over the world is not an inherent human possession. The crown of dignity and the mastery over creation are gifts

bestowed on humanity by the Creator of heaven and earth. The people close by singing verse 9 as a refrain. It is an expression that the dignity of humanity not be misunderstood in arrogant terms, but correctly understood as the gracious gift of God.

Compare this Psalm to the hymns, “O How Glorious, Full of Wonder” and “Lord, Our Lord, In All the earth.”

PRAISE TO THE GOD OF NATURE AND LAW (19:1-14)

Two HYMNS are woven together by the Psalmist, named as David. In the first one God is praised for creation and nature (19:1-6). The glory of God is revealed in the heavens, particularly in the might and power of the sun, whose rays and heat penetrate all of humanity. The Psalmist personifies the heavenly bodies, but unlike the pagan poets, he does not give them the status of deity. They are but examples of God’s craftsmanship and witness to his glory.

In the second hymn God is praised for revealing his will through the Law (19:7-14). A later writer was probably dissatisfied with a hymn simply praising God for his activity in nature. He might have perceived it as being almost pagan, and felt like the Psalm needed something on the Law to make it complete. Verse 7 is the heart of this second hymn on the Law and everything following it is a commentary. The Law is described as a living expression of God’s will. To obey it is to have one’s life renewed. The reward is not material prosperity, but the fulfilled life, which the Law promotes and produces.

In verse 14 the Psalmist prays that his hymn may be pleasing to God. This verse is a dedicatory formula of the type given in the presentation of a sacrifice, but instead of offering an animal, the worshiper offers himself.

Compare this Psalm to the hymns, “The Spacious Firmament on High” and “The Heavens declare Thy Glory, Lord.”

PRAISE TO THE CREATOR AND RIGHTEOUS RULER (33:1-22)

This Psalm of Praise is a HYMN sung to God the Creator and Righteous Ruler of Nations. Verses 1-3 are a Call to Worship to join in the hymn with the accompaniment of stringed instruments and festal cries of joy.

It is not human power, calculated in military terms (33:16-17), but humility and reverence (fear) that brings about deliverance (33:18). The fear of the LORD ends all other fears. Israel puts its trust and hope in such a God.

HYMN OF PRAISE (34:1-22)

This is an acrostic¹ HYMN OF PRAISE that may be based on an incident in 1 Samuel 21:10—22:1, although the King's name there is Achish. It begins with an introduction (34:1-3), which is an excellent example of the Old Testament language of praise. The Psalmist has recently experienced the Lord's saving power and so he recommends faith and trust in the Lord to the congregation (34:4-10). The metaphor of "tasting" (verse 8) may have been suggested by the sacrificial meals in the Temple. "The fear of the Lord" means to be humble in the Lord's presence, and although such an attitude does not protect one from the misfortunes of life, such an orientation towards God makes for wellbeing and peace. Outwardly it manifests itself in honesty of speech (34:11-22).

PRAISE TO GOD AS CREATOR AND PROVIDER (100:1-5)

While this HYMN does not refer to God as King, its mood of doxology makes it similar to the preceding Kingdom Psalms (93; 95-99) and it can therefore be taken as a doxology for the whole collection.

The occasion probably was the offering of a Thank Offering at the Temple by a procession of worshipers. As the procession moves towards the Temple, the worshipers are called to experience (to know) God, that He is both their Creator and their Provider (like a shepherd). As the procession comes close to the Temple gates, it exhorts the worshipers to enter into praise. Worship is an occasion for gladness because the nature of God is to perform acts of steadfast love.

Compare the hymns, "The Canticle of Thanksgiving" and "All People That on Earth do dwell" with the 100th Psalm.

PRAISE TO THE GOD OF CREATION (104:1-35)

This HYMN defines creation as bringing order where there was chaos. Several stages are mentioned. (1) Creation of the Heavens (104:1-4); (2) Creation of the Earth (104:5-9); (3) Provision of Water (104:10-13); (4) Provision of Food (104:14-18); (5) Organization of Time (104:19-23); (6) Taming the Sea (104:24-26); (7) God's Control over Life (104:27-30); and (8) a concluding praise (104:31-35).

It's easy to sum up this Psalm. The water, which covered the earth, subsided leaving mountains and valleys. Water was then provided from above (rain) and from below (springs), and food grew for human and animal use. Time was organized according to the moon for the Seasons and the Sun for day and night. In the end, the monster of chaos, Leviathan (usually a crocodile, but here one of the large sea-creatures) is tamed. Such is an occasion for singing a HYMN OF PRAISE to God the Creator, who brings order out of chaos.

¹ In an acrostic poem, there are twenty-two verses. Each verse begins with a new letter of the alphabet. The Hebrew language has twenty-two letters.

Compare the hymns, “O Worship the King” and “Many and Great O God” with this Psalm.

PRAISE TO THE COVENANT GOD OF HISTORY (105:1-45)

This HYMN to the Covenant God was designed for use at one of the major festivals. It is a grateful recollection of the events, which created the nation of Israel. At some point the ritual shout “Hallelujah” was added to the end, which means, “Praise the Lord.” We have the meaning of the word, but not the word itself. The only place where we can find Hallelujah is in Revelation

There are four basic parts to the hymn. (1) An Introduction (105:1-6). In the introduction the congregation is summoned to praise and give thanks to the God who created Israel, who performed so many miracles and brought Israel into existence. (2) The Theme (105:7-11). The theme is that God’s faithfulness insures an everlasting Covenant with Israel. (3) The Story of Israel (105:12-42). Four segments of the story are strung together. They have to do with the Patriarchs (12-15), Joseph (16-22), the Exodus (23-38), and the Wilderness (39-42). Several significant events are missing in the recollection of the acts of God in the life of Israel. Nothing is said about their deliverance at Sea, the revelation of the Law at Sinai, and Israel’s rebellion in the wilderness. No explanation is given for these omissions. (4) A Return to the Theme (105:43-45). In returning to the theme, the Psalmist states that God fulfilled his part by giving Israel the land of Canaan and that Israel must do its part by obeying God’s Laws. The congregation is to respond with one word, “Hallelujah,” which means, “Praise the Lord.” The only place in the Bible where the word “Hallelujah” can be found is in Revelation 13:17; 19:1, 3, and 6.

PRAISE TO THE COVENANT GOD (111:1-10)

The form of this HYMN is identical to that found in Psalm 112. Both consist of twenty-two phrases each beginning with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Such is called an acrostic poem.

The Psalm begins with the ritual cry “Praise the Lord” (Hallelujah). This praise is directed at the God who has made a Covenant with his people. The Psalm concentrates on the events of the Exodus, which brought Israel into existence. These events are summarized as redemption and as the establishment of the Covenant. Contemplating God’s works in these events of the nation, the Psalmist cries out that God’s name is unique and awe- inspiring. The Psalm ends with the basic doctrine of Israel’s wisdom teachers, that wisdom begins with the fear of the LORD.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of these Psalms would go to the top of your list and why?
2. Why should we worship God?
3. Why should we fear God?
4. Name your favorite passage from the Psalms in this chapter!

COMPARE THE PSALMS WITH THE FOLLOWING HYMNS

1. Psalm 19 with Hymn 149, "Let's Sing unto the Lord"
2. Psalm 33:4-11 with Hymn 107, "Righteous and Just is the Word of Our Lord"
3. Psalm 34:8 with Hymn 646, "Canticle of Love"
4. Psalm 100 with Hymn 74, "Canticle of Thanksgiving"
5. Psalm 100 with Hymn 75, "All People That on Earth Do Dwell"
6. Psalm 104 with Hymn 73, "O Worship the King"
7. Psalm 104:24-30 with Hymn 148, "Many and Great, O God"

PSALMS

6. Hymns of Praise II

*Praise him with trumpet sound;
praise him with lute and harp!
Praise him with tambourine and dance
praise him with strings and pipes!
Praise him with clanging cymbals,
praise him with loud clashing cymbals!
Let everything that breathes
praise the Lord!
Praise the Lord!
Psalm 150:3-6*

Psalm 113-115, 117, 145-150

6. HYMNS OF PRAISE II

Psalms 113-115, 117, 145-150

ASSIGNMENTS				
Psalms 113-114	Psalms 115 and 117	Psalms 145-146	Psalms 147-148	Psalms 149-150

HYMN TO THE GOD OF THE POOR (113:1-9)

This HYMN is the first of a series of Hymns used with the Jewish Feasts of Tabernacles (Harvest) and Passover. In Jewish homes Psalms 113-114 are sung before the Passover meal, and Psalms 115-118 are sung after it. (See Matthew 26:30.) This group is referred to as the “Egyptian Hallel.”

Psalm 113 is a congregational hymn in which the Lord is exalted (113:1-4) because he cares for the poor and needy (113:5-9). This was the experience of the Israelites as they came out of Egypt.

HYMN TO THE GOD OF THE NATION (114:1-8)

This was the second HYMN to be sung prior to the Passover Meal. It is also a Hymn sung at the ritual of the Festival of the New Year. The purpose of this hymn is covenant renewal, for it describes some of Israel’s most important events, such as the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 14:21-29), and the crossing of the River Jordan (Joshua 3:14-17). These are the events that shaped Israel into a nation. There is good reason to praise the Lord.

LITURGICAL HYMN OF PRAISE (115:1-18)

This liturgical HYMN may have been sung during the time of an unknown national disaster. It contrasts the Lord’s power with the impotence of the heathen idols or gods. It was also sung antiphonally, as follows:

1. Choir. (115:1-2) The choir begins by praising God alone.
2. Soloist. (115:3-8) The soloist praises God for his omnipotence, and criticizes all the lifeless idols and those who worship them.
3. Choir. (115:9-11) The choir makes a plea to the congregation and the priests to trust in the Lord.

4. Congregation. (115:12-13) The congregation responds with confidence and trust.
5. Priest. (115:14-15) The Priest pronounces the blessing.
6. Hymn of Praise. (115:16-18) The Psalm concludes with a burst of praise.

HYMN OF PRAISE (117:1-2)

This is a brief HYMN used for starting the Temple service. It calls all nations to praise the Lord, whose steadfast love and faithfulness are world wide and eternal.

HYMN OF PRAISE (145:1-21)

This Acrostic HYMN was written for a solo voice. In the Hebrew there is one missing verse, which the New Revised Standard Version of the Bible supplies from the Septuagint (LXX), which is the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The missing letter is “N” (Nun), and can be read in the second half of verse 13.

There are three parts to the Psalm: (1) Praise for the qualities which unite in the name of God (145:1-7). (2) The merciful character of the Covenant God (145:8-13b). This section is reinforced by a quotation from an ancient covenant formula. This formula can be found in Exodus 34:6 and appears again in Psalm 103:8. (3) The consistency of God’s Words and Deeds (145:13b-20). This consistency of Words and Deeds in matters of salvation and judgment is worthy of praise because they are manifestations of God’s justice. Such a God is worthy of being praised by everyone, especially those who come from the covenant community (the Saints), but also the singer himself and every human being (all flesh). (145:21)

HYMN OF PRAISE (146:1-10)

These last HYMNS all begin and end with “Hallelujah” (Praise the Lord). This one is written for a solo voice. The Psalmist begins by praising the Lord with all of his vital powers (his soul) and insists that only the Lord can be trusted (146:1-4). In the second half of the Psalm (146:5- 10), the Psalmist sings about the justice of God, which reaches out to deliver the helpless and destroys the wicked.

This is the Psalm John Wesley sang on the night of his death, and it is also the basis of the hymn, “I’ll Praise My Maker While I’ve Breath.”¹ Having sung the Psalm during the course of the night, Wesley said: “The best of all, God is with us.”

¹ “I’ll Praise My Maker While I’ve Breath,” *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), #60. Compare Psalm 146:2 with the Hymn.

HYMN OF PRAISE (147:1-20)

This HYMN of Praise expresses the paradoxical nature of God's dealing with the world in three brief poems. (1) In the first poem (147:1-6), the God, who counts the stars and calls them by name, has compassion on the outcasts (exiles from Babylon). (2) In the second poem (147:7- 11), the God of unlimited power, expressed in the rain he provides for the grass on the hills, is not impressed by the power he finds in animals and human beings; rather, he delights in those who anchor their hope and their lives in God's steadfast love. (3) In the final poem (147:12-20) we find that the God who rules the universe has taken up residence in Zion, the City of David. His word is all-powerful. It not only expresses itself in the weather, but it also expresses itself in the covenant with Israel. The command that sends forth the snow has also been enshrined in statutes and ordinances (the Law).

H YMN OF PRAISE (148:1-14)

In this HYMN of Praise, the Psalmist calls upon all things in heaven (148:1-6), all things on earth (148:7-10), and all of God's people (148:11-14) to join in the chorus of praise.

HYMN OF PRAISE (149:1-9)

This HYMN is a call to the faithful members of the covenant community to participate in a sacred dance in praise of the Lord, who created Israel through his deliverance of oppressed people from Egypt and his making of a covenant with them at Sinai. The worshipers celebrate the victory in the temple with swords in their hands, and as a part of the ritual, they recline on couches, possibly for a sacred meal. They rejoice in God's victory and look forward to an even greater triumph to come.

The Psalm could belong to any period in Israel's history, but it also looks forward to the final battle at the end of the age. Victory comes not only through holy war, but also with the two-edged sword. In the New Testament, the two-edged sword is a metaphor for the Word of God (Hebrews 4:12 and Revelation 1:16).

HYMN OF PRAISE (150:1-6)

The closing HYMN is a doxology of praise. It was used as an introduction to the covenant renewal ritual when the mighty acts of God, in delivering Israel from bondage in Egypt, would be recited. Such praise is to be offered in every place, both in the sanctuary and in the firmament (150:1-2); it is to be offered with every kind of instrument (150:3-5); and it is to be offered by every living creature (150:6). The whole Psalm makes a fitting conclusion to the Book of Psalms. Charles Wesley answered this call to praise with the hymn, "Praise the Lord Who Reigns Above:"¹

¹ "Praise the Lord Who Reigns Above," *The United Methodist Hymnal* (Nashville: The United Methodist Publishing House, 1989), #96.

Praise the Lord who reigns above
And keeps his court below;
Praise the holy God of love
And all his greatness show;
Praise him for his noble deeds,
Praise him for his matchless power;
Him from whom all good proceeds
Let earth and heaven adore.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which one of these Psalms would go to the top of your list and why?
2. Who should praise God?
3. How should God be praised?
4. Name your favorite passage from the Psalms in this chapter!

COMPARE THE PSALMS WITH THE FOLLOWING HYMNS

1. Psalm 113:2-3 with Hymn 690, "The Day Thou Gavest, Lord, Is Ended"
2. Psalm 117 with Hymn 101, "From All That Dwell Below the Skies"
3. Psalm 146 with Hymn 60, "I'll Praise My Maker While I've Breath"
4. Psalm 147 with Hymn 160-161, "Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart"
5. Psalm 150 with Hymn 96, "Praise the Lord Who Reigns Above"
6. Psalm 150 with Hymn 139, "Praise to the Lord, the Almighty"

PSALMS

7. Songs of Thanksgiving

*As for mortals, their days are like grass;
they flourish like a flower of the field;
for the wind passes over it, and it is gone,
and its place knows it no more.
But the steadfast love of the LORD
is from everlasting to everlasting
on those who fear him,
and his righteousness to children's children,
to those who keep his covenant
and remember to do his commandments.*

Psalm 103:15-18

Psalm 30, 32, 65-67, 92, 103, 116, 124, 138

7. SONGS OF THANKSGIVING

Psalms 30, 32, 65-67, 92, 103, 116,124, 138

ASSIGNMENTS				
Psalms 65 & 67	Psalms 124 & 30	Psalms 32 & 66	Psalms 92 & 103	Psalms 116 & 138

COMMUNAL SONGS

SONG OF THANKSGIVING (65:1-13)

This community SONG OF THANKSGIVING is the payment of a vow. In a time of drought the congregation promised that if God would send rain they would offer him a sacrifice of praise. Since drought was regarded as a punishment for sin, verses 1-4 praise God for his willingness to hear prayer and forgive sin. In verses 5-8 the Psalmist acknowledges that Israel's God is the hope of the whole earth, for he is its Creator. The Psalm ends in verses 9-13 with gratitude and praise for the coming of the rain.

SONG OF THANKSGIVING (67:1-7)

This community SONG OF THANKSGIVING begins with words similar to Aaron's Benediction (Numbers 6:26), and has two principal themes: (1) Praise to God for his blessings (67:6), and (2) Prayer that all nations should reverence Israel's God (67:7).

The congregation recalls in this song the blessings which were offered, in which Israel sought prosperity as the visible sign to the whole world that the power of God was active in its midst.

THANKSGIVING FOR DELIVERANCE (124:1-8)

A community SONG OF THANKSGIVING is given to the Lord, Creator of heaven and earth, for delivering his people. That God is on the nation's side brings up Holy War imagery. Instead of asking "whose side God is on" we should be asking ourselves whether we are on God's side. The latter question is by far the more important.

INDIVIDUAL SONGS

SONG OF THANKSGIVING (30:1-12)

The occasion for this individual SONG OF THANKSGIVING is the presentation of a thank offering in the Temple. The Psalmist praises God for his recovery from a serious illness. The song was probably sung in fulfillment of a vow he made during his illness (30:1-3). The congregation is invited to join in his thanksgiving. The worshippers are addressed as saints and reminded that the wrath of God is but a secondary and transient aspect of his nature. His true and permanent purpose for humanity is gracious and loving (30:4-5).

The Psalmist reflects on his past suffering and concludes that he had become proud and self-satisfied. Through his illness he learned humility and was strengthened by the Lord's presence. In his suffering he appealed to the Lord on the basis that he could not praise him from the pit (Sheol), and to send him there, would be the Lord's loss. God reversed his condition and he exchanged sackcloth for a festal robe. He is sure that his new state will be permanent (30:6-12).

THANKSGIVING FOR HEALING (32:1-11)

The Psalmist (David) thanks God for healing in this individual SONG OF THANKSGIVING. The Psalm was probably sung in the Temple in connection with the presentation of a guilt offering.

After two beatitudes (32:1-2), the Psalmist tells of his experience of alienation and forgiveness. Three words are used to describe his alienation. They are (1) transgression (rebellion), (2) iniquity (distortion or perversion), and (3) sin (wandering from the road or missing the mark).

While disease was regarded as punishment for sin, healing was considered as evidence that the sin had been forgiven. Healing came only after one had acknowledged his sinfulness, and so the Psalmist, having experienced the healing, commends to the congregation a similar faith in God and obedience to his will.

Psalm 32:11 is similar to Psalm 68:3, which convinced John Wesley that joy should be a part of Christian piety and worship in contrast to something Thomas A Kempis said that "all mirth is vain and useless, if not sinful." According to Wesley, joy results from forgiveness, which he called justification. The immediate results of justification are the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, and a rejoicing in the hope of the glory of God, with joy unspeakable and full of glory.¹ Forgiveness happens when one confesses sin, and the result is forgiveness, which is accompanied with peace and joy.

¹ John Wesley, "The Scripture Way of Salvation," *Sermon* 43.

LITURGY OF PRAISE (66:1-20)

This is an individual SONG OF THANKSGIVING, which accompanies the payment of a vow. The Psalmist calls for the praise of the God who reveals himself in nature and history. The congregation is invited to recall with him the deliverance of God's people from Egypt (66:6), especially the drying up of the sea (Exodus 14:21-29), the river (Joshua 3:14-17), and the defeat of the nations who opposed Israel. God led them into a "spacious place" called Canaan (66:12). While the Psalmist does not claim to be sinless, he does claim that sin has not gained control over him and that the same God delivered him through an act of steadfast love (66:20).

A SONG OF DELIVERANCE (92:1-15)

This is an individual SONG OF THANKSGIVING in which there are four parts. Verses 1-4 represent an introduction in which the Psalmist gives thanks for four characteristics of God: his name, his steadfast love, his faithfulness, and his works. Verses 5-9 declare that the wicked will perish. They may prosper for a time, but their final fate will be eternal destruction. In verses 10-11 the Psalmist gives thanks for the downfall of the wicked, and in verses 12-15 he describes the rewards of the righteous. The rewards can be summed up in prosperity and long life. These things do not represent the achievement of the righteous. They are gifts from God.

THE LOVE AND MERCY OF GOD (103:1-22)

This individual SONG OF THANKSGIVING can be divided into three parts.

1. Personal Thanksgiving (103:1-5). In this first section, the Psalmist expresses thanks for three gifts which he has received from God: forgiveness (103:3), healing (103:3), and long life (103:4-5). The Lord renews his life as that of a young eagle. See also Isaiah 40:31.

2. God's anger and love (103:6-18). Because the nature of God is love, he must also express anger. This is because he loves the oppressed as well and desires to establish justice. Although God may punish, he is slow to anger (103:8), and his anger is only temporary (103:9). It is his steadfast love that is eternal (103:17). God understands human frailty and death, and that is why he pities us and offers forgiveness to all who revere him (103:11-14).

3. Call to Praise (103:22). The Lord rules over all; therefore, all of his creation ought to praise him.

HYMN OF THANKS (116:1-19)

This is an individual SONG OF THANKSGIVING. The hymn opens by thanking God for healing. Apparently the writer was near death when God healed him. Even in his affliction, however, he does not lose faith in God. The whole experience helped him to

realize that to trust in human power is vain. In gratitude to the Lord, the Psalmist pays his vows and makes a thank offering to him.

SONG OF THANKSGIVING (138:1-8)

An individual sings this SONG OF THANKSGIVING. He thanks God for delivering him from trouble. He thanks God with his whole heart before the “gods,” which could be either the “pagan gods” or the “heavenly council.” The Psalmist reflects on his deliverance and sings a hymn about the greatness of the Lord, who lifts up the lowly and brings down the arrogant.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of these Psalms expresses gratitude the best?
2. For what are you most thankful?
3. How should we thank God? How should we thank others?
4. Name your favorite passage from the Psalms in this chapter!

COMPARE THE PSALMS WITH THE FOLLOWING HYMNS

0. Psalm 67:4 with Hymn 73, “O Worship the King”
1. Psalm 116:13 with Hymn,¹ “What Shall I Render to My God”

What shall I render to my God
For all His mercy's store?
I'll take the gifts He hath bestowed,
And humbly ask for more.

The sacred cup of saving grace
I will with thanks receive,
And all His promises embrace,
And to His glory live.

My vows I will to His great Name
Before His people pay,
And all I have, and all I am,
Upon His altar lay.

Thy lawful servant, Lord, I owe
To Thee whate'er is mine,
Born in Thy family below,
And by redemption thine.

Thy hands created me, Thy hands
From sin have set me free,

¹ This Hymn is not in the United Methodist Hymnal.

The mercy that hath loosed my bands
Hath bound me fast to Thee.

The God of all redeeming grace
My God I will proclaim,
Offer the sacrifice of praise,
And call upon His Name.

Praise him, ye saints, the God of love,
Who hath my sins forgiven,
'Til, gathered to the church above,
We sing the songs of heaven.

PSALMS

8. Songs of Trust and Hymns of Zion

*Walk about Zion, go all around it,
count its towers,
consider its ramparts;
go through its citadels,
that you may tell the next generation
that this is God,
our God forever and ever.
He will be our guide forever.*

Psalm 48:12-14

Psalms 11, 16, 23, 62-63, 131, 46, 48, 76, 87

8. SONGS OF TRUST AND HYMNS OF ZION

Psalms 11, 16, 23, 62-63, 131 and 46, 48, 76, 87

ASSIGNMENTS				
Palms 11 & 16	Psalms 23 & 62	Psalms 63 & 131	Psalms 46 & 48	Psalms 76 & 87

SONGS OF TRUST

A DECLARATION OF FAITH (11:1-7)

This declaration of faith is a SONG OF TRUST in which the Psalmist expresses his faith in God's concern for justice. The Psalmist rebukes those who tell him that his only safety lies in flight from his enemies (11:1), and insists that he will stand his ground and rely upon God's power to establish justice (11:6). The righteous will see his face (11:7). In paganism "to behold his face," meant that one entered the inner shrine where the idol stood. In the Old Testament it refers to entrance into the sanctuary, but it has a much wider implication than that. It means "communion" with God.

A SONG OF CONFIDENCE (16:1-11)

Here we have a SONG OF TRUST attributed to David. The Psalmist has probably had a close brush with death and exercises his confidence in God's power to keep him from perishing in Sheol or the pit (the underworld). He has confidence that he will survive his ordeal and, through God's help, he will enjoy life's pleasures again. Persons who set their hearts on God (16:1-6) will find joy and security for the present and need not worry about the future (16:7-11). It is a mistake to find a belief in the resurrection in this Psalm, but Paul did interpret the Psalm's deeper significance in Acts 13:35-37.

The heading of the Psalm uses the word "Miktam" which is a word of uncertain meaning. In Isaiah 38:9 it is translated as "writing." Some scholars say that it means "to cover, or to expiate." This would mean that this is a Song, which covers or expiates sin.

A SONG OF TRUST (23:1-6)

This Psalm of David's is a SONG OF TRUST. It is also a song of gratitude to God for delivering him from his enemies, who may be just outside the Temple. The song is accompanied with a thank offering in the Temple, where the Psalmist would like to spend his remaining days. Some scholars see three images in the Psalm, that of the shepherd

(23:1-3a), the Guide (23:3b-4), and the host (23:5-6). Because *rod* and *staff* can be tied to the shepherd image, it may be best to regard only the double image of shepherd (23:1-4) and host (23:5-6). It is the shepherd who can lead the sheep down the right path, and if it leads through a dark dangerous valley, the sheep fear neither pitfalls nor enemies, for the shepherd is nearby and can protect them. They finally end up in the Temple where a sacrificial meal is shared. To dwell in the house of the Lord means to worship in the Temple forever, meaning as long as the Psalmist lives.

A SONG OF TRUST (62:1-12)

There are elements of a LAMENT and a PSALM OF WISDOM here, but it is essentially a SONG OF TRUST. The Psalmist is a man of authority who thinks that his political opponents are trying to unseat him through slander and lies. In the midst of all this he trusts in the power of God, who exercises such power with love and justice (62:11-12).

A PRAYER FOR DELIVERANCE (63:1-11)

This could be called either a LAMENT or a SONG OF TRUST. The Psalmist delights in God's presence to the extent that he becomes oblivious to his need for personal security. Having tasted the full joy and satisfaction of God's presence, he could not bear to lose it. To experience God's "steadfast love" and to witness it in worship is better than life itself (63:2-3). In verse 4 he describes the traditional position for prayer, which is standing with hands extended and palms upward. Verses 9-10, which are about vengeance, stand in sharp contrast to the rest of the Psalm.

A SONG OF TRUST (131:1-3)

In this simple SONG OF TRUST (LAMENT) the Psalmist places his confidence in the Lord, and in turn calls all of Israel to the same kind of hope.

HYMNS OF ZION

A HYMN OF ZION (46:1-11)

This HYMN OF ZION may have been written following Sennacherib's attack on Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 32), following some natural disaster, or in anticipation of the events heralding the Messiah's coming. The first verse inspired Luther's, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God."

The theme of the Psalm has to do with God's presence with his people (46:1, 4-5, and 11), and his unassailable protection. Through him the ideal and perfect Kingdom is established (46:4-5), and all human efforts against that Kingdom will fail. The establishment of God's Kingdom will finally bring peace on earth. Compare 46:4-5 with Revelation 22:1-5 and 46:9 with Isaiah 2:4.

THE STRENGTH OF ZION (48:1-14)

In this HYMN OF ZION, the God of Jerusalem is praised. This is an outburst of relief and joy as the city stands in the face of an enemy, such as happened during Sennacherib's threat (2 Chronicles 32).

In verse 2 Zion is described as being in the far North. Canaanite mythology placed the home of the gods on a mountain in the far North, which was called Zaphon or North. The Psalmist simply took over the traditional phrase to describe the home of the one true God of all the earth as Mount Zion in Jerusalem. His presence there was enough to assure victory over any threat, whether the enemy came by land or by sea.

The ships of Tarshish were deep-water vessels capable of sailing to Tarshish on the Southwest coast of Spain. Even they did not pose a threat to Jerusalem, where God was present protecting his people.

A HYMN OF ZION (76:1-12)

Though God dwells in heaven his point of contact with the world is Mount Zion in the midst of Salem. This is why we have a HYMN OF ZION, which describes what God does in the world. Salem is a pre-Israelite name for Jerusalem (Genesis 14:18). God's presence makes Zion more majestic than the everlasting mountains. He is a warrior God and his presence causes his enemies to fall unconscious before him. The God who appears on Mount Zion is the heavenly God whose authority embraces the whole earth. His presence means judgment for the wicked and deliverance for the oppressed. God makes even his hostility against the enemy a source for praise. To this kingly and victorious God it is appropriate to pay vows and offer homage.

A HYMN OF ZION (87:1-7)

It can be dated to postexilic times when the Jews were scattered all over the world. The order of the Psalm has been disturbed in the process of translation, and scholars are not in agreement as to how it should be reconstructed. Verse 3 inspired Augustine to write his *City of God*. Under the inspiration of this Psalm, John Newton wrote the hymn, "Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken." Verse 4 of the Psalm mentions some of Israel's enemies. Rahab is a Hebrew name for the dragon monster of chaos, which corresponds to the Babylonian Tiamat. Here it is applied to Egypt. Even Israel's enemies will bow before the Lord at Zion. (See Psalm 86:9.)

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of these Psalms expresses trust the best?
2. Which of these Psalms expresses Zion as the City of God best?
3. Which of these Psalms is your favorite?
4. Name your favorite passage from the Psalms in this lesson!

COMPARE THE PSALMS WITH THE FOLLOWING HYMNS

1. Psalm 23 with Hymn 128, "He Leadeth Me." Hymn 137, "Psalm 23," and Hymn 138, "The King of Love My Shepherd is."
2. Psalm 46 with Hymn 110, "A Mighty Fortress is Our God."
3. Psalm 87 with Hymn 731, "Glorious Things of Thee are Spoken."

PSALMS

9. Pilgrim and Enthronement Psalms

*How lovely is your dwelling place,
O LORD of hosts!*

*My soul longs, indeed it faints
for the courts of the LORD:
my heart and my flesh sing for joy
to the living God.*

*For a day in your courts
is better than a thousand elsewhere.
I would rather be a doorkeeper in the house of my God
than live in the tents of wickedness.*

Psalm 84:1-2 and 10

Psalms 29, 47, 84, 93, 96-99 and 122

9. PILGRIM PSALMS AND ENTHRONEMENT PSALMS

Psalms 84, 122 and 29, 47, 93, 96-99

ASSIGNMENTS			
Psalms 84 & 122	Psalms 29 & 47	Psalms 93, 96-97	Psalms 98-99

PILGRIM PSALMS

A PILGRIM'S SONG (84:1-12)

This Psalm belongs to that special category of Psalms, which we call PILGRIM PSALMS. It has to do with a pilgrim's longing to dwell in the Temple where God can be experienced forever. Such persons even make the "Valley of Baca" into a "Valley of Springs." (84:6) The "Valley of Baca" is unknown, but one can assume that it was an arid valley fit only for balsam trees. Baca probably means "balsam." Zion is the place on which the Temple sits, and this is what the godly person longs for and pursues as part of his or her lifetime goal. To be a doorkeeper in the house of the Lord is better than to dwell in the tents of the wicked (84:10).

IN PRAISE OF JUSTICE (122:1-8)

In this PILGRIM PSALM the pilgrim is about to leave Jerusalem. As he does so he expresses the joy his visit has brought him. Three impressions of his visit are especially strong. They are as follows: (1) The procession of pilgrims from all the tribes of Israel (122:4); (2) the site where in former times the thrones of the Davidic kings stood (122:5); and (3) the imposing structure of the city with its walls strengthened at intervals by defense towers (122:7).

The psalmist concludes with a moving prayer for the complete spiritual and material wellbeing of the city. His motive is not one of patriotism but one of religious faith. Since the main function of the Davidic king was to mediate the justice of God to the nation, his throne was primarily one of judgment. The psalmist however does not value Jerusalem as a political capital so much as the place where God's Temple (earthly house) has been established.

ENTHRONEMENT PSALMS

THE LORD OF THE STORM (29:1-11)

This Psalm is a HYMN OF ENTHRONEMENT to the Lord of the storm, whose power over nature is overwhelming. His power is expressed in the torrent of rain, the blaze of lightening (flames of fire), and in the roaring wind. The tallest trees are broken and the land is shaken from the northern mountains of Lebanon to Sirion (the Phoenician name for Mount Hermon) to the desert of Kadesh, which is about fifty miles south of Beersheba. This irresistible power of the Lord's moves the gathered people to praise the Lord and pray for strength and peace.

KING OF ALL NATIONS (47:1-9)

This ENTHRONEMENT PSALM for the enthronement festival was also used along with the covenant renewal ritual at the New Year Festival. The claim that the Lord rules all the earth is not wishful thinking, but the result of faith. This God overcame the Canaanites and gave them the land, which he promised to Jacob.

Following the recitation of God's mighty acts, the people formed a procession to "bear" the Ark into the Temple. The blowing of the ram's horn trumpet and the singing of these verses accompanied the procession. The word translated as "Psalm" in verse 7 is really "Maskil" which indicates that special music accompanied the singing of the words. As the Ark entered the Holy of Holies the congregation sang verses 8-9. They believed that all history was moving towards the time when the covenant people and the rulers of foreign nations would form a single congregation to worship the King of the earth, to whom belongs all worldly power (Shields).

HYMN IN PRAISE OF GOD (93:1-5)

This Psalm is an ENTHRONEMENT PSALM, which deals with the Kingly rule of the God of Israel. It was composed for use in connection with a feast when the theme of God's Kingship was emphasized. One possibility might be the Feast of Booths. In this Psalm there are three parts. In the first, the theme is stated (93:1-2). In the second part, God's power over chaos is described. The waters of the sea were symbolic of chaos. (93:3-4). In the final verse (93:5) God's holiness in the Temple is described, which the congregation proudly proclaims.

HYMN CELEBRATING GOD'S KINGSHIP (96:1-13)

This ENTHRONEMENT PSALM celebrates God's Kingship and was composed for a festival, which was celebrated along with the covenant renewal rituals at the New Year Feast. The leading themes of the festival, "Creation" (96:1-6) and "Judgment" (96:10-13) come together with an invitation to all nations and peoples to join in the sacred procession (96:7-9).

HYMN CELEBRATING GOD’S KINGSHIP (97:1-12)

Another ENTHRONEMENT PSALM composed for the enthronement festival celebrates God’s coming to his people as their King. The whole earth, including the coastlands (the remote islands and peninsulas of the Mediterranean), is summoned to rejoice in the Lord’s Universal Kingship. Pagan deities are but worthless idols before his majesty.

HYMN PROCLAIMING GOD’S FUTURE KINGDOM (98:1-9)

Although the verbs are in the past tense, the reference or orientation of this ENTHRONEMENT PSALM is to a future event. It is a summons to all nations and even to the physical universe to join in God’s praise and confidence in his victory.

The worldwide rejoicing is localized and symbolized by the song and instrumental music of the festal procession. The lyre, trumpet, and horn are all used as the Ark is carried in procession and everyone rejoices before the Warrior King. There is some imagery in this Psalm of the Holy War concept, which is used frequently in the Old Testament.

HYMN CELEBRATING GOD’S KINGSHIP (99:1-9)

In this ENTHRONEMENT PSALM, God is described as one who has established the universe and rules history with justice. In the festal procession the Ark was carried into the Temple. The Ark was a symbol of the heavenly throne on earth. The cherubim, two winged figures with animal bodies and human heads, sat on top of the Ark. The golden lid of the Ark served as a footstool for God’s invisible presence.

God’s justice was manifested in the covenant with Israel; and Moses, Aaron, and Samuel were persons who mediated the covenant. They interceded with God on behalf of the people, and they mediated God’s self-revelation and the law to the people. Since there were both blessings and curses in the covenant, God acted through his mediators with both forgiveness and punishment.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of the Psalms expresses the presence of God the best?
2. Which of the Psalms is your favorite?
3. Name your favorite passage from the Psalms in this lesson!

COMPARE THE PSALM WITH THE FOLLOWING HYMN

1. Psalm 96 with Hymn 91, “Canticle of Praise to God.”
2. Psalm 98 with Hymn 246, “Joy to the World.”

PSALMS

10. The Royal Psalms

*For the LORD has chosen Zion;
he has desired it for his habitation;
This is my place forever;
here I will reside, for I have desired it.
I will abundantly bless its provisions;
I will satisfy its poor with bread.
Its priests I will clothe with salvation,
and its faithful will shout for joy.
There I will cause a horn to sprout up for David;
I have prepared a lamp for my anointed one.
His enemies I will clothe with disgrace,
but on him, his crown will gleam.*

Psalm 132:13-18

**Psalms 2, 18, 20-21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110,
132, 144**

10. THE ROYAL PSALMS

Psalms 2, 18, 20-21, 45, 72, 89, 101, 110, 132, 144

ASSIGNMENTS				
Psalms 2 & 18	Psalms 20-21	Psalms 45 & 72	Psalm 89 & 101	Psalms 110, 132, 144

GOD'S CHOSEN KING (2:1-12)

This Psalm belongs to the ROYAL PSALMS, and can be dated between the reign of Solomon and the Fall of Jerusalem (931-586 B.C.E.). It was composed by a court poet for use at the coronation of a King or at an annual enthronement festival. The hope is that the “geographical limits” and the “political glory” of the reign of David would be restored. In the New Testament this hope was reinterpreted in terms of a Messianic King in David's line who would overcome all opposition to his coming reign (Acts 4:25-26). In other words the New Testament gives this Psalm a messianic interpretation. There are four strophes.

1. World Rebellion. (2:1-3) The world rulers rebel against the Lord's anointed (Messiah).
2. God's Decision. (2:4-6) The rebellion is foolish, for God has chosen his King to reign. A particular King was in the mind of the author at the time, but when one reinterprets this Psalm in messianic terms one thinks ultimately of Christ. Zion refers to the citadel of Jerusalem.
3. Promise of Dominion. (2:7-9) God has adopted the new King and given him authority, just as he gave authority to Christ (Hebrews 1:5 and 5:5).
4. God's Ultimatum. (2:10-12) A final warning is given to the rebellious rulers of the world to submit to God's chosen King.

SONG OF THANKSGIVING 18:1-50)

This is a ROYAL PSALM. In it David expresses his gratitude for victory in battle. Another version of this particular Psalm can be found in 2 Samuel 22.

The images of the Psalm reflect the holy war tradition. The King is portrayed as having come to the edge of disaster only to encounter God's delivering action, which is described in terms of a battle between Heaven and Sheol.

Images of nature describe the battle and how God delivers the King from danger. The Psalm turns on the idea that the King is not an absolute monarch but, like the other members of the covenant community, is obligated to obey the divine laws of the covenant. It is the Lord, not the King, who wins the Battle. The ensuing peace is a complete triumph for the Davidic monarchy, and inaugurates his worldwide rule (18:43-45 & 50).

One might compare this Psalm to Psalm 2, for the same messianic implications can be drawn from it. The conclusion is a song of thanksgiving to God for his goodness to the King; and the last line refers to the Lord's covenant with the house of David, an eternal promise (2 Samuel 7:16).

PRAYER FOR VICTORY (20:1-9)

A choir of priests offered this ROYAL PSALM on behalf of the King on the eve of a battle. It accompanied a grain offering and a whole burnt offering presented by the King. Sacrifice and prayer belonged together in the Temple ritual. A solo voice (probably the King's) from the choir probably sang verses 6-8 or at least verse 6.

The idea of a holy war is expressed and goes back to the period of the tribal confederacy (1250-1000 B.C.E.). The size and equipment of the army have no bearing on the outcome of the battle since the Lord alone gives the victory. Absolute trust in his power to overthrow the enemy is all that is required. Calculating one's own strength or the strength of the enemy is a failure of trust and invites disaster. The prayer for victory is to build up that trust in Israel and its King.

THANKSGIVING FOR VICTORY (21:1-13)

This ROYAL PSALM bearing David's name is intentionally paired with the preceding Psalm (20). In the former Psalm the priests prayed for victory for the King and now they thank God for that victory. This Psalm continues the Holy War theory that the King's victories are due to the Lord's intervention on Israel's behalf and are not to be attributed to human power.

ROYAL WEDDING SONG (45:1-17)

A professional scribe (45:1) wrote this ROYAL WEDDING PSALM on the occasion of Ahab's marriage to Jezebel, the Princess of Tyre. The mention of ivory palaces supports this conclusion (1 Kings 22:39 and Amos 3:15). Archaeologists have discovered beautiful carved ivory in Ahab's palace in Samaria.

The song gained such popularity that it was used at later royal weddings and probably at the festival of the enthronement of Kings. The two primary functions of the King are mentioned: (1) to lead in war (45:2-5), and (2) to maintain justice (45:6-7).

Although the King was never regarded as a god—such as was the case in Egypt—he was considered a “Son of God” by adoption. His adoption was symbolized with the anointing of oil.

The latter half of the song is addressed to the Phoenician Princess to forget her foreign origin and devote herself to her husband’s faith and culture (45:10-17). The Psalm ends with hope for the royal couple, but that hope soon turned to ashes as they became one of Israel’s worst royal couples (1 Kings 16:29-33).

PRAYER FOR THE KING (72:1-20)

The last Psalm in Book II is a ROYAL PSALM. It is called “A Psalm of Solomon” because it fits Solomon’s reign—Israel’s golden age of peace, prosperity, and power. The occasion for the Psalm may have been a coronation or at least its annual commemoration.

The Psalm looks beyond the real world to the ideal world: an endless reign over the entire world (72:8-11). These are the verses that link the Psalm with Solomon. The “River” is the Euphrates (72:8). Tarshish (Tartessus) was probably located on the southwest coast of Spain (Jonah 1:3). Sheba was located in southern Arabia and Seba in Ethiopia. All of these places symbolize the remote, the foreign, and the exotic. The theological implications here would be world dominion under an ideal King. It is the King, real or ideal, who is the guarantor of justice for the poor and the helpless (72:1-4 & 12-14). Long may he live and may the people support and pray for him (72:15-17).

A doxology, which is not part of this last Psalm, marks the end of Book II. (Compare 72:18-19 with 41:13). Verse 20 marks the end of an early collection of Psalms now included in the Psalter.

PRAYER FOR NATIONAL SALVATION (89:1-52)

This is a ROYAL PSALM (89:1-37) which ends with a LAMENT (88:38-51). The historical context is the exile of the youthful King Jehoiachin from Judah in 597 B.C.E. (2 Kings 24:8-15).

In the Introduction we find a twofold theme, which is: (1) God’s permanent steadfast love, and (2) his indissoluble covenant with the descendants of David (89:1-4).

God’s Glory is described in contrast to the angelic beings. He created the entire land of Palestine, including its great mountains, Tabor and Hermon, (89:12). Tabor was the rounded hump of a mountain near Nazareth from which Deborah and Barak swept down to victory (Judges 4-5), and Hermon was the 10,000 foot peak on the border with Lebanon (89:5-18).

The promise to David was that his Kingdom would endure as long as the universe endures. Rebellion of a King was to bring punishment, but even that was not a cancellation of the promise.

When the Babylonian armies devastated Jerusalem and took the youthful Jehoiachin off to Babylon, the impossible had happened. God had broken his word and stripped a descendant of David of his crown (89:39), scepter, and throne (89:44). These three things were symbols of the Kingly office. The Psalm ends with a Lament calling upon God to withdraw his wrath, to remember human frailty and its bondage to death, and to reinstate the divine covenant with the family of David (89:38-51).

The benediction in this chapter closes Book III (89:52).

THE KING'S PLEDGE FOR JUSTICE (101:1-8)

This ROYAL PSALM is the King's pledge to rule justly by rooting out evil from both private and public life. It may have become part of a coronation ceremony.

THE PRIEST-KING (110:1-7)

This ROYAL PSALM was composed for a coronation ritual. The King (my Lord) is invited by Israel's God (the Lord) to ascend the throne. There are two divine speeches spoken by either a priest or prophet followed by congregational responses to each of them.

The first speech and response is found in 110:1-3. Here the Lord invites the King to sit on his right-hand side. This probably means the right side of the Ark. This position indicates that the King is God's viceregent. Mesopotamian art depicts the King with his foot on the neck of a conquered enemy. The congregation in turn prays that the King's power, symbolized by his scepter, will spread outward from Jerusalem to overthrow its enemies.

The second speech and response is found in Psalm 110:4-7. A reference is made to Melchizedek, the King of Salem (Jerusalem), as a model (Genesis 14:17-24). The Davidic monarchy is in direct line with the Kings of pre-Israelite Jerusalem, and like them, combines the offices of priest and king. The Jerusalem cult stressed the justice of God, and Melchizedek means: "my King is righteousness." The Lord has condemned the nations, and the priest-king is to carry out his sentence for him.

THE ARK AND JERUSALEM (132:1-18)

Included in this ROYAL PSALM are two independent poems. They have been written in dramatic liturgical form and they were used during the annual ritual of the enthronement of the Lord, which celebrated the carrying of the Ark into Jerusalem and the eventual enthronement of it in the Temple. The poems provide both historical and theological justifications for the close relationship between the Temple and the Davidic monarchy in Jerusalem. The two poems were combined because both relate to the narrative of II Samuel 7.

In Psalm 132:1-10 we find a description of David's plan to build the Temple. Although he was the planner, he was not the builder. He simply desired a place for the Ark. It was in

his hometown of Ephrathah (Bethlehem) that it was learned that the Ark, which had been captured by the Philistines, was at Jaar (Kiriath-jearim/Baale-judah). After the Ark was recaptured, it was taken into Jerusalem. The King, the priests, and the people accompanied this cultic procession. As the Ark was taken into the Temple the people prayed that the Lord would enter this sacred place along with his throne, which was on top of the Ark. Psalm 132:11-18 deals with two decisions made by God: (1) that David and his ancestors should occupy the throne forever, and (2) that the place should be Jerusalem. Because of God's presence in Jerusalem, the land would be blessed. Two symbols are included to describe God's people: The "Horn," was a symbol of strength, and the "Lamp" was a symbol of illumination and life. Israel would then be a light to all nations. The "Crown" would shed its luster to all.

PRAYER FOR VICTORY (144:1-15)

The King spoke this ROYAL PSALM on the eve of Battle. There are four parts to it. (1) The recognition of God as the source of military power (144:1-4). Military power does not come from officers and troops, but from God alone. Without God, victory is impossible. (2) The call for God's help (144:5-8). In the second part of the Psalm, the Psalmist calls upon God to rescue him from his enemies and grant him victory over them just as he did for his people in the past. (3) The promise to lead a thanksgiving service (144:9-11). If victory will be granted, the Psalmist promises to personally lead a thanksgiving service with a Psalm (new song), accompanied with a ten-stringed harp. Psalm 124 would have made a good Psalm for the occasion. (4) The prayer for future blessings (144:12-15). In the conclusion of the Psalm, the Psalmist prays for the general welfare of the nation, and includes such concrete things as its population, crops, and cattle. It is a prayer for the peace and prosperity of future generations. This last section may have been a separate Psalm.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of these Psalms describes the responsibility of Royalty the best?
2. Which of these Psalms is your favorite?
3. Name your favorite passage from the Psalms in this lesson!

COMPARE THE PSALMS WITH THE FOLLOWING HYMNS

1. Psalm 20 with Hymn 160, Rejoice, Ye Pure in Heart."
2. Psalm 72 with Hymn 63, "Blessed Be the Name," Hymn 157, "Jesus Shall Reign," and Hymn 203, "Hail to the Lord's Anointed."

PSALMS

11. Liturgies

*O give thanks to the LORD, for he is good;
his steadfast love endures forever!*

Let Israel say,

“His steadfast love endures forever.”

Let the house of Aaron say,

“His steadfast love endures forever.”

Let those who fear the LORD say,

“His steadfast love endures forever.”

Psalm 118:1-4

**Psalms 15. 24. 50, 68, 75, 81-82, 108, 118,
121, 134**

11. LITURGIES

Psalms 15, 24, 50, 68, 75, 81-82, 108, 118, 121, 134

ASSIGNMENTS				
Psalms 15, 24	Psalms 50, 68	Psalms 75, 81	Psalms 82, 108	Psalms 118, 121, 134

ADMISSION INTO THE TEMPLE (15:1-5)

This LITURGY for admission to the tent (Temple) bears the name of David as its author. *Tent* refers to the Jerusalem Temple built on the Holy Hill (Zion), and preserves the memory of the “Tabernacle” or “Tent of Meeting” from the Mosaic era.

Certain conditions needed to be fulfilled before a person was admitted to the Temple area. God expects from such a person right conduct, right speaking (15:2-3a), right relationships with others and God (15:3b-4), and the right use of wealth (2:5). The right use of wealth involves the refusal to charge “interest” and take “bribes.” Among Israel's pagan neighbors the going “interest rate” on loans was from 33 and 1/3 to 50 percent. The Jewish Law prohibiting interest (Exodus 22:25 and Leviticus 25:35-37) refers to charitable loans to people in distress rather than to ordinary business loans, which became common in a later commercial age, even among the Jews. The point being made is that the people of God’s covenant are not to increase their financial well being at the expense of the poor. They are loyal to God’s covenant and God blesses them for it.

LITURGY FOR ENTERING THE TEMPLE (24:1-10)

There are three parts to this LITURGY: a hymn (24:1-2); an entrance liturgy for the people (24:3-6); and an entrance liturgy for the Lord (24:7- 10). As the procession proceeds the priests are asked for the condition of entrance into the Temple.

The entrance requirements are given in more detail in Psalm 15, but can be summed up by saying that both the outer and inner life (hands and heart) must be clean. That which is false (idols) must not be worshiped and one must practice honesty in social relationships.

Twice the procession calls on the Temple gates to open and admit the Lord, symbolized by the Ark. The God who seeks entrance is the King of Glory or the God of the Holy War tradition who led Israel out of captivity to freedom and the Promised Land. This whole tradition was related to the Ark at Shiloh (I Samuel 4:1-9) and its transfer to Jerusalem under David (2 Samuel 6:12-15).

LITURGY OF TRUE WORSHIP (50:1-23)

This LITURGY was used in the covenant renewal on the New Year Festival. Asaph refers to a possible author, a style of authorship associated with him, or the Asaphite guild. The sons of Asaph participated in nearly every major celebration relating to the Temple. Occasionally they were represented as striking the cymbals, but they were predominantly singers. They became known as the Temple singers.

Asaph also had a part in Psalms 73-83. The Asaphite songs are those of a stern moralist, or one who prefers to teach as he sings. To him life has more rigor than romance, and so these songs have a serious intent.

The first of the Asaphite Psalms is a LITURGY on judgment and true worship. False piety was under judgment, and false piety assumed that sacrificial meals and burnt offerings bound God to humanity and forced him to minister to human needs. While the covenant at Sinai was accompanied with sacrifices, God does not need human gifts nor is he dependent upon animal flesh (50:9-10). What God wants from the worshiper is a thankful heart and prayer (50:14-15). The wicked have no right to participate in the renewal of the covenant because they cannot approach God in the right manner. They can offer up sacrifices, but they cannot do so with thankful hearts. If they could, they would not be involved in wickedness.

SONG OF TRIUMPH (68:1-35)

This LITURGY is the most difficult of all the Psalms to interpret. Many scholars think that it is but a collection of unrelated fragments, but others see a unified composition used in a Temple procession. The Psalm might have been sung as the Ark was carried into Jerusalem (2 Samuel 6) or at a ceremony commemorating that historical event.

The unity of the various elements of the Psalm would be God's appearing to his people as a Warrior God, who led them through the desert, chose his home on Mount Zion (location of the Temple), and saved Israel while he destroyed the enemy. The Psalm is a collection of vivid pictures of God's mighty power.

The gold and silver dove was the emblem of the Canaanite love goddess named "Astarte." Mountain peaks were considered homes for the gods. The Psalm denies this. Bashan was a region (the Golan Heights) east of the Sea of Galilee which stretched to Mount Hermon, which may be the mountain being referred to in the Psalm. Zalmon is another mountain on which snow occasionally falls. It is located in the central highlands near Shechem (Judges 9:48). God has chosen Zion in Jerusalem as the place where he will dwell. He dwells with his people, not in the mountains. The mentioning of the four tribes is a way of including all twelve tribes by mentioning the extremes. Saul came from the tribe of Benjamin and David from Judah.

SONG OF THANKSGIVING (75:1-10)

This LITURGY of Thanksgiving is called corporate because it begins with “we.” Gratitude is expressed to God for his judgment of the wicked. The pronoun, “I” is spoken by the priest or Temple prophet on behalf of God.

A warning is given that the God of Israel controls the destinies of all nations. The “cup” symbolizes the wrath of God (75:8), which will be exercised against the wicked.

In conclusion, an individual—perhaps the King—expresses his faith and praise to God for his righteous judgment (75:9-10).

LITURGY FOR A FESTIVAL (81:1-16)

This Psalm is a LITURGY designed for celebrating the Feast of Tabernacles (Booths). It reminds pilgrims approaching the Temple with music, songs, and shouts of joy that the feast to which they have come was prescribed in the Sinai Covenant.

The 15 days of feasting began with the new moon and ended with the full moon. The opening and closing was sounded with the ram’s horn trumpet. The new moon was a favorable time for prophecies inspired by the voice of God. Here a prophet recalls the nation’s deliverance from slavery in Egypt, God’s answer to their cries in the wilderness, his revelation in thunder from Sinai, and the testing of the nation at Meribah.

The Covenant established by these events requires obedience to the first commandment. The prophet continues to warn the nation that independence from God leads them to disaster and submission will bring about a greater miracle than that which they experienced in the wilderness. Honey instead of water will flow from the rock.

JUDGMENT OF THE GODS (82:1-8)

In this LITURGY the psalmist (Temple priest or prophet) sees a vision in which God judges the other members of the divine council. Members of this council are described as gods, but they might be persons who exercise God’s judgment over others. Because there is corruption and injustice in the law-courts, the punishment will be that the gods will perish like mere human beings. The Psalm ends with a prayer that this vision might be realized.

LITURGY FOR VICTORY OVER NATIONAL ENEMIES (108:1-13)

This Psalm is composed of portions of two other Psalms. The first part of the Psalm (108:1-5) is taken from Psalm 57:7-11. The message from Psalm 57 is that no matter how dark things may appear, those who fill their minds with God can sing his praise under any circumstances. The new day can be greeted with music, song, and sacrifice, which will be heard all over the earth.

The second part of the Psalm (108:6-13) is taken from Psalm 60:5-12. This is a group lament in which the people gather following a humiliating defeat at the hands of their enemies, primarily the Edomites. For them defeat symbolizes that something was wrong with them; and for that reason, they gather to find out what it is and commit themselves to the Lord for a future victory.

The big three of the twelve tribes mentioned: Manasseh, Ephraim, and Judah. Israel's traditional three enemies, Moab, Edom, and Philistia are claimed. The "cast shoe" symbolizes "possession" over Edom, and the author is claiming these lands as part of the empire under the United Monarchy. They may have been lost, but they belong to the God of Israel, who will reclaim them in victory.

This Psalm, unlike the other two, is a LITURGY. The other two were designated as LAMENTS.

LITURGY OF THANKSGIVING (118:1-29)

This LITURGY is the last of the Egyptian Hallel Psalms. The speaker is a King who has come to the Temple to offer thanks for a victory, and some of the liturgical elements can be found in the various directives given in verses 2-4. Involved are King, priests, and the people.

In verses 1-18 the King recalls God's victory for his people, and in verses 19-29 the procession moves to the altar with branches (118:27).

LITURGY OF BLESSING (121:1-8)

The LITURGY consists of a question, an answer, and three blessings. Some think that the question is being asked as the pilgrim ascends to Jerusalem; others think that the question is being asked as pilgrims prepare for the journey home from Jerusalem. "Hills" could refer to both "danger" and "support." The hills could refer to the high places where the Baals—the local fertility gods—were worshiped, but hills could also refer to Mount Zion, on which Jerusalem was built. There were sanctuaries built on the hills both to the pagan Baals (2 Kings 23:5) and to the God of Israel (Mount Zion).

The psalmist asks a question, and the priest answers it in terms of the Lord who created the universe and will sustain it. He will also sustain the pilgrim as he journeys on his way. The pilgrim might have been worried about the Judean hills, but the priest assures him that his help will also come to him from the Lord in such places. In verse 2 the "my" should probably be "your." Verses 3-8 make up three benedictions or blessings given out by the priest for the pilgrim. They can be summed up as follows: (1) You will bear no disaster on the road (121:3-4); (2) You will suffer no sickness on the road (21:5-6); and (3) You will suffer no peril or danger on the road (121:7-8). The pilgrim can travel assured of safety and security because help comes from Mount Zion as well as from every other hill created by God.

AN EVENING CALL TO WORSHIP (134:1-3)

In this LITURGY we find a call to worship, which was used in the evening service of the Temple. It consists of a summons to the people by the priests to praise God and the pronouncement of a blessing on the people for having done so.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of these Psalms would make the best liturgy?
2. Which of these Psalms is your favorite?
3. Name your favorite passage from the Psalms in this lesson!

COMPARE THE PSALMS WITH THE FOLLOWING HYMNS

1. Psalm 24 and Hymn 212, "Psalm 24 (KJV)," and Hymn 213, "Lift Up Your Heads, Ye Mighty Gates.
2. Psalm 118 and Hymn 657, "This is the Day," and Hymn 658, "This is the Day that the Lord Hath Made.

PSALMS

12. Communal Laments I

*Turn again, O God of hosts;
look down from heaven,
and see; have regard for this vine,
the stock that your right hand planted.
They have burned it with fire, they have cut it down;
may they perish at the rebuke of your countenance.
But let your hand be upon the one at your right hand,
the one whom you made strong for yourself.
Then we will never turn back from you;
give us, O LORD God of hosts;
let your face shine, that we may be saved.*

Psalm 80:14-19

Psalms 12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79-80, 83

12. COMMUNAL LAMENTS I

Psalms 12, 44, 58, 60, 74, 79-80, 83

ASSIGNMENTS			
Psalms 12, 44	Psalms 58, 60	Psalms 74, 79	Psalms 80, 83

Prayer for Deliverance (12:1-8)

In this COMMUNAL LAMENT, which bears the name of David, the congregation cries out for help in the midst of rampant evil and wickedness (12:1). A priest, or temple prophet, interrupts the lament to assure the people that God is about to intervene (12:5). It was believed that the complete triumph over evil would be the signal for the Lord to break into history with his final act of judgment and salvation. The choir then responds by renewing its prayer for protection and deliverance (12:7-8).

Prayer for Deliverance (44:1-26)

Here we have a COMMUNAL LAMENT led by the King or High Priest (44:4, 6, and 15). The Psalm is prompted by some disastrous military defeat, which left Israel bewildered. The defeat is difficult to understand because Israel has been loyal (44:17-22). Israel has trusted the past stories of God's activities in history and has not trusted in bow and sword (44:6), and still the enemy has been victorious. The only verse that gives some indication of the date is verse 11, which was an expression used during the Exile. In writing to the Roman Church, Paul quoted Psalm 44:22, to express a similar feeling of abandonment (Romans 8:36). In the midst of defeat and despair the Psalmist cries out for help and urges God to wake up from his sleep (44:23).

Prayer for a Curse (58:1-11)

The violence used in this COMMUNAL LAMENT is to be explained by the belief of the author that someone has placed a curse on him. In response he prays for God's curse and judgment on his enemies, primarily on those corrupt and evil men in power.

In 58:10 we have an allusion to the Canaanite goddess, Anath, who walked knee deep in the blood of her enemies. (Anath was the sister of Baal and the goddess of war.) The Psalmist would like to see God do a similar thing to Israel's enemies.

Prayer for Deliverance (60:1-12)

This is a COMMUNAL LAMENT in which the people gather after a humiliating defeat at the hands of their enemies, primarily the Edomites. For them defeat symbolizes that something was wrong with them; and for that reason they gather to find out what it is and commit themselves to the Lord for a future victory.

The big three of the twelve tribes are mentioned: Manasseh, Ephraim, and Judah. Israel's traditional three enemies, Moab, Edom, and Philistia are claimed. The *cast shoe* symbolizes "possession" over Edom, and the author is claiming these lands as part of the empire under the United Monarchy. They may have been lost, but they belong to the God of Israel, who will reclaim them in victory.

Prayer for Deliverance (74:1-23)

On the occasion of the destruction of the Temple, the people join together in a COMMUNAL LAMENT. The time suggested by many is the destruction of the Temple in 587/6 B.C.E. by the Babylonians, but some scholars suggest a different time in light of verse 9, which says that there were no prophets speaking out. In 587/6 B.C.E. the nation's greatest prophets—Jeremiah and Ezekiel—were speaking out. The prophetic influence was at its height. This is why some scholars suggest that the time period mentioned must be the destruction of the Temple by Antiochus IV in 168 B.C.E.

In this lament God is accused of abandoning his people and forgetting the covenant and his dwelling place on Mount Zion. He who controls nature and history can certainly deal with a puny enemy. The nation therefore calls upon God to act again as he did in the past. He is called upon to deliver the soul of his "dove" from the wild beasts. "Dove" in verse 19 refers to God's people.

Prayer for Deliverance (79:1-13)

In this COMMUNAL LAMENT the people mourn the fall of Jerusalem and the defiling of the Temple (587 B.C.E.). They perceive their plight as punishment from God, but they also ask why God's judgment does not fall on their enemies, who do not even bother to call upon his name. The prayer is a request for forgiveness, deliverance, and vengeance. If it is answered, the people promise to give thanks to God forever (79:13).

Prayer for Deliverance (80:1-19)

This COMMUNAL LAMENT was written between the Fall of Israel and the Fall of Judah. The author probably came from Israel, which had been left in ruins. Judah is not mentioned. His mention of the three principal tribes in Israel, affirms this conclusion. Benjamin and Joseph were sons of Jacob's favorite wife Rachel, and Ephraim and Manasseh were sons of Joseph. Israel is compared to a vine, which God planted, but then he allowed it to be uprooted by Israel's enemies. The Psalm is a prayer for Israel's restoration.

Prayer for Deliverance (83:1-18)

This COMMUNAL LAMENT does not fit into any particular historical situation, but it does draw upon Israel's victories in the time of the Judges. Verses 1-8 describe the enemies of Israel, who are its near neighbors or the "children of Lot." The children of Lot were Moab and Ammon, but this phrase includes all of Israel's enemies who are in collusion with them. The prayer is for vengeance on all those who have tried to take Israel's land away. It draws deeply on the way in which God has given victory to such persons as Deborah and Barak (her military leader) in their defeat of the Canaanites led by Sisera and Jabin (Judges 4-5), and Gideon who led a decisive victory over the Midianites (Judges 6-8). The Psalmist expects more victories over Israel's enemies and trusts in God to operate in the same way in his own time.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of these Psalms makes the best Communal Lament?
2. Which of these Psalms is your favorite?
3. Name your favorite passage from the Psalms in this lesson!
4. Why are no hymns based on any of these Psalms?

PSALMS

13. Communal Laments II

*By the rivers of Babylon—
there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.*

On the willows there we hung up our harps.

For there our captors asked us for songs,

and our tormentors asked for mirth,

saying, “Sing us one of the songs of Zion!”

How could we sing the LORD’s song in a foreign land?

If I forget you, O Jerusalem, let my right hand wither!

Let my tongue cling to the roof of my mouth,

if I do not remember you,

if I do not set Jerusalem above my highest joy.

Psalm 137:1-6

Psalms 85, 90, 106, 123, 125-126, 129, 137

13. COMMUNAL LAMENTS II

Psalms 85, 90, 106, 123, 125-126, 129, 137

ASSIGNMENTS			
Psalms 85, 90	Psalms 106, 123	Psalms 125-126	Psalms 129, 137

Prayer for Deliverance (85:1-13)

In this COMMUNAL LAMENT the question is raised about how God has worked in the past in hopes that he will work in their present. Perhaps their particular problem was a crop failure (85:12). In verses 8-13 a temple priest or prophet delivers an oracle of assurance. Not only will God work among them again, he will exceed what he has done in the past.

Prayer for Deliverance (90:1-17)

This COMMUNAL LAMENT is linked with Moses, who experienced the long years of wandering in the desert. Ecclesiastes also shares the mood of the Psalmist. The Psalm is a declaration of God's infiniteness and human finiteness, or God's eternity in contrast to human transience. It begins by stating God's everlastingness (90:1-2) and human transience (90:3-6). Human transience is due to human sin, upon which God has pronounced his judgment (90:7-10). God's judgment and human transience should make us wise (90:11-12) so that we can see our deepest need for God's presence and steadfast love (90:13-17). In the end the Psalmist prays for God's pity and the return of joy and gladness.

Lament over Israel's Disobedience (106:1-48)

This postexilic COMMUNAL LAMENT begins with praise but quickly turns into a confession of the nation's sins from the beginning to the Psalmist's time. The first five verses opens the Psalm with praise, and the last verse closes with praise. The last verse, however, is not part of the Psalm; rather, that verse brings the fourth book to a close. "Praise the Lord" follows the closing doxology rather than the Psalm itself.

In the main body of the Psalm there is a list of the main events in Israel's history and the naming of certain places where Israel rebelled or disobeyed the covenant. (1) Rebellion at the Red Sea (106:7-12); (2) the craving for Egypt (106:13-15); (3) Dathan and Abiram's rebellion (106:16-18); (4) the creation of a golden calf (106:19-23); (5) the refusal to

enter Canaan (106:24-27); (6) the apostasy to Baal of Peor (106:28-31); (7) disobedience at the waters of Meribah (106:32-33); and (8) the apostasies in the time of the Judges (106:34-39). After all these sins are listed, the Psalmist then describes the pattern he has seen in the life of Israel: rebellion, occupation, repentance, and freedom, followed by another repetition of the same sequence of events (106:40-46). The final verse of the Psalm itself is a prayer for deliverance (106:47).

Prayer for Deliverance (123:1-4)

In this COMMUNAL LAMENT, one of the pilgrims approaches the Lord on behalf of the nation. He has felt the oppression far too long and asks God for help that is way overdue. The historical setting of this Psalm is postexilic, a time when Israel was under the direct rule of foreign powers.

Prayer for Deliverance (125:1-5)

This COMMUNAL LAMENT was composed in a time of foreign domination, probably shortly after the Exile. Pagan control placed a premium on cooperation with the conquerors, and it was very difficult to remain loyal to the covenant. The burning question was, "What will happen to the Holy Land?" Will pagans and traitors continue to rule it? The Psalmist's answer was that those who remain true to the covenant faith (the righteous) are the true Israel, and that the land rightfully belongs to them. The scepter (domination) of the foreigner will not maintain power for long, and it is for their downfall that the Psalmist prays. The true Israel on the other hand will stand.

Prayer of Deliverance (126:1-6)

This COMMUNAL LAMENT might also be dated to the return of the people from Babylonian Exile (538 B.C.E.). Some scholars feel that verses 1-3 should be read as if they were in the present or future tense. This would mean that they are a prediction, rather than a recollection, of the promised restoration, followed with a prayer for its fulfillment (126:4-6). If this is the case, then the Psalm could be written about any time of difficulty and may not be directly related to the Exilic Period. If it is related to the latter, the people's joy has to do with the decree of Cyrus of Persia, which permitted them to return home. When they returned home, however, drought, locusts, and bad harvests reduced them to poverty. (See Haggai 1:9-11.) The people now pray for a new manifestation of God's power, which will bring renewed life to the nation like winter rains filling the dry water-courses in the Negev Desert. This is to be compared to the sower who went out to sow and is now able to return to rejoice over his bountiful harvest.

Prayer for Deliverance (129:1-8)

This COMMUNAL LAMENT was composed in a time when God's people were dominated by a foreign power. The Psalmist prays for God's deliverance and asks him to deal with them like he dealt with his people's enemies in the past. "Let them be like the grass on the housetops," says Psalm 129:6, "which withers before it grows up." The flat

roofs of the homes were made of mud plastered on reeds. The grass would grow quickly, but the first hot winds of summer killed it so that it was not worth harvesting. The Psalmist hopes that this will be the fate of the nation's enemies.

Lament from Babylon (137:1-9)

In this COMMUNAL LAMENT the exiles gather on the banks of some irrigation canals that bring the water of the Euphrates to the fields of the city of Babylon. The people chide them into singing their songs of Zion, but they cannot bring themselves to sing songs that were part of the ritual in the Temple. All had been destroyed in 587/6 B.C. E. In verses 5-6 an individual testifies that although he cannot sing the sacred songs, he can never forget the place of their origin and will regard any opportunity to return to Jerusalem as his highest joy. The Psalm ends with a curse on Edom (the nation related to Israel through Jacob's brother Esau) who helped Babylon raze Jerusalem. Both Edom and Babylon are cursed, and Babylon's eventual conqueror is praised and blessed.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of these Psalms makes the best Communal Lament?
2. Which of these Psalms is your favorite?
3. Name your favorite passage from the Psalms in this lesson!

COMPARE THE PSALMS WITH THE FOLLOWING HYMNS

1. Psalm 90 and Hymn 117, "O God Our Help in Ages Past."
2. Psalm 137 & Hymn 181, "Ye Servants of God," and Hymn 733, "Marching to Zion"

Note: Charles Wesley and Isaac Watts wrote hymns in a time when it was not very popular to sing anything but the Psalms. They based their hymns on some of the Psalms, but they faced persecution for singing them. Wesley responded to the persecution with his collection of songs: *Hymns for Times of Trouble and Persecution*. These hymns were to lift the spirits of those who were demoralized by the conflict.¹ The best-known hymn in this collection is, "Ye Servants of God, Your Master Proclaim." In Watts' "Marching to Zion," the second verse points to the problem. Others may not want to sing these songs, but Watts and his followers did. That second verse begins with the words: "Let those refuse to sing who never knew our God." What do you think? Should they have sung the Songs of Zion by the rivers of Babylon, or should they have waited until they could sing them again in Jerusalem?

¹ Craig R.. Koester, *The Apocalypse: Controversies and Meaning in Western History* (The Great Courses), p. 11.

PSALMS

14. Individual Laments I

My God, my God, why have you forsaken me”

*Why are you so far from helping me,
from the words of my groaning?*

*...they divide my clothes among themselves,
and for my clothing they cast lots.*

*...he did not hide his face from me,
but heard when I cried to him.*

*To him, indeed, shall all who sleep in the earth
bow down;*

*before him shall bow all who go down to the dust,
and I shall live for him.*

Psalm 22:1, 18, 24b, 29

Psalms 3-7, 13-14, 17, 22

14. INDIVIDUAL LAMENTS 1

Psalms 3-7,13-14,17,22

ASSIGNMENTS			
Psalms 3-4	Psalms 5-6	Psalms 7, 13-14	Psalms 17, 22

Prayer for Deliverance (3:1-8)

Upon the occasion of running away from his son Absalom, David wrote this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT. (See 2 Samuel 15) Verses 1-2 outline the situation; verses 3-4 express the Psalmist's trust in the Lord, which is a regular element in laments; verses 5-6 indicate that the Psalmist has spent the night in the Temple, where he received assurance that the Lord is still on his side; and verses 7-8 make up a concluding prayer of deliverance for the Psalmist and the nation.

"Selah" is a liturgical direction, which may indicate an instrumental interlude in the singing of the Psalm. "Holy Hill" refers to Mount Zion in Jerusalem.

Prayer for Deliverance (4:1-8)

In this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT the Psalmist (a poor man) rebukes his lying accusers (the wealthy). The charge is probably a formal accusation to which he feels that he must publicly protest his innocence. The ceremony in which the Psalm was used probably included a sacrifice or sacrifices (4:5) and spending the night in the Temple (4:8). The Psalmist sleeps peacefully in the Temple during the ordeal of his trial. He believes that he is in the right and that the Lord will watch over him. "The light of your face" in verses 6 refers to the presence of God.

Prayer for Deliverance (5:1-12)

This INDIVIDUAL LAMENT begins with the cultic formula, "my King and my God," (5:2) and goes on to describe the alienation between the Psalmist's (David's) enemies and God (5:4-6). The setting is the morning service of the Temple to which the Psalmist brings his offering and prays for help, and waits for an answer from the Lord (5:7). He is sure that his prayer will be heard for two reasons: (1) God hates evil (5:4-6), and (2) God loves steadfastly (5:7a). Because of the first reason the Psalmist's enemies

will be denied entrance to the Temple, cut off from fellowship with God. Because of the second reason the Psalmist himself has access to the sanctuary, which he enters with fear.

The prayer of the Psalmist is three-fold: (1) for himself (5:8); (2) against his enemies (5:9-10); and (3) on behalf of those who trust in the Lord (5:11-12). The vengeance called down on his enemies will be both the judgment of God and the consequence of their crime, just as the joy of the righteous is a gift from God and the natural outpouring of their gratitude.

Prayer in the Face of Death (6:1-10)

In this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT, the Psalmist (who is David) complains of sickness and mental anguish, which he attributes to sin; and then he pleads for deliverance from divine wrath (6:1-3). On the basis of the Lord's steadfast love, he begs for his life. He is afraid of death because he fears that Sheol (the underworld) is a place where life comes close to extinction. The Lord's presence does not reach this dark and cheerless place beneath the surface of the earth (6:4-5). With common oriental exaggeration he describes his bed as soaking wet from his tears and his eyes worn out from weeping. His distress is also attributed to his enemies (6:6-7), but he is confident that God has heard his prayers and will answer them (6:8-10).

Prayer for Deliverance (7:1-17)

In this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT written by David, he cries for help (7:1-2) and flees to the Temple where he claims to be innocent of any wrongdoing (7:3-5). He calls upon God to clear his name and destroy his wicked enemies (7:6-11). There is no thought that the Lord might also love his enemy. Those who refuse to repent are to be judged and condemned. The "poetic justice" of God is as swift as the arrows of war and as deadly as a sword (7:12-16). In gratitude the Psalmist acknowledges his gratitude publicly in the Temple by means of a thank offering and song of praise.

Prayer for Deliverance (13:1-6)

In this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT, the Psalmist (David) gives his complaint special emotional force by using the four-fold "How Long?" (13:1-2) This "How Long?" cry is a cultic formula of lamentation which appears frequently in the Old Testament. The Psalmist however is not pessimistic about the Lord's "saving action" and his "readiness to save." Both qualities of the divine nature are derived from the Exodus faith of Israel and grounded in the "steadfast love" of the Lord.

This Lament follows the perfect pattern, which is threefold: (1) The appeal to the Lord (13:1-2), (2) the reason for the lamentation (13:3-4), and (3) the hymnic expression of confidence (13:5-6).

The Folly of the Godless (14:1-7)

This Psalm is almost identical with Psalm 53 and seems to be a variation of the typical INDIVIDUAL LAMENT. It bears the name of David. The fool who says there is no God is not a silly man, but one who lives a morally corrupt life. Such people do not deny God by intellectual arguments, but by their immoral lives. To this extent we are all fools, for all of us have strayed and none of us is good (14:3 and Romans 3:10-12).

The Psalm ends with a yearning for better times when deliverance will come out of Zion. Such deliverance does not come from the Messianic King, but from the Lord himself, who comes forth out of the Temple (Zion). Jacob and Israel—the two names for the founder of Israel—rejoice. Jacob's name was changed to Israel after his momentous encounter with God at Peniel (Genesis 32:28).

Prayer for Deliverance (17:1-15)

This is an INDIVIDUAL LAMENT, which bears the name of David, in which the Psalmist cries out for vindication from false accusers. It is filled with “self-justification” (17:1-5) and the desire for “vengeance” (17:13-14).

What we have here is a fugitive who comes to the Temple to present his case before the divine judge (God) and then spends the night waiting for a verdict.

The writer is confident that when morning comes, he will receive an answer directly from God. One can find an example of this in God speaking to Moses in the Tabernacle (Numbers 12:5-8). This would satisfy the Psalmist and establish his innocence.

Prayer for Deliverance (22:1-31)

Jesus quoted this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT of David's from the cross (Matthew 27:46 and Mark 15:34). The Psalm begins with radical despair (22:1-21) and ends with thanksgiving and praise (22:22-31).

The thought of his enemies, tearing at him like a pack of dogs and charging him with the fierceness of the wild bulls of Bashan (the grasslands of the northern part of the Transjordan) wore him down physically, but his reflections on how God has acted in the past give him hope.

Verses 16 and 18 give a description of how his enemies treat him when they believe him to be dead, but they also describe what happened when Jesus died on the cross. What is important about this Psalm and Jesus final cries on the cross is the final triumph expressed in verses 27-29 and Jesus' resurrection. In the end every knee will bow down to him and every tongue confess him as Lord (Philippians 2:9-11).

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of these Psalms makes the best Individual Lament?
2. Which of these Psalms is your favorite?
3. Name your favorite passage from the Psalms in this lesson!

COMPARE THE PSALMS WITH THE FOLLOWING HYMNS

1. Psalms 4 and 5 and Hymn 473, "Lead Me Lord."
2. Psalm 17 with Hymn 479, "Jesus, Lover of My Soul."

PSALMS

15. Individual Laments II

*In you, O LORD, I seek refuge;
do not let me ever be put to shame;
in your righteousness deliver me.*

*Incline your ear to me; rescue me speedily.
Be a rock of refuge for me, a strong fortress to save me.*

*You are indeed my rock and my fortress;
for your name's sake lead me and guide me,
take me out of the net that is hidden for me,
for you are my refuge.*

*Into your hand I commit my spirit;
you have redeemed me, O LORD, faithful God.*

Psalm 31:1-5

Psalms 25-26, 28, 31, 35, 38-39, 41

15. INDIVIDUAL LAMENTS II

Psalms 25-26, 28, 31, 35, 38-39, 41

ASSIGNMENTS			
Psalms 25-26	Psalms 28, 31	Psalms 35, 38	Psalms 39, 41

Prayer for Deliverance (25:1-22)

This INDIVIDUAL LAMENT of David's is in an acrostic form, which means that every successive verse begins with another letter of the Hebrew alphabet. Although there is no clear logical structure, most of the elements of the typical lament are present, such as: the cry for help (25:1-3), the Psalmist's situation (25:18-19), the claim of innocence (25:21), the expression of trust (25:8-15), and the prayer for vindication (25:16-20). Verse 22 was added to make the Psalm more personal for congregational use.

Prayer for Deliverance (26:1-12)

In this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT of David's the Psalmist asks God to declare him not guilty of the charges made against him by his enemies (26:1-2). He takes an oath of innocence (26:3-5), performs an appropriate ritual (26:6-7), renews his prayer for vindication (26:8-11), and affirms his confidence (26:12).

The Psalmist prays for vindication on the grounds that his inner life (26:2) will pass the test of the Lord's searching examination during a night in the Temple. While in the Temple he washed his hands (an ancient means of declaring one's innocence) and joins in a solemn procession around the altar singing of God's mighty acts in his own—and in Israel's—history.

Prayer for Deliverance (28:1-9)

This INDIVIDUAL LAMENT of David's has its setting in the Temple. God is referred to as a Rock (See Psalm 18:1-3), and the Psalmist fears the pit (Sheol) if he receives no answer to his prayer for deliverance (28:1). The Psalmist lifts up his hands in a religious gesture in the innermost room of the sanctuary (Holy of Holies) as he cries out for the punishment of those who are the cause of his trouble. After a priest or temple prophet delivers words of assurance to him, he responds with gratitude and praise.

Prayer for Deliverance (31:1-24)

This INDIVIDUAL LAMENT of David's consists of two parts in parallel form with each other, both containing the principal elements of a lament.

In the first part (31:1-8) we find the cry for help (31:1-5), the Psalmist's situation (31:4), a claim of innocence (31:6), and the grateful recognition of God's help (31:7-8). The "net" referred to in verse 4 means "hidden peril" which strikes without warning. The "broad place" means salvation, which delivers one from such peril. In verse 5 we find the dying words of Jesus (Luke 23:46): "Into Thy hands I commit my Spirit..."

In the second part (31:9-24), we find the cry for help (31:9), the Psalmist's situation (31:10-13), an expression of confidence (31:14, and 19-20), a prayer for vindication (31:15-18), and the grateful recognition of God's help (31:21-24).

Prayer for Deliverance (35:1-28)

There are elements of several INDIVIDUAL LAMENTS in this Psalm of David's. They make up a cry for vindication and vengeance. It is the Psalm of a hunted man, who cries out for vindication from the destruction of his enemies. It is filled with hunting imagery as can be seen from the mention of pursuers, weapons, net and pit, and the reference to the enemies as "wild beasts."

John Wesley interpreted Psalm 35:10 to mean that, God sides with the poor and the oppressed. This led Wesley to emphasize the importance of the Acts of Mercy in his teachings on Christian Perfection and Perfect Love. Acts of Mercy always have priority over Acts of Piety.

The angel is a warrior from the Lord's heavenly army sent to drive the enemies away like chaff from the threshing floor. The Psalmist demands that God do something, after which he promises to praise him. The morality in this Psalm is questionable by New Testament standards.

Prayer for Individual Forgiveness (38:1-22)

The Psalmist (David) of this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT understands his physical sickness and mental anguish as punishment for sin, which also alienates him from himself and his friends. Disease and sickness were considered arrows from demons or deities. All he can do is to confess his sin with bitter regret and cry out to God for healing and forgiveness.

Confession of Suffering (39:1-13)

In this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT the Psalmist, named as David, confesses that his suffering is the result of his sin, but he fears complaining publicly, lest he give encouragement to the wicked, who deny God's concern for goodness and justice. Not being able to contain himself any longer, he cries out to God in private. He cries out for

forgiveness and healing. If neither can be his, he prays for deliverance from the consequences of his sins. In his concluding prayer he prays not for the presence of God, but for God's absence so that he can enjoy a brief period of happiness before he is finally cut off by death. When one has sinned, God's presence becomes a menace because it signals judgment.

Prayer for Healing (41:1-13)

In this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT the Psalmist (David) begins with a beatitude (41:1-3), which gives a reason why he should be healed from his suffering. The reason is his concern for the helpless and the needy. This kind of concern is supposed to result in salvation, protection from illness, and deliverance from one's enemies. Because he has sinned, the Psalmist prays for forgiveness and healing (41:4-10).

At such a time as this even his closest friend has considered him cursed by God, and so the Psalmist prays for recovery so that he can take out revenge on his enemies, and perhaps on the friend who betrayed him. Having endured under trial he is finally granted healing and deliverance. This enables him to enter the Temple again where he can enjoy a life of continuous fellowship with God (41:11-12).

A Doxology ends the first Book of Psalms at this point (41:13). Compare this verse with those found in 72:18-20; 89:52; and 106:48. The Book of Psalms is divided into five parts in imitation of the Pentateuch.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of these Psalms makes the best Individual Lament?
2. Which of these Psalms do you like the best?
3. Name your favorite passage from the Psalms in this lesson!

COMPARE THE PSALMS WITH THE FOLLOWING HYMNS

1. Psalm 28:7 with Hymn 652, "Canticle of Remembrance."
2. Psalm 31:5 with Luke 23:46!

PSALMS

16. Individual Laments III

*Create in me a clean heart, O God,
and put a new and right spirit within me.
Do not cast me away from your presence,
and do not take your holy spirit from me.
Restore to me the joy of your salvation,
and sustain in me a willing spirit.*

Psalm 51:10-12

Psalms 42-43, 51-57

16. INDIVIDUAL LAMENTS III

Psalms 42-43, 51-57

ASSIGNMENTS			
Psalms 42-43	Psalms 51, 52	Psalms 52-54	Psalms 55-57

Prayer for Healing (42:1—43:5)

Maskil is used in 12 Psalms and probably indicates that some special kind of music is to accompany the reading or singing of the Psalm, or that the Psalm is to be sung at a special or annual festival.

Chapters 42 and 43 make up an INDIVIDUAL LAMENT, in which there are three stanzas, each followed with a refrain. The refrains are the same (42:5, 11; and 43:5).

The author of the Lament lives in the far North at Mount Mizar, an unidentified peak, near Mount Hermon. Surrounded by godless men who mock his faith (42:3, 10; and 43:1-2), he longs to make a pilgrimage to Jerusalem (42:4; 43:3-4). Illness not only prevents him from going (42:10), it is also symbolic of disfavor with God. In spite of this, he longs for God's presence as a deer longs for a drink of cool water (42:1-2).

Prayer for Forgiveness (51:1-19)

This INDIVIDUAL LAMENT can be linked to Nathan's confrontation with David following the latter's adultery with Bathsheba and his arrangement of Uriah's death (2 Samuel 12). God's "mercy" and "steadfast love" make forgiveness possible, but four things are still necessary from those who seek it.

1. Recognize that sin has gained complete control. (51:3)
2. Acknowledge that the sin is against God. (51:4)
3. Accept full responsibility for sin. (51:4)
4. Abandon all claims to merit or good work that earns forgiveness. (51:5 and 7)

Forgiveness cannot be gained through sacrifice, but only through a broken spirit and a contrite heart (51:16-17). In an attempt to tone down the anti-sacrificial spirit of this Psalm, an enthusiastic advocate of sacrifice, who dreamed of the time when the Temple would be rebuilt and the sacrificial system restored, added verses 18-19. This was probably done during the Exile.

God's Judgment and Grace (52:1-19)

The occasion of this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT is Doeg's betrayal of David (1 Samuel 22). This Psalm might be a formula for the expulsion of an offender from the covenant community. The "Mighty Man" is one who is so steeped in evil that all his values are reversed. He takes pride in oppression (52:1), loves vicious deeds and lying words (52:2- 4), and trusts in his possessions (52:7). His total destruction is predicted in a prophetic manner and he is to be expelled from the religious community. *Tent* might mean "temple" or simply "household." Psalm 51:10 inspired Charles Wesley to write the hymn, "Oh for a Heart to Praise my God.

Having condemned the offender, the Psalmist concludes with assurance of God's grace for himself. He is like a green olive tree in the house of God. The olive tree, because of its fruitfulness and hardiness, symbolizes the flourishing condition of those who trust in God and hate evil.

The Fate of the Wicked (53:1-7)

This INDIVIDUAL LAMENT is almost identical to Psalm 14. The big difference is that in Psalm 14 the divine name is Yahweh (the Lord) and here it is Elohim (God). In this version the author draws more upon the holy war concept of a God of terror, who will scatter the bones of the wicked. To scatter someone's bones is to destroy the most permanent part of the body; hence, the wicked will be completely destroyed.

Prayer for Deliverance (54:1-7)

According to the title this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT is David's appeal to God after the Ziphites betrayed his position to Saul (1 Samuel 23:19ff). Due to his confidence in God's help, he offers a "freewill offering." A freewill offering is one not prescribed by law. It is presented voluntarily as an act of gratitude. David's memory of past deliverances makes him confident of God's present help.

Prayer for Deliverance (55:1-23)

The content of this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT fits into the time of Absalom's rebellion, when Ahithophel, David's most trusted adviser, defaulted. Full of conflicting emotions, the Psalmist trusts in God. Friends may be faithless, but not God.

Prayer for Deliverance (56:1-13)

This INDIVIDUAL LAMENT has a title that refers to an incident described in 1 Samuel 21:10-15. *Terebinths* are large common trees. *Miktam* is a word that has to do with "covering" and refers to that category of Psalms that talk about the "covering of sin" or "expiation." The cry for identification of the enemy as the people (56:7) indicates that the original speaker was the King. The King affirms that God is for him, and for that reason, he does not have to fear what his enemies might do to him.

Prayer for Deliverance (57:1-11)

Traditionally this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT belongs to the time when David was in hiding from Saul (1 Samuel 22:1; 24:1ff). Its message is that no matter how dark things may appear, those who fill their minds with God can sing his praise under any circumstances. The new day can be greeted with music, song, and sacrifice, which will be heard all over the earth. These verses are almost identical with those found in Psalm 108:1-5.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of these Psalms makes the best individual Lament?
2. Which of these Psalms do you like the best?
3. Name your favorite passage from the Psalms in this lesson!

COMPARE THE PSALMS WITH THE FOLLOWING HYMNS

1. Psalm 51:10 with Prayer 353 “Ash Wednesday,” with Hymn 417 “O For a Heart to praise my God,” and Hymn 502 “Thy Holy Wings, O Savior.”
2. Psalm 55:22 with Hymn 142 “If Thou But Suffer God to Guide Thee,;

PSALMS

17. Individual Laments IV

*Hear my cry, O God;
listen to my prayer.
From the end of the earth I call to you,
when my heart is faint.
Lead me to the rock
that is higher than I;
for you are my refuge,
a strong tower against the enemy.*

Psalm 61:1-3

Psalms 59, 61, 64, 69-71, 86, 88, 94

17. INDIVIDUAL LAMENTS IV

Psalms 59, 61, 64, 69-71, 86, 88, 94

ASSIGNMENTS				
Psalms 59, 61	Psalms 64, 69	Psalms 70-71	Psalms 86, 88	Psalm 94

Prayer for Deliverance (59:1-17)

The title of this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT refers to a situation in 1 Samuel 19:11-17. The person offering the prayer in very personal terms is the King, and the place where he is praying is probably the Temple.

The Lord of all the nations is also the God of Israel or Jacob, and he is described in military terms such as strength, fortress, and shield (59:9, 11, and 17).

Prayer for Protection (61:1-8)

This is the INDIVIDUAL LAMENT of a prisoner of war far from the Temple. He longs to get to the Temple (Rock), but he cannot do so under his own power (61:2). Since he assumes that a King reigns in Jerusalem, this Psalm was written before the Exile. As a prisoner he yearns for the Temple and God's protection from his enemies.

Prayer for Deliverance (64:1-10)

In this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT the Psalmist complains and describes his particular situation and difficulty (64:1-6). He expresses confidence in verses 7-9 that God will punish all who have plotted against him. God's "arrow" (64:7) symbolizes sickness, which is God's way of punishing the sinner (See 38:2 and Job 6:4 and Job 16:12-13). Because of God's justice and judgment, the righteous will have cause to rejoice and praise God.

Prayer for Deliverance (69:1-36)

This INDIVIDUAL LAMENT alternates between prayer and lamentation. The author sees the main causes of his misery and suffering as his zeal for God and the Temple (69:7 & 9). Verse 9 has been quoted in John 2:17 and Romans 15:3. In the midst of his plight the Psalmist calls upon God for help on the basis of God's "steadfast love" and his "abundant mercy" (69:16). He laments that those from whom he expected comfort and

help he received heart-breaking insults and poison for food (69:21). Verse 21 has been compared to Jesus receiving vinegar on the cross in every Gospel (Matthew 27:34, 48; Mark 15:36; Luke 23:36; and John 19:29). In response the Psalmist prays for vengeance on his enemies, something that Jesus does not do from the cross.

The concluding call for universal praise was probably added during the Exile by someone who saw in the Psalmist's plight a parallel to the suffering of the Jews in Babylon. The Psalm was used as a prayer for the restoration of Zion (Jerusalem and the Temple) and Judah to its rightful place (69:34-36).

Prayer for Deliverance (70:1-5)

This INDIVIDUAL LAMENT is practically identical with Psalm 40:13-17. It is a plea for help and deliverance from one's personal enemies.

Prayer of an Old Man (71:1-24)

In this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT the Psalmist prays for deliverance from his enemies and places his trust in God. Nothing can make him despair as long as God is with him. The future is full of hope. In gratitude for God's help the Psalmist promises to testify publicly concerning God's deeds of salvation in Israel's history and in his own personal experience (71:15-19a). He also vows to use his musical gifts to celebrate God's saving act with instruments (harp and lyre) and voice so that future generations will know about God and his activity in history (71:22-24).

Prayer for Deliverance (86:1-17)

This is an INDIVIDUAL LAMENT in which the Psalmist comes to the Temple to pray for deliverance from his enemies, but ends up praising God and promising to do so forever. It is because he knows God, his steadfast love and power that he is confident that God cares and will help him. Therefore he puts his trust in God to deliver him from his godless enemies.

Prayer for Healing (88:1-18)

This is an INDIVIDUAL LAMENT in which the writer has experienced nothing but illness from his youth up. It is one of the, if not the darkest of all the Psalms. In addition to the illness, the writer experiences the deepest possible depression. He cries out for help, which never comes; nevertheless, his faith lives on. To whom else could he call out? This does not mean that he has any hope for healing or deliverance. He still sees himself doomed to the Pit or Abaddon (destruction), and forsaken by his friends.

The Pit and Abaddon are additional names for Sheol. This person's condition seems very similar to Job's, but Job finally finds the presence of God. Things do not seem to turn out for this writer. He remains in his state of depression and despair.

Prayer for Deliverance (94:1-23)

This Psalm is an INDIVIDUAL LAMENT, but because it has described the problem in such general terms, it was easily adapted for congregational use. The Psalmist calls upon God for vengeance and judgment against the wicked, and then he expresses confidence that God will pour out his steadfast love and blessings upon his afflicted and oppressed people.

John Wesley heard coming out of Psalm 94:16 a call to form Christian Societies, which would promote righteous behavior and stand against wickedness and injustice.¹

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of these Psalms makes the best individual lament?
2. Which of these Psalms do you like best?
3. Name your favorite passage from the Psalms in this lesson!

COMPARE PSALM 61 WITH THE FOLLOWING HYMN

Psalm 61 with Hymn 523, “Suranam, Suranam”

¹ Sermon 52.

PSALMS

18. Individual Laments V

*Where can I go from your Spirit?
Or where can I flee from your presence?
If I ascend to Heaven, you art there;
if I make my bed in Sheol, you are there.
If I take the wings of the morning
and settle at the farthest limits of the sea,
even there your hand shall lead me
and your right hand shall hold me fast.
If I say, "Surely the darkness shall cover me,
and the light around me become night,"
even the darkness is not dark to you;
the night is as bright as the day,
for darkness is as light to you.*

Psalm 139:7-12

**Psalms 102, 109, 120, 130, 139, 140, 141,
142, 143**

18. INDIVIDUAL LAMENTS V

Psalms 102, 109, 120, 130, 139-143

ASSIGNMENTS				
Psalms 102 and 109	Psalms 120 and 130	Psalm 139	Psalms 140-141	Psalm 142-143

Prayer for Healing and Deliverance (102:1-28)

In this INDIVIDUAL (and National) LAMENT the Psalmist expresses his agony over having been stricken in the prime of life with illness (102:1-11 and 23-24).

In the second half of the Psalm (102:12-28) two prophecies are given along with an introductory hymn to each one. The first hymn can be found in verse 12 with the prophecy in verses 13-22. The prophecy has to do with God's hearing the groaning of his people in Exile and promising to build up Zion or to restore the nation. In the Psalmist's mind his personal suffering and salvation are bound up with the suffering and salvation of the nation. In such a prophetic vision he announces that the time of deliverance has come. The people in exile, no longer rebellious, yearn for Jerusalem and mourn over her ruins. Having heard the groans of the people, God promises to save them from national death and calls them and all nations to live under his righteous rule.

The second hymn can be found in verses 25-27 with the prophecy found in verse 28. In this prophecy the posterity of the people is assured.

Both prophecies have been concerned with the coming of God as King and the two hymns have an emphasis on enthronement, and in this sense, they are similar to the enthronement Psalms (95-97).

Prayer for Deliverance (109:1-31)

In the first part of the Psalm (109:1-5), the Psalmist offers an INDIVIDUAL LAMENT because his enemies have accused him falsely. Although he has responded with prayer and love, they have cursed him.

In the second part of the Psalm (109:6-19), we find the description of a curse. A curse was considered a very potent means of attacking one's enemy. In the curse, one might obtain a statue of the enemy along with some cuttings of his hair or nails. Over these objects one

would recite a magical formula. It was believed that words brought the curse to reality. Is the curse, described in these verses, a counter-curse of the Psalmist against his enemies, or is he merely describing the curse of his enemies against him to God? It is difficult to know for sure.

The Psalmist does not believe that a counter-curse would be effective apart from God's help; hence, in 109:20-29, he prays that his enemy's curses recoil on their heads. He wants God to cancel their curse and replace it with a blessing (109:27-29).

The Psalm closes with a vow to praise the Lord for his help in dealing with this unfair curse (109:30-31).

Prayer for Individual Deliverance (120:1-7)

This first Psalm of Ascents is an INDIVIDUAL LAMENT written by a pilgrim ascending towards the Temple. He is praying for deliverance from enemies who cause his distress. Lying lips and a deceitful tongue are the cause of the Psalmist's distress. These things injure him as much as the arrows shot by a soldier and the hot, long-burning fire produced by the wood of the broom tree. Arrows were the deadliest weapons of war shot by the professional soldier, and the wood of the broom tree burned the hottest and longest of all wood. The difficulty for the Psalmist is that his own people are the enemies of peace. They are members of the covenant community and should be living at peace with him and one another. Instead they behave like the rough mountaineers of Meschec (a place between the Black and Caspian Seas) and the wild tribesmen of Kedar (in the Syrian Desert). When the Psalmist tries to be reconciled with them, they simply redouble their attacks on him. That is why he prays for deliverance as he makes his pilgrimage to the Temple in Jerusalem.

Prayer for Deliverance (130:1-8)

In the INDIVIDUAL LAMENT, which is one of the seven penitential Psalms (32, 38, 51, 102, 130, and 143), the Psalmist confesses his sins and calls upon God for deliverance. Morning is mentioned because it was the traditional time when the people expected God to reveal his salvation. (See Psalm 59:16) In addition to confessing his own sin, the Psalmist recognizes how similar the situation is with the nation; and so like Isaiah (Isaiah 6:5), he identifies with the sinful nation, which he calls upon to join him in penitence. The call is not only to penitence, but to a confident hope in the Lord's steadfast (saving) love and power.

On May 24, 1738, John Wesley wrote about listening to the choir sing this Psalm in St. Paul's Cathedral. This occurred just hours before he felt his heart strangely warmed at a religious society meeting on Aldersgate Street in London. Like the Psalmist, Wesley called upon God, and God answered him.

The Ever Present God (139:1-24)

In this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT the Psalmist appeals to the Lord on the basis of his presence and power to forgive and save him. That God should be in Sheol is a new thought and one that was frequently denied. (See Psalm 115:17.) Even darkness has no reality for the God whose very presence is Light. That people should defy the God who knows everything and whose presence is everywhere fills the Psalmist with contempt and hatred for such people; and yet, he fears that there might be some unrecognized and undetected wicked way lurking in himself. He prays that God will expose it, eradicate it, and lead him in the way of peace everlasting.

Prayer for Deliverance (140:1-13)

In this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT the Psalmist finds himself in trouble due to the plotting of violent people with venomous tongues. He prays that God will guard him (140:1-8) and punish them (140:9-11). He ends with an expression of confidence that God is for the righteous and opposed to evil (140:12-13). In calling for the “coals of fire” the Psalmist draws upon the imagery of the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah in Genesis 19:24, but this same imagery was used in reverse in Proverbs 25:21-22 and Romans 12:20. In these latter verses, loving one’s enemies was like heaping “coals of fire” on their heads.

Prayer for Deliverance (141:1-10)

This is an INDIVIDUAL LAMENT offered on the occasion of the evening sacrifice of grain and frankincense (Leviticus 2:1). In his prayer the Psalmist holds his hands out with palms turned upward, which was an ancient gesture of supplication. He asks that his prayer itself be considered a sacrifice. In this request we see the beginning of the spiritualization of the sacrificial system (141:2).

The Psalmist is crying for deliverance from temptation. Many Israelites have renounced their allegiance to the Lord and have gone on to prosper. They are friendly to the Psalmist, and they invite him to their feasts (141:4), and offer to anoint him with oil as one of their honored guests (141:5). He fears that such an association will lead him to some corrupt word, thought or deed; and so he prays for divine deliverance from such temptations. He would rather take harsh discipline from a good person than hospitality from a person who has wandered away from the covenant with God.

Prayer for Deliverance (142:1-7)

The title of this INDIVIDUAL LAMENT links the Psalm with the time when David was on the run and in hiding from Saul. (See 1 Samuel 23:19ff.) As the Psalmist calls out for deliverance, he notices that only his enemies surround him, and that there is no sign of any human deliverer. On such an occasion he relies completely upon the Lord; hence, a note of confidence breaks through in the final verse of the Psalm.

Prayer for Deliverance (143:1-12)

This INDIVIDUAL LAMENT is the last of the penitential Psalms. Feeling persecuted by vicious enemies the Psalmist seeks deliverance, vindication, and vengeance from the Lord. He recognizes that he cannot base his appeal on his own personal innocence, for no human being can stand as righteous before God. His cry for help expresses his own feelings of alienation from God in the same way that Psalm 22:1-21 does. The “Pit” refers to the underworld. The conclusion of the prayer appeals to God’s steadfast love and sense of justice to preserve the Psalmist’s life and to destroy his enemies. Why? Because the Psalmist serves God and his enemies do not.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of these Psalms makes the best individual Lament?
2. Which of these Psalms do you like the best?
3. Name your favorite passage from the Psalms in this lesson!

COMPARE THE PSALMS WITH THE FOLLOWING HYMNS

1. Psalms 120 and 130 Hymns 515 “Out of the Depths I Cry to You: and 516 “Canticle of Redemption.”
2. Psalm 139 with Hymn 205 “Canticle of Light and Darkness.”
3. Psalm 141 with Hymn 498 “My Prayer Rises to Heaven.”

PSALMS

19. Wisdom Psalms

*Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked,
or take the path that sinners tread,
or sit in the seat of scoffers;
but their delight is in the law of the LORD,
and on his law they meditate day and night.*

Psalm 1:1-2

Psalms 1, 37, 49, 73, 91, 127-128, 133

19. WISDOM PSALMS

Psalms 1, 37, 49, 73, 91, 112, 127-128, 133

ASSIGNMENTS			
Psalms 1, 37	Psalms 49, 73	Psalms 91, 112	Psalms 127-128, 133

The Righteous and the Wicked (1:1-6)

The first Psalm belongs to the WISDOM PSALMS, and was written after the reform of Ezra (400 B.C.E.). It is an introduction to the entire Psalter. There are two strophes. A strophe is a rhythmic system composed of two or more lines repeated as a unit. Verses 1-3 describe the state of the righteous person who finds true happiness in the Law of the Lord. To meditate on the Law literally means to mumble or utter its words under one's breath. Compare the imagery found here with that of Jeremiah 17:7-8.

The second strophe is found in verses 4-6 and describes the fate of the wicked person, who is not even allowed in the congregation of the righteous. The righteous person is blessed, but the wicked is blown away and destroyed like chaff in the wind. John Wesley understood righteousness in terms of the process of sanctification, right relationships (holiness).

The Destiny of the Wicked (37:1-40)

This is a WISDOM PSALM, which is in acrostic form. It bears David's name on it. The Psalm expresses the main teaching of Israel's wisdom teachers, that the righteous will be rewarded with long life and prosperity, and the wicked will be destroyed. The righteous may have to exercise patience, for this is the way God most certainly acts. The righteous should never envy the wicked, for things are not as they may seem, and the wicked are in a far from enviable position. Their time will soon run out. The righteous should go on doing good, being patient, and trusting in God.

The Foolishness of Trusting in Wealth (49:1-20)

In this WISDOM PSALM the universal problem of the prosperity of the wicked and the exploitation of the weak is raised. How can we trust in a God who allows such a situation to exist? The answer given is that even the wealthy cannot escape death, nor can we redeem ourselves from Sheol with money. Death is the great equalizer, from which no

one can escape. The message here is the same as that found in Jesus' "Parable of the Rich Fool" (Luke 12:16-21).

The Justice of God (73:1-28)

In this WISDOM PSALM the lesson is the same as that found in the Book of Job. How can God be just when there is so much injustice in this world? Verse 1 is both the Psalmist's confession of faith and a thesis to be debated. Verses 2-6 describe the Psalmist's experiences and the reasons for his initial doubt. He nearly lost his faith in God's justice as he saw the wicked prospering and getting away with their evil deeds. "It is very common for these," says John Wesley, "to live as if they were never to die, as if their present state would last for ever.... But how miserable a mistake is this."¹

The Psalmist's own efforts towards righteousness only seemed to bring suffering. If the wicked were not punished, he thought, then why be good? This was his temptation, but he feared the kind of influence this would have on younger generations coming up. Verses 17-28 provide him with two answers to his question about the justice of God as he seeks a satisfying answer in the Temple. The first answer is described in verses 17-22. The prosperity of the wicked is only temporary. The second answer is described in verses 23-28. The righteous experience the nearness of God, something the wicked can never enjoy. Job gives similar answers to the problem of evil.

Meditation on God (91:1-16)

This WISDOM PSALM was spoken by a temple priest or prophet and was used to instruct the congregation in God's delivering power.

Verses 1-13 are words of encouragement about God and verses 14-16 are words from God himself. Both are spoken to the person of faith. To be under God's shadow and under the protection of his wings is to be in the safety and security of the Temple. This was given in contrast to those who trusted in magical incantations and spells for safety and security. The Psalmist trusts in and encourages us to trust in God. Life may not be a bed of roses, but under God's protection, nothing can really harm us.

Satan used verses 11-12 against Jesus, but Jesus refused to test God (Matthew 4:6-7 and Luke 4:10-12). Whether the forces are human or demonic, they cannot ultimately injure us. Those who trust in the Lord need not fear any peril, for they will enjoy a three-fold salvation: DELIVERANCE, HONOR, and LONG LIFE.

The Righteous and the Wicked. (112:1-10)

This WISDOM PSALM is an acrostic Psalm in the same sense as Psalm 111, but in content, it is the same as Psalm 1. It is primarily concerned with rewards for the righteous

¹ John Wesley, "Human Life a Dream," *Sermon 124* ¶ 1.

and punishment for the wicked. Rewards are described in material terms because there is no clear concept of the afterlife in the Old Testament. Although the Psalmist contrasts the fate of the righteous and the wicked, he gives much more time to the rewards of the righteous (112:1-9) than he does to the punishment of the wicked (112:10).

In verse 9, the righteous person is praised for being concerned with the poor, which is also God's concern. The word *horn* in this verse means, "power." Righteousness will last forever. It has an internal power of its own that is to be lifted up and exalted.

Wisdom Concerning Home and Children (127:1-5)

Here we find two independent Proverbs brought together, probably for use at the birth of a son. This combination of two Proverbs can be called a WISDOM PSALM. In the first Proverb (127:1-2) we are told that no one can build a home or city without the help of the Lord. All such efforts will end in failure. With the Lord in the driver's seat, there is no need to be anxious. (See Matthew 6:25-34.)

The second Proverb has to do with a special gift from God, which was a son. Through the son, the father's name and memory are kept alive. Sons are like the arrows for the professional soldier. They protect the father. It is best to go into battle with a whole quiver full. The elders of many cities, were frequently corrupt, and had the task of settling legal matters at the city gates; but few of them would ever rig a case against a man with several stalwart sons; hence a man with many sons was well equipped and properly armed for anything.

A Priestly Blessing (128:1-6)

In this WISDOM PSALM we find a priestly blessing for pilgrims arriving at the Temple in Jerusalem. The theological basis for the content of the Psalm is the Old Testament idea that righteousness brings material reward. At least two promises are made to those who live obediently to the revealed will of God in the Law. The first is that there will be many children in the family. Verse 3 describes it in terms of the wife being like a fruitful vine and the children being numerous like olive shoots around the table. The second promise is that there will be much prosperity.

The relationship between righteousness and material reward cannot simply be individualized. Prosperity also depends upon the wellbeing of the community. It is the God who resides in Zion who fulfills these two promises. A prosperous Jerusalem is a symbol of the righteousness of the whole nation. In addition to many children and prosperity, there will also be peace.

The Unity of Brothers (133:1-3)

In this WISDOM PSALM the Psalmist combats a practice, which threatened to destroy the traditional structure of Israelite society. Commerce and urbanization were causing young men to sell their shares of their inheritance so that they could go off on their own.

The Psalmist thinks that it would be better for brothers, following the death of their father, to dwell together. This would maintain the unity of the family's inheritance and keep it intact in the Holy Land. In fact the Psalmist believes that because this is the will of God, it will bring God's blessing, and make for vigor and continued life for the society. It has nothing to do with eternal life of the individual.

Two images are used to support the old tradition of keeping the inheritance together. The first is that of the anointing of the priest with oil (Exodus 29:7). The oil is described as running down the hair and head of the high priest. This was a symbol of God's favor and blessing. The second image has to do with the dew, which gathered on the slopes of Mount Hermon. Mount Hermon had an exceptionally heavy dewfall, which caused greater fertility in the area around it. This is compared to what the Psalmist hoped would happen on the slopes of Mount Zion.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of these Psalms makes the best case for wisdom?
2. Which of these Psalms do you like best?
3. Name your favorite passage from the Psalms in this lesson!

COMPARE THE PSALMS WITH THE FOLLOWING HYMNS

1. Psalm 37 with Hymns 464 "I Will Trust in the Lord" and 129 "Give to the Winds Thy Fears."
2. Psalms 73 and 91 with Hymn 502 "Thy Holy Wings, O Savior."
3. Psalm 127 with Hymn 646 "Canticle of Love."

PSALMS

20. Mixed and Unclassified Psalms

*Oh, how I love your law!
It is my meditation all day long.
Your commandment makes me wiser than my enemies,
for it is always with me.
Your word is a lamp to my feet
and a light to my path.*

Psalm 119:97-98 and 105

**Psalms 9-10, 27, 36, 77, 95, 207, 135-136,
119 and 151**

20. MIXED AND UNCLASSIFIED PSALMS

Psalms 9-10, 27, 36, 40, 77, 95, 107, 135-136 and 78, 119, 151

ASSIGNMENTS						
Psalms 9-10	Psalms 27, 36	Psalms 40, 77	Psalms 95, 107	Psalms 135-136	Psalms 78, 151	Psalm 119

MIXED

Prayer for Justice (9:1—10:18)

Chapters 9-10 both make up a LAMENT, which is one Psalm in the Septuagint (Greek Version), and they bear the name of David as their author. They make up what is known as an Acrostic poem, which means that every second verse begins with a different but successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, although the pattern is somewhat disturbed and imperfect in these two chapters.

Part of the poem is a THANKSGIVING hymn (9:1-12), but the rest of it is an INDIVIDUAL LAMENT (9:13—10:18). The hymn can be seen as an extended invocation, which introduces the lament. The wonderful deeds of the Lord's are his acts of judgment, which represent his perfect justice. "Daughter of Zion" (9:14) is a poetic personification of Jerusalem, which stands in God's favor. The "I" in the Psalm may be the King speaking as the representative of the Nation. Although the poor are afflicted (9:18) and the wicked prosper (10:5a), the situation will change. The wicked are persons who deny not God's existence, but God's control over the world (10:6,13). They contend that God cannot, or will not, take action against them. The Psalmist, in contrast to that, recognizes in them the attitude of self-deification. Forgetting their humanity, they behave as if they were God. The Psalm expresses faith that God, who is King (10:16), will oppose the powerful and aid the helpless and oppressed (10:17-18).

"Selah" is an instruction calling worshippers to lift up their voices or instruments in refrain, or interlude; and "higgaion," like "selah," calls for music. In some cases it calls for the sound of stringed instruments.

Prayer for Deliverance (27:1-14)

Most scholars consider this Psalm to be both a SONG OF TRUST (27:1-6) and an INDIVIDUAL LAMENT (27:7-14), although some view the Psalm as a unity describing

the experience of a fugitive seeking refuge in the Temple. While beset by his enemies, who are still some distance from him, he enters the Temple, sings of his confidence in the Lord, pours out his traditional lament, and receives an encouraging answer from the priest or cult prophet (27:14).

Human Evil and Divine Love (36:1-12)

There are elements of the WISDOM PSALM and the LAMENT in this Psalm; but since the last section seems to determine the character of the whole, we might call it a LITURGY OF LAMENT. It opens with a description of the wicked, who has no reverence for God, nor do they fear judgment, and who consequently devotes himself to mischief and deceit (36:1-4). The divine character is contrasted as being loving, faithful, and good. The steadfast love of God rules the universe, and anyone may find shelter in his wings and abundant spiritual nourishment. The imagery of the Temple is used at this point. The writer has in mind the outspread wings of the cherubim over the ark (36:7) and the abundant food and drink of the sacrificial meals (36:8). (36:5-9) The Psalm concludes with a personal prayer of the Psalmist that he might remain within the grace of God (36:10-12).

Thanksgiving for Deliverance (40:1-17)

This Psalm of David's contains both a SONG OF THANKSGIVING and a LAMENT. They have been combined together to form a LITURGY. Rather than to offer a formal sacrifice of thanksgiving the Psalmist pledges to do God's will. (See Amos 5:21 and Hosea 6:6)

The only sacrifice acceptable to God is the worshipper. All other sacrifices are secondary and nonessential. A person willing to give *self* as a sacrifice will find good news in the law, which is no longer a burden but guidance to the one who wants to do God's will.

In the Lament the Psalmist asks that joy reside only where it properly belongs—in the community of the faithful worshippers of the Lord. Most of this Lament can also be found in another Psalm. (Compare 40:13-17 with Psalm 70:1-5.)

Prayer for Deliverance (77:1-20)

This LAMENT ends in a HYMN. The Psalmist questions God's reason for deserting his covenant people. The agony is so intense that he is tempted to question God's love and justice. He attempts to encourage himself by recalling God's mighty works from the past. In doing this he quotes fragments of an ancient hymn, which praises God for his work in creation (77:16-19) and in Israel's history (77:20).

Liturgy Celebrating God's Kingship (95:1-11)

This Psalm is a LITURGY or a HYMN. God as the Creator is not only to be worshiped, but also obeyed. This is one of the cardinal principles of Old Testament religion.

Verse 8 makes a reference to Meribah and Massah, the stories of which can be read in Exodus 17:1-7 and Numbers 20:1-13. What happened in these two places was grumbling about water. The writer seems to indicate that there was a lack of trust on the part of the people in the God who had led them out of slavery in Egypt. These stories were considered classic examples of the people's rebellion. While they eventually received water from God as a result of their grumbling, they did not receive the greater blessing of entering Canaan or the Promised Land, which is described in verse 11 as "Rest."

Thanksgiving and Steadfast Love (107:1-43)

The Psalm is a LITURGY for Thanksgiving followed by a HYMN of Praise. Most scholars see two separate Psalms pieced together, with the first one including verses 1-32 and the second verses 33-43.

In the Liturgy the priest leads the congregation by calling on those who have had experiences of God's salvation to testify to his steadfast love. The occasion of the Psalm was probably the celebration of one of the feasts in Jerusalem. Four witnesses are named: (1) the traveler who came across the desert (107:4-9); (2) the captive set free from prison (107:10-16); (3) the sick man healed of illness (107:17-22); and (4) the traveler (sailor) saved from the storm (107:23-32).

In the Hymn of Praise, the Psalmist praises God for his bounty and steadfast love. Although the Psalm was not originally part of the liturgy, it does make a suitable conclusion.

Hymn of Praise (135:1-21)

This HYMN of Praise begins and ends with Hallelujah (Praise the Lord!). It opens first with a call to worship (135:1-4), and then moves on to praise God as the ultimate power over nature (135:5-7). The Lord, and not the pagan weather gods, gives the rain on which the fertility of Palestine depends; and it is the Lord who controls all of the activities of nature, whether for good or ill. No other power lies behind the natural phenomena that we experience. The Lord of nature is also the Lord of history (135:8-14), and has chosen Israel and led it into the Promised Land. It is the Lord who defeated Sihon and Og as Israel prepared to enter Canaan (Numbers 21). Since the Lord is independent of time, he will likewise deliver his people from their present troubles. Verses 8-12 are a condensation of Psalm 136:10-22.

Contemplation of the Lord's greatness leads the Psalmist to scorn the pagan duties (135:15-18), and to close the Psalm with a call to the priest and people to sing God's praise (135:19-21). The Levites (House of Levi) were the Temple singers and servants.

The Great Praise (Hallel) (136:1-26)

This HYMN was written in praise of God's steadfast love. There is in each verse a congregational response, which was a regular part of the Temple liturgy. In this response

we find the Hebrew word *hesed*, which is translated as “steadfast love.” The word needs further definition, for it is as rich as is the Greek word *Agape*, which is translated simply as “love” in the New Testament. The English in neither case is descriptive enough to fully explain the meaning of “divine love.”

The Psalm begins with a summons to give thanks (136:1-3), which is followed by the proclamation of the work of God in nature (136:4-9) and the work of God in Israel’s history (136:10-22). The latter section omits two important aspects of Israel’s history, the revelation of God at Sinai and the people’s rebellion in the wilderness. The final two sections have to do with a summing up (126:23-25), and a second call to give thanks (136:26). Hearing these deeds of the Lord recited at the covenant renewal festival, the worshippers saw them not as mere tradition from the remote past, but as events taking place in the living present. The Lord, they thought, remembered not only their forefathers, but them as well.

UNCLASSIFIED (78,119,151)

The Lesson of History (78:1-72)

This Psalm fits into none of the traditional categories. It unfolds with the style of the traditional wisdom teacher and its purpose is to explain why God forsook the tribe of Ephraim and chose the tribe of Judah. It begins by pointing out how God delivered his people from Egypt. “Zaan” in 78:12 is a royal Egyptian store city which is identical to Raamses. In delivering his people from Egyptian slavery, God gave plenty of signs. There is the miracle at the Sea, the pillars of cloud and fire, the water, manna and quail, and finally the conquest in Canaan. What more could they ask for, and yet they rebelled. Ephraim led the rebellion, which climaxed in idolatry and the destruction of the shrine at Shiloh. Ephraim had produced such a man as Joshua, but now it was totally corrupt. The Philistines even captured the ark. In response God rejected the tribe of Ephraim and chose Judah. In preference to Shechem, the new capitol was to be Jerusalem and Mount Zion. All the tension between the northern and southern kingdoms is described in this Psalm with Judah coming out on top. Israel is identified with Ephraim. Hence we see the schism developing between the Jews and the Samaritans.

In Praise of the Law (119:1-176)

The mood of this Psalm is a LAMENT. It is also an alphabetical acrostic poem in the same sense as Psalms 9-10; 25; 34; 37; 111-112; and 145. This Psalm is however the longest Psalm in the Bible. It consists of 22 sections, which are 8 verses long. Each section begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet, and each verse within that section begins with the same letter.

Every section consists of a series of individual statements about the Law interspersed with frequent prayers.

Different words are used to describe the Law, some of them being used with less frequency than others. The word “Law” means “guidance” or “instruction.” Precepts,

statutes, commandments, and ordinances refer to separate legal units. These separate units are commands in the strictest sense. “Testimonies” is a more general word signifying that the Law is God’s own witness of his will to his people. “Word” personalizes the Law and makes of it a dynamic utterance from God. “Way” has a similar connotation and refers to the Law’s guidance through the complex landscape of life. Two other words, “promises” and “judgments” carry a positive and negative dimension of the Law.

Below is just a guess at the frequency with which the above words have been used. You might like to count them up to see if this estimate is correct.

Word (27)	Precepts (21)
Law (25)	Ordinances (14)
Commandments (23)	Promises (9)
Testimonies (22)	Ways (3)
Statutes (22)	Judgments (3)

The 22 sections are as follows:

1 - 8	The Law of the Lord
9 - 16	Obedience in the Law of the Lord
17 - 24	Happiness in the Law of the Lord
25 - 32	Determination to obey the Law of the Lord
33 - 40	A Prayer for Understanding
41 - 48	Trusting the Law of the Lord
49 - 56	Confidence in the Law of the Lord
57 - 64	Devotion to the Law of the Lord
65 - 72	The Value of the Law of the Lord
73 - 80	The Justice of the Law of the Lord
81 - 88	A Prayer for Deliverance
89 - 96	Faith in the Law of the Lord
97 -104	Love for the Law of the Lord
105 -112	Light from the Law of the Lord
113 -120	Safety in the Law of the Lord
121 -128	Obedience to the Law of the Lord
129 -136	Desire to obey the Law of the Lord
137 -144	The Justice of the Law of the Lord
145 -152	A Prayer for Deliverance
153 -160	A Plea for Help
161 -168	Dedication to the Law of the Lord
169 -176	A Prayer for Help

Psalm 151

Psalm 151 is in most Greek manuscripts of the Psalter, but is not considered a part of the Protestant and Roman Catholic Scriptures. It was discovered among the Dead Sea Scrolls in Qumran Cave XI in 1956.

It is also present in two ancient manuscripts. In the **Codex Alexandrinus**, and most other Septuagint manuscripts, it appears as an appendix to the Psalter. It contains the simple heading, "Outside the Number." The Number is a reference to the traditional 150 Psalms. In the **Codex Sinaiticus**, one of the oldest, most reliable, and almost complete manuscript of the Septuagint, Psalm 151 is included as an integral part of the Psalter. There is a heading at the beginning of the Psalter, which reads: "The 151 Psalms of David."

There are both Hebrew and Greek Versions of the Psalm, and some think that the Greek Version is a combination of two separate Psalms from the Hebrew.

PSALM 151

[2] My hands made a harp, my fingers fashioned a lyre.

[3] And who will declare it to my Lord? The Lord himself; it is he who hears.

[4] It was he who sent his messenger and took me from my father's sheep, and anointed me with his anointing oil.

[5] My brothers were handsome and tall, but the Lord was not pleased with them.

[6] I went out to meet the Philistine, and he cursed me by his idols.

[7] But I drew his own sword; I beheaded him, and removed reproach from the people of Israel.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Which of these Psalms makes the best case for wisdom?
2. Which of these Psalms do you like best?
3. Name your favorite passage from the Psalms in this lesson!

COMPARE THE PSALMS WITH THE FOLLOWING HYMNS

1. Psalm 95 with Hymn 91 "Canticle of Praise to God."
2. Psalm 119 with Hymn 502 "Thy Holy Wings, O Savior" and 601 "Thy Word is a Lamp."

PROVERBS

21. The Praise of Wisdom

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

Proverbs 1:7

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

Proverbs 9:10

Proverbs 1:1—9:18

21. THE PRAISE OF WISDOM

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

1. Pride
2. Covetousness
3. Lust
4. Anger
5. Gluttony
6. Envy
7. Selfishness

Proverbs 1:1—9:18

THE SEVEN VIRTUES

1. Faith
2. Hope
3. Love
4. Prudence
5. Temperance
6. Justice
7. Fortitude

THE HEART OF WISDOM (1:1-33)			
Wisdom is the Fear of the Lord (1:7)	Wisdom is taught by Parents (1:8)	Sinners do not teach Wisdom (1:10)	Wisdom is a Prophetess (1:20-21)
THE BENEFITS OF WISDOM (2:1-22)			
The Understanding of the Lord's Ways (2:1-5)		The Possession of the Lord's Land (2:21-22)	
THE REWARDS OF WISDOM (3:1-35)			
Long Life (3:2a & 16)	Guidance (3:5-6)	Wealth (3:16b)	
Prosperity (3:2b & 9-10)	Health (3:8)	Honor (3:16b & 35)	
THE PATH OF WISDOM (4:1-27)			
Light is the Path of the Righteous (4:18)		Darkness is the Path of the Wicked (4:19)	
THE WISDOM OF FIDELITY (5:1-23)			
Beware of Adultery (5:3-6)		Remain Faithful (5:18-19)	
THE WISDOM OF GOD (6:1-35)			
Avoid the Seven Deadly Sins (6:16-19)		Keep the Commandments (6:20-23)	
THE CHOICE OF WISDOM (7:1-27)			
Keep the Commandments (7:2)		Write the Commandments on your Heart (7:3)	
THE VALUE OF WISDOM (8:1-36)			
Wisdom is more valuable than anything (8:10-11)		Wisdom existed from the beginning (8:23)	
THE INVITATION OF WISDOM (9:1-18)			
Wisdom invites you to Life (9:5-6 & 10)		Folly invites you into Death (9:17-18)	

21. THE PRAISE OF WISDOM

Proverbs 1:1—9:18

ASSIGNMENTS				
The Heart and Benefits of Wisdom 1:1—2:22	The Rewards and Path of Wisdom 3:1—4:27	The Wisdom of Fidelity and of God 5:1—6:35	The Choice and Value of Wisdom 7:1—8:36	The Invitation to Wisdom 9:1-18

INTRODUCTION TO THE PROVERBS

The Name

The Hebrew word behind Proverbs is *Mashal*, which means “a comparison” or “a likeness” and designates a statement, which shows what something means by comparing it with something else. The most common word we use is *maxim*, but the Proverbs include fable, riddle, satire, and parable as well; hence, a statement or maxim may vary from a simple line to a lengthy poem.

The Authorship

Because of his interest in wisdom, Solomon is the first name that we think of; and he is indeed the author of the two longest collections (10:1—21:16 and 25:1-29:27). Solomon was a man of outstanding wisdom (1 Kings 3; and 4:29-34), and his court became an international center of learning. According to 1 Kings 4:32, he uttered 3000 Proverbs and 1005 Songs. Since Solomon had close links with Egypt, through his marriage to the Pharaoh’s daughter, he drew on Egyptian wisdom as well. The Teaching of Amenemope is always mentioned as one source.

Solomon and his wise men incorporated the wisdom of the east, but only as it fit into their concept of God. This means that the authors of Proverbs consisted of several generations of wisdom teachers or wise men. Since they were related to the royal court, they tended to be conservative in their social and political views, for they were in charge of the moral and practical training of the young men of the court, who were drawn from the upper classes. These young men were being prepared for positions of responsibility in society, business, politics, and diplomacy. In spite of this it is remarkable how *strikingly* similar

some of their teachings are to those of the prophets, who were more radical in their social and political views.

The Date

Some of the individual Proverbs are older than Solomon, but the collection of Proverbs or the Book as we have it today comes out of the post-exilic age. Hezekiah, who was involved in some of the editorial work (Proverbs 25:1), reigned 250 years after Solomon. The book was finalized by Ben Sira's time (180 B.C.). It is difficult to be specific, but we might use Solomon (965-931 B.C.E.) and Hezekiah (715 B.C.E.) as guides, recognizing that some of the Proverbs were collected in the fourth century, and that the entire collection was not completed until the second century B.C.E.

The Setting

The setting ranges from the time of the United Kingdom under Solomon through the Divided Kingdom, which followed, but does not include the Exilic period. These wisdom writers came from a pre-exilic time when there was still a Jewish State or States.

The Purpose

The Proverbs served as an oriental textbook for training young men in right living. Those who trained them included fathers, teachers, and royal counselors. The young men were trained in their homes, in schools and in the royal court. The wisdom was taught in short sharp phrases, making much use of dramatic contrasts and common scenes from everyday life. The wisdom being taught was not a simple formula for success, but lessons about right and wrong. The component units were to be memorized by the student and expounded upon by the teacher.

Although the major concern is with practical matters, the use of Yahweh in referring to God is very significant. Wisdom sayings in the Proverbs may have been gleaned from non-Israelite wisdom traditions, especially Egyptian, which explains why the major religious themes such as Exodus and Covenant are ignored. Wisdom is defined as reverence for God and obedience to his laws. What is noticeably missing in the Proverbs is any reference to life after death. The righteous must be rewarded and the wicked punished in this world.

The "fear of the Lord" is the beginning of all true wisdom. God has taught us what is best for us and our experience proves it, if we will but use our common sense to analyze it. With this in mind the teachers of wisdom attempted to clothe truth with beauty.

A word fitly spoken
is like apples of gold
in a setting of silver. (Proverbs 25:11)

1:1—9:18	10:22—22:16	22:17—31:31
In Praise of Wisdom	The Proverbs of Solomon	Miscellaneous Collections

The Outline

- A. In Praise of Wisdom (1:1—9:18)
- B. The Proverbs of Solomon (10:1—22:16)
- C. Miscellaneous Collections of Wisdom (22:17—31:31)
 - 1. The Thirty Sayings (22:17—24:22)
 - 2. A Supplement to the Thirty Sayings (24:23-34)
 - 3. Hezekiah's Collection (25:1—29:27)
 - 4. The Sayings of Agur (30:1-33)
 - 5. The Sayings of Lemuel (31:1-9)
 - 6. The Perfect Wife (31:10-31)

THE HEART OF WISDOM (1:1-33)

These first chapters contain the latest material in the book and were assembled in order to provide an introduction to the other collections. They contain developed essays rather than brief maxims, and their primary purpose is to give praise to wisdom.

Introduction (1:1-7)

The title includes the name of Solomon (1:1), but this only refers to the nature of the book and its relationship to wisdom. The preface (1:2-6) is very different than what might be found in Egyptian wisdom literature. In Egyptian literature wisdom would be intended only for court officials; in Proverbs it is intended for all who are willing to accept it. The heart of this whole section is that “the fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge.” (1:7) “Fear of the Lord” refers to religion in general and to Israel’s religion in particular. *Beginning* means “the best part.” One could rewrite this motto to say: “Israel’s religion is the best part of knowledge.” This is the point of the writer throughout this book and all of the wisdom materials.

The point being made is that faith and morality are tied together and cannot be separated. It has been this way from the beginning when God created not only the physical world, but a moral order as well. To fear the Lord leads one to an understanding of this moral order, and learning about this moral order will lead one directly to the Lord who created it. The study of the Proverbs, along with the repetition involved in learning them, leads directly to God, and that is why they are so important. Once one has become acquainted with God, the moral life and all of its implications become clear.

The Importance of Parental Instruction (1:8-9)

Fathers and mothers are portrayed as their children's most important teachers. (See also Deuteronomy 6:7 and Proverbs 4:3-4.)

The Influence of Sinners (1:10-19)

Gangsterism was common when the Proverbs were written. The teacher of wisdom tries to deal with it by warning his students that the desire to get rich quickly through crime has its own obvious results. Even a bird knows better than to get caught in a net or trap so obvious. A life of sin and crime leads to ruin.

Wisdom as a Prophetess (1:20-33)

The word *wisdom* is *feminine* and is referred to in the feminine gender. She (wisdom) is compared to the prophets who appeared in public places, around the city gates, to warn those who were taking the way of the fool. Wesley liked verses 20-21 and said that the fear of the Lord is "Reverence and obedience" to God. Wisdom set an example for Wesley in his habit of preaching in the open air.[>] The person who listens and seeks wisdom will be rewarded; the person who pays no attention will reap the awful consequences.

THE BENEFITS OF WISDOM (2:1-22)

The primary benefit of wisdom is the knowledge of God (2:5), but the person who finds wisdom also understands righteousness and justice (2:9) and has a safeguard against falling into the wrong kind of company—both male (2:12-15) and female (2:16-19). Apparently the unfaithful wife was as much of a problem as it is in our time. In discussing the problem the teacher of wisdom makes us aware of the fact that one's wife is not a piece of property, but stands with her husband in a relationship of companionship. Marriage was not thought of by the wise as a legal-economic contract, but as a covenant made before God.

THE REWARDS OF WISDOM (3:1-35)

These Proverbs attempt to connect Israel's faith to wisdom. It is the most religious chapter in the book, and uses the name of God frequently. The relationship with God is particularly evident in Proverbs 3:1-12. John Wesley distinguished between those who were Christians in name only and those who were real Christians. The difference lies in discipline. "The soul and body," he said, "make a [person]; the spirit and discipline make a Christian."[>] Wesley is not talking about negative forms of discipline, but the practice of doing the means of grace, such as worship, Bible Study, prayer, and Holy Communion.

[>]John Wesley, *Notes*, 1:7.

[>]Sermon #22 and "Causes of the Inefficacy of Christianity," ¶7.

Included in this kind of discipline is participating in a small group of believers who watch over one another in love, encouraging and holding one another accountable.^{7/2}

The second section, found in Proverbs 3:13-26, deals with the actual rewards of following the way of wisdom, which are: long life, prosperity, happiness, peace, and security. Wisdom leads both to physical and spiritual wellbeing. The “tree of life” is a symbol of “divine life” and “immortality.”

The final section has to do with generosity towards the neighbor and one’s concern for justice (3:27-35). To do good results in God’s blessing; to do evil results in God’s curse. The wicked person may appear to prosper, but do not be fooled, for such a person is a fool.

THE PATH OF WISDOM (4:1-27)

This chapter includes three essays on wisdom. Each one has a slightly different emphasis, but each one begins with a renewed address to the teachers’ son or sons (4:1, 10, and 20).

The Source of Wisdom (4:1-9)

Wisdom is not something that we dig out of ourselves; it is passed on from one generation to another. The original source is God. This makes wisdom our most valuable possession. In the New Testament that most valuable possession is the wisdom to choose the Kingdom of God. Jesus talked about it in terms of the treasure in a field and the pearl of great value (Matthew 13:44-46). These things would be chosen very naturally, and the same should apply to choosing wisdom, which has its source in God, even if it is passed down through the generations.

The Way of Wisdom (4:10-19)

The way of wisdom is the way of righteousness, which the writer compares to light. The way of wickedness belongs to darkness. This idea is similar to what we find in the Gospel and Letters of John and with what we know of the Dead Sea Scrolls found in Qumran. The righteous person lives a life in a dawn that becomes brighter every day, and the wicked person stumbles around in the night of an impenetrable darkness.

The Journey of Wisdom (4:20-27)

Life is compared to a journey. In the rabbinical literature the rules of conduct for life are called *Halakah*, which means “a way of walking.” We find similar references to this in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 5:32-33; Psalm 119:1,5; and Jeremiah 6:16). In the New Testament Jesus uses the same kind of imagery in Matthew 7:13-14. Our goal in life is to enter the Kingdom of God by passing through the narrow gate. The road that passes through this narrow gate is itself narrow, and there are ditches on both side of it. As

^{7/2}One can find the details in the General Rules.

difficult as it might be to walk this road, it is well illuminated, even if it is not well traveled. God himself has illuminated the way into his Kingdom with the wise, the prophets, and finally his own Son.

THE WISDOM OF FIDELITY (5:1-23)

This was written at a time when the moral standards of Hebrew society were under attack. Even the punishment for adultery, which was death (Deuteronomy 22:22), was not being carried out; therefore, a warning was necessary to keep young men from straying and to convince them that there was wisdom in being faithful to their wives.

Warnings against adultery occupy more space in the Book of Proverbs than any other vice. The issue was more than sexual promiscuity. Those who committed adultery destroyed their relationship with their spouse, broke up the solidarity of the family, and violated a legal contract all at the same time. These things could not be ignored, for they disrupted social life and threatened faith at the same time. The consequences were both sociological and theological.

THE WISDOM OF GOD (6:1-35)

Proverbs 6:1-19 seems to interrupt the teaching against adultery, a theme which is taken up again in Proverbs 6:20-35. In these earlier verses there are warnings against laziness (6:6-11) and crookedness (6:12-15). The seven deadly sins are also described in vivid imagery using the various organs of the body and how they can be misused. The first five sins are related to the eyes, tongue, hands, heart, and feet. The last two have to do with a false witness and the sowing of discord. These seven deadly sins are difficult to name concisely, but theologians have referred to the first one—PRIDE—as the root of all the other sins. Spiritual pride is the most deadly, and Jesus told a parable against it in Luke 18:9-14.

Proverbs 6:20-35 takes up the warning against adultery, which dominated chapter 5. The commandment of God, says the writer in Proverbs 6:23. Discipline is the way of life. Herein lies the true wisdom of God?

THE CHOICE OF WISDOM (7:1-27)

This is the most elaborate of the warnings concerning adultery. The women who try to seduce Israel's young men are very convincing and are able to use tempting words (7:10-20). They are more than harlots. They are women whose morals have been corrupted through contact with the pagan world. One must guard against their seductions. The only choice is to choose wisdom as one's companion (7:4). The consequence for rejecting wisdom is death (sheol). (See Proverbs 5:1-6.) Even such men as Solomon have made the wrong choice and have fallen (I Kings 11:1-13).

THE VALUE OF WISDOM (8:1-36)

Wisdom is straightforward in contrast to the crookedness of wickedness (8:8-9). It is humble in contrast to the arrogance of evil (8:13). Here we find faith and ethics related. Everyone who fears the Lord will hate evil.

From the very beginning of creation wisdom was in God's nature and plan (8:22), and those who value "her" will find life (8:35-36). The life promised is not eternal, but fulfillment in the present. Those who are seduced by the harlot named "folly" will experience death.

THE INVITATION OF WISDOM (9:1-18)

All of the previous chapters are summarized in a twofold invitation made to every person. The invitations are made by wisdom and folly, both of which are personified. Both invite us to a banquet. In the imagery of wisdom's banquet we find a beast, bread, wine and the seven pillars (of heaven), but in the imagery of folly's banquet we are told that the food is delightful because it is forbidden. The responsibility for accepting one of these invitations rests upon every individual. This was true both in the Old Testament (Deuteronomy 30:19) and in the New Testament (Matthew 7:13-14). The invitation of wisdom (9:1-6) leads to life; the invitation of folly (9:13-18) leads to death.

What is unfortunate is that folly misleads her guests. They do not know that they are choosing death (Sheol), but that is precisely what they are doing. Jesus uses similar imagery in the New Testament. At the close of the Sermon on the Mount he invites the wise to build their house upon a rock, and at the same time warns that the foolish will build their house upon the sand (Matthew 7:24-27). Closer to the imagery of Proverbs is the Parable of the Wedding Feast and Jesus' invitation to it (Luke 14:15-24 and Matthew 22:1-10).

The key verses in these nine chapters are Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10. These two verses define the nature of wisdom and teach us that our relationship with God determines how we will behave. The closer we are to him, the more we love righteousness and hate evil. The farther we are from him, the more we will be enticed by evil to depart from righteous living. The former means life, the latter death.

THE INVITATION TO WISDOM

"The fear of the Lord," says Proverbs 1:7, "is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction." According to Proverbs 9:10, the result of wisdom is the knowledge of God himself. Although "departing from evil" is not mentioned in either of these verses, as it was in Job 28:28, it is certainly implied in the vivid description of the seven deadly sins in Proverbs 6:16-19. People who have learned wisdom will steer clear of these deadly sins, but the foolish will be deceived and destroyed by them.

Ask most people what the worst sins are, and the common answers will be murder, adultery, etc. Few of us will name idolatry and blasphemy. “The sins of the flesh are bad,” says C.S. Lewis, “but they are the least bad of all the sins.”¹ The worst are the spiritual sins, that is, those against God. They are far more deceptive than the sins against the flesh. There is a struggle going on within all of us, but only those who fear God understand their own condition. C.S. Lewis describes the struggle:²

For there are two things inside me, competing with the human self which I must try to become. They are the Animal self, and the Diabolical self. The Diabolical self is the worse of the two. That is why a cold, self-righteous prig who goes regularly to church may be far nearer to hell than a prostitute. But, of course, it is better to be neither.”

The closer we draw near to God, the more clearly do we see our sin; the farther we stray away from him, the more we are deluded into thinking that we are righteous. “When a man is getting better,” says Lewis, “he understands more and more clearly the evil that is still left in him. When a man is getting worse, he understands his own badness less and less. A moderately bad man knows he is not very good; a thoroughly bad man thinks he is all right.”³

The invitation to wisdom goes out to everyone, but not everyone feels the need for it. Those guilty of the sins of the flesh are generally more sensitive to their need than those guilty of the sins of the Spirit. That is why the so-called sinners flocked to Jesus, and the Scribes and Pharisees criticized Jesus for mixing with them. The same thing happens today. The Church is frequently criticized for attracting the wrong kind of people, but as the Body of Christ in the world, it is the only community inviting the lost to the Grace of God offered through faith in Christ.

Jesus followed up his famous Sermon on the Mount with an invitation to build one’s life on his teachings. Those who do so, he said, will be building their house on the solid rock; but those who fail to do so, will be building their house on sand. The house on the rock will withstand the rain, wind, and flood; but the house on the sand, will collapse (Matthew 7:24-27). That the building up of one’s house is not simply the doing of good deeds, is made clear by two parables which describe the invitation in terms of attending a Great Dinner (Luke 14:15-24) or Wedding Banquet (Matthew 22:1-10). The invited guests did not show up, and so the invitation went out to anyone who would come. Just coming was not sufficient. Those caught without their “wedding robes” were cast into the outer darkness where there would be weeping and gnashing of teeth (Matthew 22:11-14).

¹ C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (New York, Macmillan Publishing Co., Inc., 1952), p. 94.

² *Ibid.*, p. 95.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 87.

Although these stories illustrate a profound truth, we must be careful of them because they tend to leave us with the impression that we are either righteous or wicked. Having on the “wedding robes” has nothing to do with morality, but has everything to do with our sense of reverence and awe in the presence of God. The first dimension of wisdom is to fear God. When we begin to fear God, then we are building our house on the rock and wearing the proper “wedding robes.” It does not mean that we are sinless.

The world does not consist of people who are 100 per cent Christian, or 100 per cent nonChristian. It consists rather of people who are slowly becoming Christians, or slowly ceasing to be Christians. This cuts across clergy and laity alike. There are clergy who are ceasing to become Christians, and there are persons not yet in the Church who, are in the process of becoming Christians, even though they do not yet use the name. The first step is to fear God, but that is certainly not the last. George MacDonald describes the process of taking the steps away from sin towards God in terms of his parable of the house:⁴

Imagine yourself as a living house. God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on: you knew that those jobs needed doing and so you are not surprised. But presently he starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to? The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage; but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.

⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 174.

PROVERBS

22. The Proverbs of Solomon

*Sometimes there is a way that seems to be right,
but in the end it is the way to death.*

Proverbs 16:25

*To do righteousness and justice
is more acceptable to the LORD than sacrifice.*

Proverbs 21:3

Proverbs 10:1—22:29

22. THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON
Proverbs 10:1 – 22:16

<p>The Wise Man and the Fool 10:1; 10:14; 12:1; 12:15; 13:9; 13:13; 13:20; 14:11; 14:16; 14:34; 15:3</p>	<p>The Righteous and the Wicked 11:19; 11:23; 11:31; 12:26; 12:28; 21:3</p>	<p>Purity of Heart 14:12; 16:2; 16:25; 20:9; 21:2; 22:1</p>
<p>The Tongue 10:20; 10:31; 12:18; 12:22; 13:3; 17:4; 21:23</p>	<p>Parents and Children 13:1; 13:24; 15:20; 17:6; 17:25; 20:20; 22:6</p>	<p>Wives 12:4; 18:22; 21:9; 21:19</p>
<p>Laziness and Hard Work 10:4; 12:24; 14:23; 15:19; 18:9; 19:15; 20:4; 21:25</p>	<p>The Rich and the Poor 10:15; 13:7; 14:20; 21:13; 22:2; 22:9; 22:16</p>	<p>Business 11:1; 15:22; 16:3; 16:8-9; 21:14</p>
<p>The Proud and the Humble 11:2; 13:10; 16:18; 18:12</p>	<p>Friends 12:26; 17:17a; 18:24</p>	<p>Masters and Servants 14:35; 17:2</p>
<p>Kings and Rulers 14:15; 14:28; 16:12; 20:8</p>	<p>Anger 14:17; 14:29; 15:1; 15:18; 22:24</p>	<p>Love 10:12; 15:17; 17:9</p>
<p>The Fear of the Lord 14:2; 14:26; 14:27; 15:33; 16:6</p>	<p>The Young and the Old 16:31; 17:6; 20:29</p>	<p>Alcohol 20:1</p>
<p align="center">War 16:7; 21:30-31</p>		

22. THE PROVERBS OF SOLOMON

Proverbs 10:1—22:16

In this first collection of the Proverbs of Solomon we find a variety of maxims, each having two lines, which contrast with one another. The second line, or half of each saying, is the antithesis of the first. These maxims are observations on life and advice given on the basis of common sense. Vices are scorned and virtues are commended. The maxims served as texts for instruction in individual homes or in a school of wisdom.

Read the chapters, which follow and choose from the various topics the verse or verses that seem most important to you.

- A. The Wise Man and the Fool _____

- B. The Righteous and the Wicked _____

- C. Purity of Heart _____

- D. The Tongue _____

- E. Parents and Children _____

- F. Wives _____

- G. Laziness and Hard Work _____

- H. The Rich and the Poor _____

- I. Business _____

- J. The Proud and the Humble _____

- K. Friends _____

- L. Masters and Servants _____

- M. Kings and Rulers _____

- N. Anger _____

- O. Love _____

- P. The Fear of the Lord _____

- Q. The Young and the Old _____

- R. Alcohol _____

- S. War _____

NUGGETS OF GOLD

Proverbs are short concise statements, easy to remember; but frequently, they are filled with half-truths. As long as we understand this, they can be very helpful to us; but if we forget it, they mislead us.

An illustration might help. Proverbs 22:6 says: “Train children in the right way, and when old, they will not stray.” While it is important to train children in the right way, there is no guarantee that they will not stray. There are many other influences in our children’s lives besides our own. What we hope to accomplish in training them in the right way is to give them resources for dealing with evil when it tempts them, but we do not live in a deterministic world and thank God that we do not. If we did, then the opposite of this Proverb would also be true—children trained in evil ways could not break away. The Proverb has validity, but we must recognize that some children, trained in the way that they should go, will stray, and some children brought up with bad influences will also break out of their harmful environment. Good has a more powerful influence than evil, and our goal is to equip our children with the resources to distinguish between good from evil. Whether they finally do, depends upon other influences upon them and the choices that they finally make for themselves.

It is as a resource that Proverbs are “nuggets of gold,” not as absolute truths. They enable us to focus more sharply on truth, which is also more easily remembered. If we can recall the truth when we need it, then it is truly a nugget of gold. Poetry can serve the same function. Portions of two brief poems by Robert Frost have been nuggets of gold for me. The first one is from his, *The Road Not Taken*, in which he says: “Two roads diverged in a wood, and I—I took the one less traveled by, And that has made all the difference.” Now, “one less traveled by” can also lead nowhere, and to take such a road into the woods might even get you lost. But when you see the poem as a resource for taking the path of righteousness, when no one else is taking it, it can also give encouragement; and that is why it is a nugget of gold.

The other poem that has been a resource for me is, *Stopping by the Woods on a Snowy Evening*. As I went through college and graduate school, I memorized the following four lines that still speak to me:

The woods are lovely, dark and deep,
But I have promises to keep,
And miles to go before I sleep,
And miles to go before I sleep.

Proverbs serve the same function. I will never forget one Proverb used by a member of a congregation that I served in Georgia. He taught English at the local Junior College, and wrote a book, which was really a look at the local community through his eyes. He named the book, *Better a Dinner of Herbs*, basing the title on Proverbs 15:17 (NKJV), which says: “Better a dinner of herbs (vegetables) where love is, t

han a fatted calf with hatred.” I read the book and gained insight into the community and the congregation. This book helped me to understand why this man committed suicide. He found plenty of people all around himself trying to be successful, but much of that effort was in vain, for their lives were empty of the most important ingredient—love. When there is no love, hope is absent, and faith impossible.

It is essential to memorize a few nuggets of gold to serve as a resource in traveling through this world. They inspire and direct us. “How much better,” says Proverbs 16:16, “than gold! To get understanding is to be chosen rather than silver.” What is significant is that when we choose wisdom and understanding we are choosing gold and silver. This choice puts us in the fear of the Lord and causes us to shun evil (Proverbs 14:16).

PROVERBS

23. Miscellaneous Collections of Wisdom

*Two things I ask of you:
do not deny them to me before I die:
Remove far from me falsehood and lying;
give me neither poverty nor riches;
feed me with the food that I need,
or I shall be full, and deny you,
and say, “Who is the LORD?”
or I shall be poor, and steal,
and profane the name of my God.*

Proverbs 30:7-9

Proverbs 22:17—31:31

23. MISCELLANEOUS COLLECTIONS OF WISDOM

Proverbs 22:17—31:31

THE THIRTY SAYINGS (22:17—24:34)

This section is dependent upon the Egyptian Instruction of Amenemope. The title comes from the fact that Amenemope's book contains thirty units or paragraphs. Many of the proverbs in this section have parallels in the Egyptian work, although the order is different. While this might seem like plagiarism today, it was not considered dishonest to borrow proverbs from another source without giving credit. Wisdom was considered the common property of all and should be sought by all. In addition to this, these proverbs have been adapted to the Hebrew Religion. We can find traces of Proverbs 24:21 in 1 Peter 2:17, where respect and support are recommended for the Emperor.

The proverbs in these chapters are more connected than has been the case in the previous chapters. Try to select an important verse in each of the following selections:

- A. Things to Avoid. (22:22-29) _____
- B. Hazards of Social Climbing. (23:1-8) _____
- C. Father and Son Discipline. (23:9-28) _____
- D. Promise of the Afterlife. (23:17-18) _____
- E. Portrait of a Drunkard. (23:29-35) _____
- F. Teaching on Wisdom and Folly. (24:1-14) _____
- G. Right Living. (24:15-22) _____
- H. Appendix to the Thirty Sayings (24:23-34) _____

HEZEKIAH'S COLLECTION OF PROVERBS (25:1—29:27)

Hezekiah (715-687 B.C.) tried to return Israel to the old neglected patterns of worship. He repaired the Temple, restored worship, the sacrificial system, and focused his attention on Solomon's classical wisdom.

Select some of the most relevant Proverbs, which relate to the following topics:

- A. The Wise Man and the Fool _____
- B. The Righteous and the Wicked _____
- C. The Tongue _____
- D. Wives _____
- E. Discipline _____
- F. Laziness and Hard Work _____
- G. The Integrity of the Poor _____
- H. Confession and Forgiveness _____
- I. Revenge _____
- J. The Proud and the Humble _____
- K. Neighbors and Friends _____
- L. Kings and Rulers _____

At least two of the Proverbs in this section may have influenced the teachings of Jesus and Paul. The first is Proverbs 25:6-7, which Jesus uses in Luke 14:7-10, where he discusses the humility of guests at a feast; and the second is Proverbs 25:21-22, which seems to be imaged by Jesus in Matthew 5:44-45 and by Paul in Romans 12:20. The topic here is how one treats an enemy.

THE SAYINGS OF AGUR (30:1-33)

Nothing is known of Agur, except that he was a non-Israelite. *Massa* either means “oracles or prophecy” or else it refers to a place. It is most likely a place, for it is mentioned as such in Genesis 25:14 and I Chronicles 1:30. It probably refers to an Arab tribe, which descended from Abraham’s son Ishmael.

“Ithiel...Ucal” are obscure words. One guess is that they mean, “There is no God and I am exhausted” or “I have no God, yet I endure.” Another guess is that they describe some visionary experience, which led to the revelation, which follows. In this latter case they might mean: “The inspired utterance of the man who struggled with God, and prevailed.” A final, but less popular conclusion is that they are the names of Agur’s students.

There are six *numerical proverbs* in this chapter. They can be read in verses 7-9, 15-16, 18-19, 21-23, 24-28, and 29-31. Read them and try to decide which one or two might be saying the most to you. Verses 11-14 list four types of sinners, which are the (1) unfilial, (2) self-righteous, (3) arrogant, and (4) greedy. The observations made in the above Proverbs illustrate the beginning of the scientific spirit. The author draws his conclusions from observations he has made, not from any direct word he has received from God.

THE SAYINGS OF LEMUEL (31:1-9)

Lemuel is described as a King of Massa, but nothing is known of him. His mother is described as his teacher, and so this tells us something of the role of the mother in the education of children. Lemuel is warned against succumbing to two things: (1) Women, who would undermine and destroy him, and (2) wine and strong drink, which would cause him to lose sight of his responsibilities as a King. Wine and strong drink might be useful to the unfortunate and the poor as an opiate, but it should never interfere with the King's duties. The main duty of the King is to take care of those who are unable to take care of themselves.

THE PERFECT WIFE (31:10-31)

The final Proverb is an acrostic poem. Each line begins with a successive letter of the alphabet. The perfect wife here appears almost as the responsible head of the household. She provides food and clothing (verses 13-15, 19, 21-22), purchases property (16), engages in trade (18, 24), and exercises charity (20). Physical beauty is a matter of indifference; what is important is intelligence, dignity, kindness (25-26), industry (15, 17, 27), and above all a religious spirit (30). The author may not be talking about a particular woman. He may be describing lady wisdom. "The woman who fears the LORD," he says, "is to be praised." (Proverbs 31:30)

WISDOM FROM THE PAST

The Proverbs are not only a collection of wise sayings, but they come from a number of very different sources. At their inception they are penetrating observations about life, including our hopes and dreams from the past for the future. Although they do not refer to their source as coming directly from God, they do point to the importance of "fearing God and shunning evil." This is the beginning of wisdom, and everything else depends upon building on this right foundation.

Why does anyone collect wise sayings? Such collections represent observations made in the past, which can illuminate our venturing into the future. They illuminate our way.

One of the most successful money raisers I have ever seen has been the compilation of 365 proverbs in a booklet called *Heart Lifters*. The first one began with, "Life is a song, love is the Music." The final one may not have been a Proverb, but it expressed the purpose of the entire collection. It simply said: "We thank those named and unnamed whose wisdom lives on to encourage us." This is the point. Collections of wisdom from

the past, whether we know their sources or not, whether Christian or not, encourage us to move into the future. They are like stepping stones enabling us to walk on the waters of faith.

One of the principles decided upon was not to make them too religious, hoping that by following this principle, the booklet would appeal to a wider variety of people. While most of them were not out of the bible, they were deeply spiritual. The entry for December 31st, for example was a quotation from Charles Dickens, who said: "I will honor Christmas in my heart, and try to keep it all the year."

Although most Proverbs are common observations about life, wise is the person who can discern the miraculous in the common. This takes a remarkable degree of maturity, and this maturity is only the possession of those who have moved beyond their first fascination with wisdom. This is why we make fun of sophomores. Beginning in their second year, their greatest temptation is to think that they have arrived in their intellectual maturity. A sophomore is indeed one whose mind has become aware of the vast world of knowledge, but that mind has not yet grasped the full range of truth. Sophomore is derived from two Greek words, the first being "Sophos," which means "Wise" as in the Philosopher's love of wisdom, but the second is "Moros," which means moron as in one's whose mind has not yet fully developed. A sophomore then is best described as a wise moron, who has not yet learned that he or she does not yet know everything.

There is however another danger in collecting wisdom. Sometimes we do it as an intellectual exercise in itself. Wisdom can never be sought for its own sake. It is the right use of knowledge, which leads us into the presence of the Holy. One can begin wise and end up as a fool, as did Solomon, or one can grow in wisdom as did the Apostle Paul, who in 1 Corinthians 4:10, considered himself a "fool for Christ." Paul left in his wake brilliant minds, who, matured in wisdom. They were men such as Augustine, Luther, Wesley, Barth, and Tillich. Although Paul Tillich was an intellectual giant, he understood what it meant to stand in the fear of the Lord. He once wrote:

Most removed from wisdom are not those who are driven by desire for pleasure or power, but those brilliant minds who have never encountered the holy, who are without awe and know nothing sacred, but who are able to conceal their ultimate emptiness by the brilliant performances of their intellect.¹

Karl Barth was also an intellectual giant who recognized true wisdom. When he last visited this country, a newspaper reporter asked him: "How would you sum up your theology?" Barth replied without any hesitation, "You put it very well in your hymn, 'Jesus loves me, this I know, for the Bible tells me so.'"²

¹Paul Tillich, *The Eternal Now* (New York: Charles Scribner's), p. 168.

²John H. Snow and Victor P. Furnish, *Proclamation: Easter (Series A)*, p. 13.

The Proverbs from the past are not only useful in guiding us how to live, but they help us to discover Moses' burning bush and Paul's Damascus experience. Although they may seem common, they function best for those who have spiritual eyes to discern God's presence, stand in reverence of Him, and shun evil because it lies outside of the divine will.

ECCLESIASTES

24. The Wisdom of Ecclesiastes

EVERYTHING IS MEANINGLESS

Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher,
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

I, the Teacher, when king over Israel in Jerusalem,
applied my mind to seek and to search out by wisdom
all that is done under heaven; it is an unhappy business
that God has given to human beings to be busy with.

I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun;
and see, all is vanity and a chasing after wind.

Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher; all is vanity.

Ecclesiastes 1:2, 12-14 and 12:8

Ecclesiastes 1:1—12:14

24. THE WISDOM OF ECCLESIASTES (1:1 – 12:14)

THE THEME: “Everything is Meaningless.” (1:2, 12-14; 12:8)

WHAT IS MEANINGLESS?

1. Wisdom: (1:18; 2:13-14)
2. Pleasure: (2:1-2; 2:4-10)
3. Work: (1:3-4; 2:17-18; 4:8)
4. Wealth: (5:10)

WHAT IS UNFAIR?

1. The lack of Justice: (4:1; 7:15; 8:14)
2. The slowness of Judgment: (8:11)
3. Chance: (9:11)
4. Inability to understand God: (11:5)

THE TIMES AND SEASONS (3:1-8)

1. Birth and Death
2. Work and Leisure
3. Healing and Killing
4. Loving and Hating

LIFE AND DEATH

1. Animals and Humans die: (3:19-21)
2. Are we better off dead?: (4:2-3; 6:3; 9:5)
3. Are we better off alive?: (9:4)
4. We leave the world naked: (5:15)

RELIGION

1. Sense of Past and Future: (3:11)
2. God made us upright: (7:29)
3. All have sinned: (7:20)
4. Keep your vows: (5:4-5)
5. Be Generous (11:2)

WHAT CAN WE ENJOY?

1. Enjoy Yourself: (3:12-13; 8:15; 9:7)
2. Enjoy your Friends: (4:9-12)
3. Enjoy your Wife: (9:9)
4. Enjoy your Work: (3:22; 5:18; 9:10)
5. Enjoy your Youth: (11:9)

CONCLUSION: “Fear God, and Obey His Commandments.” (11:1, 5; 12:1, 6-7; & 13-14)

24. THE WISDOM OF ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes 1:1 – 12:14

ASSIGNMENTS					
What is Meaningless?	What is Unfair?	The Times and Seasons	Life and Death	Religion	What can We Enjoy?

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES

The Name

Ecclesiastes is an attempted Greek translation of the author's penname, "Qoheleth." This word comes from the same Hebrew root as *qahal*, which means "assembly," and can be defined as "one who conducts an assembly or school." It usually gets translated as "the preacher" (NRSV) or "the speaker" (NEB). Another word frequently used is "philosopher" because the author uses reason and logic in his observations about life.

The Author

Traditionally it has been attributed to Solomon, but its language and style indicate that it was written much later than Solomon's time. For the most part one author wrote the book, but we do not know his name. Ecclesiastes is not a name.

The Date

The book was written in about the third century before Christ. The people had already experienced the fall of the nation in 587 B.C.E., which destroyed their belief in history as the locus of God's revelation of himself. Their interest now moved towards nature and individual morality; and for this reason, the wisdom literature became increasingly important. Ecclesiastes falls into this category.

Since the book contains many Aramaic words from the Post Exilic era and considerable influence from Greek Philosophy, it must have been written between 300 to 150 B.C.E., with an educated guess being around 250 B.C.E. The Book, however, was not accepted as Scripture until approximately 90 C.E., which means that it was not Scripture in the time of Jesus.

The Setting

The setting is definitely after the period of the Exile. The Temple had been rebuilt and the sacrificial system restored, but still Israel's national situation did not improve. In this context there was a general mood of pessimism, which the writer describes.

The Purpose

Ecclesiastes has a mood and content unknown in the other books. Why was it included in the Jewish canon? Several reasons can be given. The book was associated with Solomon, influential "wise men" sponsored it, and it contained an orthodox postscript in 12:9-14. In the latter the writer lays down his theological position in the light of which the rest of the book must be understood.

The author observes life as he sees it being lived out. Life seems to be futile, meaningless, purposeless, and empty. One is better off dead. The sovereignty of God is not denied. What is denied is the ability of finite humanity to grasp the meaning of life. Trying to live out such a life with pompous orthodoxy is an illusion, but this does not mean that we should live as if there were no God. God never intended for us to leave him out. It is God who injects joy into every aspect of living, from food and work to home and marriage (2:24-26; 3:10-15; 5:18-20; and 9:7-10).

Ecclesiastes was commonly used, or read, during the Feast of Tabernacles, apparently to add balance to the happy and carefree spirit of the celebration.

The Outline

There is no formal plan or outline in this book. It consists of thirty to forty maxims on general subjects in which the preacher finds it difficult to find meaning. Below is a brief outline of the direction those maxims seem to take.

- A. The Vanity of Human Life (1:1-11)
- B. The Search for Meaning in Life (1:12—2:26)
- C. The Times for all Things (3:1-15)
- D. The Unfairness of Life (3:16—5:7)
- E. The Futility of Labor (5:8—6:12)
- F. Observations about Wisdom (7:1—8:13; 10:1—11:10)
- G. The Certainty of Death (8:14—9:18; 12:1-8)
- H. Humanity's Duty to Fear and Obey God (12:9-14)

Vitality of Life	Search for Meaning	A Time for All Things	Unfairness of Life	The Futility of Labor	Observations about Wisdom	Certainty of Death	Humanity's Duty to God
1:1-11	1:12—2:26	3:1-15	3:16—5:7	5:8—6:12	7:1—8:13 10:1—11:10	8:4—9:18 12:1-8	12:9-14

THE TITLE (1:1)

The Hebrew word *Qoheleth* and the Greek word *Ecclesiastes* is translated as “Preacher.” The person who seems to be calling himself the “Preacher” is Solomon, but the book was written much too late for Solomon. In the same sense that Moses was considered the originator of the Law and David of the Psalms, Solomon was given credit for being the originator of the Proverbs and also of the maxims found in Ecclesiastes.

THE THEME OF THE BOOK (1:2-3)

The theme can be concisely stated: “All that makes up life soon vanishes.” At the end of the book the theme is restated (12:8).

EVIDENCE FOR THE THEME (1:4-11)

In this section the writer shares his observations with us. Generations come and go, nature is in ceaseless motion, but nothing new results. The phrase “under the sun” occurs frequently, and sets limits around the author’s claim to truth. He sees himself standing in the wisdom tradition, but all he is observing is what other teachers of wisdom have observed. He cannot come up with anything new.

THE FUTILITY OF WISDOM (1:12-18)

Wisdom is better than folly, but in the end, death makes fools of us all. There are no exceptions. Increasing one’s knowledge only increases one’s futility. It is like chasing the wind.

THE FUTILITY OF PLEASURE (2:1-11)

Even if one has all that wealth and status can afford, it does not help to live for pleasure. Life still results in meaninglessness. There is an illusion that pleasure and wealth grant meaning, but in the end, it too is like chasing after the wind

THE END OF THE WISE AND THE FOOLISH (2:12-26)

Neither the following of wisdom nor the pursuit of pleasure can lead to happiness. One might be able to find some enjoyment in one's toil, but God alone gives wisdom, knowledge, and joy. Any effort to find true enjoyment and meaning in life apart from God is like striving after the wind. All such efforts are in vain.

A TIME FOR EVERYTHING (3:1-15)

Two words are central to the poem in this passage. There is a *season* and there is *time*. *Season* refers to something that is "being determined, fixed, or appointed." *Time* means "occurrence" and refers to given moments of existence. These two words point to the fact that things are fixed in an unchangeable way, and God is responsible for it.

The most controversial verse in the book of Ecclesiastes is 3:11, where the King James Version talks about placing the "world in their heart." In the Revised Standard Version the phrase is translated "eternity in man's mind," and in the New Revised Standard Version, it is translated "he has put a sense of past and future into their minds."

The phrase refers to the wholeness—of which the recurrent times are parts—which is put into the human mind. Although God's creation—humanity—would like to determine meaning for life, such a task is impossible. The author is not skeptical of the existence of such meaning. He has faith that such meaning exists within God, but he is skeptical of any human claim to be able to state it clearly.

INJUSTICE IN THE WORLD (3:16—4:3)

An observation is made that injustice exists, even among the righteous. There is no apparent moral order in the world. This observation contradicts the earlier Israelite claim that God was working out his justice and righteousness through Israel's history. This idea is denied. Everything moves inevitably towards death. If there is any hope at all it dwells in the future judgment of God (3:17); meanwhile, all we can do is to enjoy our work (3:22). It would have been better, however, if we had never been born (4:2-3).

One could claim that "the mills of God grind slowly," but that yields no satisfaction to the human moral demand that justice be done in this world. If justice requires a canvas larger than the brief span given between the cradle and the grave, what value can it be to human life? It is like chasing the wind.

THE VANITY OF SELFISH TOIL (4:4-8)

The unfortunate thing is that we wear ourselves out working, and never pause long enough to ask, "What is it all for?"

THE VALUE OF A FRIEND (4:9-12)

At least companionship with a friend makes meaningless work more bearable.

FAME PASSES AWAY (4:13-16)

Fame and popularity mean nothing at all. It is better to be a youth who is wise than an elderly king who is foolish, but the fame of youth too, will finally pass away.

ADVICE ON RELIGIOUS OBSERVANCE (5:1-7)

Promises or vows made to God ought to be kept. If there is no intention to keep them, then it would be better not to make them in the first place.

THE VANITY OF GAIN AND HONOR (5:8-20)

Under this category there are several subjects discussed. One should not be surprised by oppression (5:8-9); one ought to be cautious of a love for money and wealth (5:10-17), and one ought to find enjoyment in one's work and possessions (5:18-20). This is not to advocate hedonism. The enjoyment of life does not come in what we might be able to obtain; rather, it comes in our ability to accept life as it is given to us. In the end life is a gift from God and can only be understood as we relate to him.

THE VANITY OF LABOR AND LIFE (6:1-12)

Of what value is long life if one cannot enjoy it. It would be better to be stillborn or miscarried. If one does have to be born, it would be better to find satisfaction than to long for it (6:9).

ADVICE ON PRACTICAL MATTERS (7:1-29)

There are good persons who die young and wicked persons who grow old (7:15). Life simply does not add up; but then, there is no one alive who is sinless (7:20). In the end everyone is brought to the test of wisdom, but wisdom lies beyond the reach of us all (7:23). In light of these conclusions, it is difficult to understand how he can then say that he has found a righteous man, but not a righteous woman (7:28).

OBEY THE KING (8:1-9)

One must obey the legal authorities even though they fall short of exercising justice. While injustice prevails now, in the end divine justice will win out.

THE WICKED AND THE RIGHTEOUS (8:10-15)

Faith cannot resolve the problem of evil in this world. Evil persons do not always get what they deserve, nor do good persons always get what they deserve. About all one can

do is to enjoy life in the midst of an aimless order. Although understanding eludes the writer, he applies his energies towards the search for wisdom. No one can discern any absolute moral order in the way things are, but one can enjoy what there is to enjoy. One has to live with patience and in the faith that eventually the wicked will be punished and the righteous rewarded. Although the mills of God grind too slowly to suit us, they do grind. Faith in divine judgment has not been totally lost.

THE VALUE OF THE SEARCH FOR WISDOM (8:16—9:16)

The study of the world cannot lead to any knowledge of the purpose of life. Death is the only sure thing in life. Wisdom dictates that we make the best of things. The author does not deny meaning in life, but demands honesty in observing life as it is. Wisdom, which honestly discerns the aimlessness of life, is more to be desired than is power, which constantly deludes us. Wisdom brings freedom and truth, even if we do not fully understand them.

OBSERVATIONS ON THE VALUE OF WISDOM (10:1-20)

This section contains a variety of proverbs, which tend to say the following: Life may seem to be aimless, the value of wisdom may not seem to be apparent, but foolishness is worthless without question. (See 10:2 and 12.)

For the most part, these proverbs express the conventional wisdom of the day, supporting personal experience. The sharp contrast between such wisdom and experience is not expressed. The author apparently finds some value in the wise sayings of his time, but he goes on to point out how relative and temporary they are.

THE VALUE OF DILIGENCE (11:1-8)

Everyone is called upon to act in spite of life's uncertainties. This is what "Send out your bread upon the waters" means, as does "Divide your means seven ways, or even eight...." (11:1-2). The first makes reference to "venturing one's livelihood" and the second to "diversifying one's risk." Things will happen anyway, but one ought not to be stymied by them. There is value in acting and taking risks.

ADVICE TO YOUNG PEOPLE (11:9—12:8)

Let youth rejoice in their youth, but let them always be mindful of God who eventually calls everyone to account. Old age has a way of reminding us of our finiteness. We must live in the light of our finiteness and the coming judgment. Judgment is not to be viewed simply in a negative sense; there are rewards as well as punishments in judgment. Judgment must come in order to sort out good and evil. It is good if we can become aware of this while we are still young.

The breaking of the silver cord and golden bowl refers to death, when the body returns to the dust and the soul to God (12:6-8). Everything is considered meaningless because

there is no developed faith in the afterlife. One needs to learn how to enjoy life knowing that death can come at any moment.

THE WHOLE DUTY OF HUMANKIND (12:9-14)

Even though much of life is incomprehensible and meaning often eludes us, we ought not to allow ourselves to be drawn away from belief and obedience. The author's observations and practical advice lead up to his final conclusion that true wisdom is to "fear God" and "keep his commandments." This is the whole duty of humankind (12:13b).

There is debate over whether this optimistic conclusion was written by the same author. One reason for this debate is the move from the first person into the third person, beginning with 12:9. It is, of course, not impossible for an author to make this transition; but in this case, it seems as if someone felt that the meaninglessness expressed in 12:8 could not be the last word. Something more needed to be said. Since there is no change in vocabulary and style, it is possible that the same person wrote it, but we will probably never know for sure.

MEANING: THE FRUIT OF RELATIONSHIPS

"Life is difficult," says M. Scott Peck in the opening sentence of his best selling book, *The Road Less Traveled*.¹ In view of this, we, like the author of Ecclesiastes, might think that it would be better not to have been born at all (4:2-3); then, we would not have to deal with life's difficulties. This is not, however, all that he says, for he also says that it is better to be a live dog than a dead lion (9:4). While we may not have chosen to be born, anyone reading these words has been born. Given this fact, what shall we do with our life?

Two choices are open to us. We can take the easy way taken by most people, which usually leads nowhere, or we can take the difficult road less traveled that takes us somewhere. But how can we go anywhere in a world that seems so unfair and meaningless? The answer to meaninglessness can never be found in our work, the accumulation of wealth, or even in the pursuit of pleasure. These things are only meaningful as they are shared. It is only in this context that we can understand the recommendation of Ecclesiastes in 9:7-9:

Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long approved what you do. Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that are given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun.

¹M. Scott Peck, *The Road Less Traveled* (New York : A Touchstone Book, 1978), p. 15.

What all this means is that if we lose sight of sharing things, then work, wealth, and pleasure become meaningless. The meaning comes only in the sharing. Although the suggestion is in the sharing with one's wife, it is obvious that the sharing must extend beyond one's spouse. Meaning can also be found, according to Ecclesiastes 4:9-12, in the simple sharing within friendships; and the Apostle Paul points to friendships beyond this world, when he says in 1 Corinthians 15:32: "If the dead are not raised, 'Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die.'" While Paul is warning us about taking the easy way out, he is certainly not suggesting it. There are two ways of looking at this statement. Since we are going to die and live with Christ, then we need to take our present lives far more seriously. The time to nurture relationships is now. Let us not get so involved in working to make money, or to indulge ourselves in pleasure, that we lose sight of our main reason for being—relationship. God created us as social beings. It is in sharing with one another that we discover meaning, which is the fruit of our relationships.

All of us want friends, but many of us take the easy way—we are only willing to accept certain kinds of people as friends. Friendships take an enormous amount of time and energy, but we must be very careful not to reject people, who need friends. They need meaning too.

If any message coming out of the apparent pessimism of Ecclesiastes, it is that meaning cannot be discovered in the natural world around us. Leslie Weatherhead in *The Transforming Friendship*, did not go that far, but he did make clear the meaning of Ecclesiastes when he wrote:

...if God can get near to us in inanimate things, He must be able to get near to us in inanimate things, He must be able to get much nearer to us through our fellows? If He can speak to me in the tones of the wind, cannot He say much more to me in the vibrant tones of my friend's voice? If the sight of a flower can speak to me of tenderness—and I think that is His voice—then, as I look into the eyes of my friend, how much nearer can God come, how much more clearly can He speak?²

Ecclesiastes was written in a time when it was difficult to see God acting in nature and history. There is a sense in which the author has given up on any possibility of perceiving God as acting in history. There is even the despair of seeing him in the cycles of nature. He believes in God, but has difficulty discerning him. His greatest message is in his rejection of meaning in things and in his discovery of the meaning as the fruit of sharing in relationship. He may not have fully understood it, but it caused him to affirm high moral standards, which are so necessary for good human and divine relationships.

²Leslie D. Weatherhead, *The Transforming Friendship* (Wyvern Books: The Epworth Press, 1962), p. 92.

THE SONG OF SOLOMON

25. The Power of Love

*Set me as a seal upon your heart,
as a seal upon your arm;
for love is as strong as death,
passion fierce as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire,
a raging flame.*

Song of Solomon 8:6

Song of Solomon 1:1—8:14

25. THE POWER OF LOVE (1:1—8:8:14)

OTHER TITLES: “The Song of Solomon” or “The Song of Songs” (1:1)

SONG ONE (1:1—2:7)

1. She longs for her love: (1:2-4)
2. She defends her dark skin: (1:5-6)
3. She searches for her lover: (1:7-8)
4. They describe one another: (1:9—2:7)

SONG TWO (2:8—3:5)

1. Experiencing love in Spring: (2:10-13)

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2. Dreaming of lost love: (3:1)

Note: Gazelle, Stag: (2:9), Fox: (2:15)

SONG THREE (3:6—5:1)

1. The Wedding Procession: (3:6-11)
2. Description of the Bride: (4:1-7)
3. Physical Consummation: (4:16b & 5:1)

SONG FOUR (5:2—6:3)

1. Dreaming of lost love: (5:2-6)

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2. Description of her lover: (5:10-16)

SONG FIVE (6:4—8:4)

1. Description of the Woman: (6:5-7)
2. Description of the Woman: (7:1-9)
3. Desire to express love in public: (8:1)

Note: Shulammite (6:13), Tirzah (6:4)

SONG SIX (8:5-14)

1. The Power of Love: (8:6-7)
2. Protection of a Sister: (8:8-9)
3. Submission to Solomon: (8:12 & 14)

CONCLUSION: “God is the Groom, his people the Bride” (Hosea 2:19-20; Ephesians 5:25-33)

25. THE POWER OF LOVE

The Song of Solomon or The Songs of Solomon 1:1—8:14

ASSIGNMENTS					
Song One 1:1—2:7	Song Two 2:8—3:5	Song Three 3:6—5:1	Song Four 5:2—6:3	Song Five 6:4—8:4	Song Six 8:5-14

INTRODUCTION TO THE SONG OF SOLOMON

The Name

This collection of lyric poems or fragments of poems on courtship and love are called the Song of Solomon because Solomon's name appears in some of them. In Hebrew the title is literally the Song of Songs. In Roman Catholic versions the word "canticles" is used.

The Author

The author is anonymous. The addition of Solomon's name to the title has no support other than the tradition that Solomon composed many proverbs and songs. Although his name is used six times in the Book (1:5; 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11-12), Solomon is not named as the author. If anything he is named as the lover, and that is why the Book is sometimes named the Song of Solomon.

The Date

The collection of poems were put in their present form in the third century B.C.E., but the material in them comes from a much earlier time, perhaps as early as tenth or ninth century, as suggested by the Tirzah-Jerusalem parallel. The most important evidence for dating this Book comes out of its use of foreign phrases.

The Setting

The speakers in the poem are a bridegroom, a bride, and a chorus. The bridegroom is sometimes a King and sometimes a Shepherd. Are these two different roles, or competing lovers? The setting for their poetry is rural and the book was probably written in the Spring time of the year.

The Purpose

Several possibilities have been given, such as, the chapters make up a drama or a wedding liturgy; but most scholars conclude that there is no unity or theme, and that they are simply a collection or anthology of poetry. If there is any uniting theme in them it is human love between the genders. Some unity can be seen in verses 2:7, 3:5, and 8:4, where love is encouraged to grow naturally without any artificial stimulus.

At times the Jews have interpreted the poems to be a picture of the relationship between God and Israel (Psalm 45 and Hosea 2), and Christians have seen them as a picture of the relationship between Christ and the Church (Matthew 9:15 and Ephesians 5:23, 33). The poems themselves give us no warrant to do this, but their lack of any mention of God, religion, and ethics, tempts us to do it. The collection of poems was preserved to consecrate human love. They were also preserved because many people used them in weddings.

The Outline

Some scholars count 25 poems; while others count as few as six. Basically there is no outline. We simply have a collection of poems or songs in which various persons speak. The New English and the New International Versions of the Bible help us to understand just who is speaking. One way of organizing these songs would be as follows: 1:1—2:7; 2:8—3:5; 3:6—5:1; 5:2—6:3; 6:4—8:4; and 8:5-14.

THE FIRST SONG (1:1—2:7)

The first verse is where we get the title. To say “Song of Songs” is like saying “Holy of Holies” or “King of Kings.” It is simply the Hebrew way of saying it is the best. The use of Solomon’s name has to do with his reputation as a “lover,” just as he had a reputation for “wisdom.” His reputation as a lover however is no model to be followed, especially if one thinks that the ideal is that of single-minded devotion to one woman. The image of the lover as a country-shepherd does not suit Solomon either, for Solomon grew up in the palace. It could be that Solomon is attempting to win a country girl who remains devoted to her shepherd lover, but that is just a guess.

The song begins with a dialogue between the girl and the women of Jerusalem (court or harem). The girl and her lover engage in dialogue. The book might be more easily read by using the following outline:

1. The girl longs for her lover (1:2-4)
2. The girl defends her beauty (1:5-6) Her dark complexion might be the result of her life in the country. “The tents of Kedar” is a phrase that refers to the black tents of the Bedouin. These tents were made of black goatskins. “The curtains of Solomon” is an expression that is unknown.
3. The girl searches for her lover (1:7-8)

4. The two lovers engage in dialogue (1:9—2:7) The images of “apples and raisins” in 2:5 come from the belief that these two fruits cause sexual desire.

The beloved is described as the rose of Sharon or the lily of the valleys. The flower imagery is used because flowers are beautiful and smell nice, and that is what the beloved wants to be like for her lover.

THE SECOND SONG (2:8—3:5)

As this second song opens, the woman describes her lover in terms of a gazelle or a young stag. These images open a song, which is the most sensual of them all. A gazelle was known for his speed and a stag for his sexual powers. Other images of animals are also used.

There are two images however, that dominate this song. First, we encounter the joy of love in Spring

. The girl speaks of her lover coming to her, and asking her to go with him into the beautiful countryside. *Foxes* in 2:15 may have had the same connotation in that day as does *wolves* to us. The girl is very willing to spend the night with her lover in the fields and hills, and it would be a shame to see someone take advantage of her, such as a wolf. In the second image the girl dreams (first dream) of her lover and seeks him in the streets of the city. She describes her desolate feelings of separation and her joy in reunion.

THE THIRD SONG (3:6—5:1)

This song begins with a wedding procession. Some scholars believe that the bride is a princess being brought to Solomon (3:6-11). The second part of the Song is a description of the bride (4:1-7), the images of which might seem grotesque to us. The point is that the groom desires a physical consummation with his bride. The final portion of this Song is a colloquy of love. It may contain three independent poems or fragments of poems (4:8--5:1), which do not seem to be related or connected.

THE FOURTH SONG (5:2—6:3)

The bride dreams a second time. The groom comes, but she is too slow to let him in. Dripping with Myrrh, she opens the door; but he disappears. Myrrh was a perfume a bride wore on her wedding night. In response to a question asked by the daughters of Jerusalem, she describes her lover (5:10-16). In reply to a second question, she insists that she knows where he is. He is tending his sheep.

THE FIFTH SONG (6:4—8:4)

In this Song the bride and groom admire one another and express their desires to taste the full delight of love in the spring countryside. Her beauty is compared with Tirzah and Jerusalem. Tirzah became the capital of Israel under Jeroboam I (1 Kings 14:17), but was abandoned by Omri for Samaria (1 Kings 16:23). *Tirzah* means “pleasure” or “beauty”

and was probably a beautiful city. The adjective *Shulammitte* in 6:13 refers either to a girl from Shunem, or to Solomon's girl.

Her beauty is described beginning with her feet and ending with her hair; and her stature is like a stately palm tree, which is a sex symbol. The "mandrakes" were to arouse sexual desire. The emotions mentioned are passionately sensual.

The desire for her lover to be, as her brother, has to do with not being able to express love by kissing in public anyone but family. She would like to express her feelings openly, but that would have offended the culture. Therefore she must restrain herself until they are alone. Does this mean that they are not yet married? While this is implied, it is not directly stated.

THE SIXTH SONG (8:5-14)

The two are finally together, and nothing will destroy their love for one another. They have been faithful, and will continue in their fidelity to one another. Such love is to be cherished more than wealth. The Song of Solomon ends with an invitation to the lover. So does the Book of Revelation, where the Church, formerly described as the Bride of Christ (Ephesians 5:25-33), longs for consummation of the marriage (Revelation 22:20). The mountain of spices is a poetic allusion to the lover's erotic union. For John Wesley, this final verse carries eschatological significance. The church waits for Christ's return to consummate his marriage to the church.

MARRIED TO CHRIST

The Song of Solomon has long been thought of as an erotic book of love that somehow does not fit into the Bible. What is it doing here? Its main function is to invite us to love God as men and women love one another. The most powerful verse is Song of Solomon 8:6, which is found towards the end of the book: "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."

While love is *erotic* it is not *illicit*. The relationship between God and his people is compared to the relationship between man and woman. The commitment expected between men and women is described in terms of "covenant," the exact same word, which is used to describe the relationship between God and his people. The commitment to God and to one's spouse carries with it the same sacredness and seriousness. Both are to endure through death.

Hosea stands as the main proponent of erotic love in the Old Testament, and he illustrates it in a way that would be difficult for us to understand today. He married a whore, and had children by her. Though she continued to be unfaithful to him, he maintained faithfulness to her. All this was done to illustrate the relationship between God and his people. Hosea 2:19-20 is the key passage: "And I will take you for my wife forever; I will take you for my wife in righteousness and in justice, in steadfast love, and in mercy. I will

take you for my wife in faithfulness; and you shall know the Lord.” God is the bridegroom, and God’s people the bride. Hosea acted out God’s faithfulness, and Gomer, his wife, acted out Israel’s unfaithfulness.

According to Matthew 9:15, Jesus understood himself as the bridegroom; and so as long as he was present there was no need to fast. Marriage is an occasion for feasting. Jesus told at least two parables using the imagery of a wedding. The first is described in Matthew 22:1-14 and generally known as the Parable of the Wedding Banquet. Since the invited guests did not respond to the invitation, everyone was urged to attend. This does not mean that everyone was accepted. Those not wearing their wedding robes were thrown out of the banquet. The wedding robe is a symbol of faith.

Another Parable that takes up this same theme is the Parable of the Ten Bridesmaids in Matthew 25:1-13. Five bridesmaids are ready when the bridegroom comes, and five are not. Jesus is the bridegroom in this story, and his true disciples are the five bridesmaids who are prepared and actively waiting for him. Exercising faith in him, or being prepared for him involves much more than believing in him. It involves exercising faith, which is like falling in love with him. Erotic love illustrates the intensity of this faith and love far more than agape love, even though God’s love for us is more like agape love.

When Paul deals with marriage, he cannot do so without dealing with how one should be related to Christ:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her, in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word, so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind—yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish. (Ephesians 5:25-27)

For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh. This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church. Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband. (Ephesians 5:31-33)

Nuns have long said in the Roman Catholic Tradition that they are married to Christ. The same is supposed to be true for priests. If we Protestants take seriously our belief in the priesthood of all believers, then all of us are to be married to Christ. He is the “Rose of Sharon” and the “Lily of the Valley.” (Song of Solomon 2:1); and although we may not think of our relationship with him in the same terms as we do with our spouse, the same intensity ought to be present. What is clear in the Song of Solomon is the desire to consummate the marriage, and all citizens of God’s Kingdom hunger for the consummation of that Kingdom, as is evidenced by the final prayer of the New Testament, which says: “Come, Lord Jesus!” (Revelation 22:20) This is our burning passion, and the only thing that comes close to describing this emotion is erotic love. In the final analysis, faith is simply loving God.

1. THE DESIRE FOR LOVE

Song of Solomon 1:1—2:7

The Shulamite longs for love

Song 1:2 Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine,

Song 1:3 your anointing oils are fragrant, your name is perfume poured out; therefore the maidens love you.

Song 1:4 Draw me after you, let us make haste. The king has brought me into his chambers. We will exult and rejoice in you; we will extol your love more than wine; rightly do they love you.

The Shulamite defends her dark skin

Song 1:5 I am black and beautiful, O daughters of Jerusalem, like the tents of Kedar, like the curtains of Solomon.

Song 1:6 Do not gaze at me because I am dark, because the sun has gazed on me. My mother's sons were angry with me; they made me keeper of the vineyards, but my own vineyard I have not kept!

The Shulamite searches for her lover

Song 1:7 Tell me, you whom my soul loves, where you pasture your flock, where you make it lie down at noon; for why should I be like one who is veiled beside the flocks of your companions?

Song 1:8 If you do not know, O fairest among women, follow the tracks of the flock, and pasture your kids beside the shepherds' tents.

The Lovers describe one another

Song 1:15 Ah, you are beautiful, my love; ah, you are beautiful; your eyes are doves.

Song 1:16 Ah, you are beautiful, my beloved, truly lovely. Our couch is green;

Song 1:17 the beams of our house are cedar, our rafters are pine.

2. FALLING IN LOVE

Song of Solomon 2:8—3:5

Experiencing love in Springtime

Song 2:10 My beloved speaks and says to me: “Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away;

Song 2:11 for now the winter is past, the rain is over and gone.

Song 2:12 The flowers appear on the earth; the time of singing has come, and the voice of the turtledove is heard in our land.

Song 2:13 The fig tree puts forth its figs, and the vines are in blossom; they give forth fragrance. Arise, my love, my fair one, and come away.

Warnings

Song 2:8 The voice of my beloved! Look, he comes, leaping upon the mountains, bounding over the hills.

Song 2:9 My beloved is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look, there he stands behind our wall, gazing in at the windows, looking through the lattice.

The Shulamite’s Brothers

Song 2:15 Catch us the foxes, the little foxes, that ruin the vineyards — for our vineyards are in blossom.”

Love lost and Found

Song 3:1 Upon my bed at night I sought him whom my soul loves; I sought him, but found him not; I called him, but he gave no answer.

Song 3:2 “I will rise now and go about the city, in the streets and in the squares; I will seek him whom my soul loves.” I sought him, but found him not.

Song 3:3 The sentinels found me, as they went about in the city. “Have you seen him whom my soul loves?”

Song 3:4 Scarcely had I passed them, when I found him whom my soul loves. I held him, and would not let him go until I brought him into my mother’s house, and into the chamber of her that conceived me.

3. THE WEDDING

Song of Solomon 3:6—5:1

The Groom

Song 3:9 King Solomon made himself a palanquin from the wood of Lebanon.

Song 3:10 He made its posts of silver, its back of gold, its seat of purple; its interior was inlaid with love. Daughters of Jerusalem,

Song 3:11 come out. Look, O daughters of Zion, at King Solomon, at the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, on the day of the gladness of his heart.

The Bride

Song 4:1 How beautiful you are, my love, how very beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats, moving down the slopes of Gilead.

Song 4:2 Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them is bereaved.

Song 4:3 Your lips are like a crimson thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil.

Song 4:4 Your neck is like the tower of David, built in courses; on it hang a thousand bucklers, all of them shields of warriors.

Song 4:5 Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that feed among the lilies.

The Consummation

Song 4:16 Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits.

Song 5:1 I come to my garden, my sister, my bride; I gather my *myrrh* with my spice, I eat my honeycomb with my honey, I drink my wine with my milk.

* *Myrrh* was a perfume that a bride wore on her wedding night.

4. THE ANXIETY OF LOVE

Song of Solomon 5:2—6:3

Lost Love

Song 5:2 I slept, but my heart was awake. Listen! my beloved is knocking. “Open to me, my sister, my love, my dove, my perfect one; for my head is wet with dew, my locks with the drops of the night.”

Song 5:3 I had put off my garment; how could I put it on again? I had bathed my feet; how could I soil them?

Song 5:6 I opened to my beloved, but my beloved had turned and was gone. My soul failed me when he spoke. I sought him, but did not find him; I called him, but he gave no answer.

A Description of her Lover

Song 5:10 My beloved is all radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand.

Song 5:11 His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven.

Song 5:12 His eyes are like doves beside springs of water, bathed in milk, fitly set.

Song 5:13 His cheeks are like beds of spices, yielding fragrance. His lips are lilies, distilling liquid myrrh.

Song 5:14 His arms are rounded gold, set with jewels. His body is ivory work, encrusted with sapphires.

Song 5:15 His legs are alabaster columns, set upon bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars.

Song 5:16 His speech is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

Her Lover's Whereabouts

Song 6:2 My beloved has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to pasture his flock in the gardens, and to gather lilies.

Song 6:3 I am my beloved's and my beloved is mine; he pastures his flock among the lilies.

5. THE PHYSICAL ATTRACTION IN LOVE

Song of Solomon 6:4—8:4

First Description of the Shulamite Woman

Song 6:4 You are beautiful as Tirzah, my love, comely as Jerusalem, terrible as an army with banners.

Song 6:5 Turn away your eyes from me, for they overwhelm me! Your hair is like a flock of goats, moving down the slopes of Gilead.

Song 6:6 Your teeth are like a flock of ewes, that have come up from the washing; all of them bear twins, and not one among them is bereaved.

Song 6:7 Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil.

Second Description of the Shulamite Woman

Song 7:1 How graceful are your feet in sandals, O queenly maiden! Your rounded thighs are like jewels, the work of a master hand.

Song 7:2 Your navel is a rounded bowl that never lacks mixed wine. Your belly is a heap of wheat, encircled with lilies.

Song 7:3 Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle.

Song 7:4 Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes are pools in Heshbon, by the gate of Bath-rabbim. Your nose is like a tower of Lebanon, overlooking Damascus.

Song 7:5 Your head crowns you like Carmel, and your flowing locks are like purple; a king is held captive in the tresses.

The Shulamite's Invitation

Song 7:11 Come, my beloved, let us go forth into the fields, and lodge in the villages;

Song 7:12 let us go out early to the vineyards, and see whether the vines have budded, whether the grape blossoms have opened and the pomegranates are in bloom. There I will give you my love.

Song 8:1 O that you were like a brother to me, who nursed at my mother's breast! If I met you outside, I would kiss you, and no one would despise me.

Song 8:3 O that his left hand were under my head, and that his right hand embraced me!

6. THE CONSUMMATION OF LOVE

Song of Solomon 8:5-14

The Supremacy of Love

Song 8:6 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.

Song 8:7 Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If one offered for love all the wealth of his house, it would be utterly scorned.

The Invitation

Song 8:12 My vineyard, my very own, is for myself; you, O Solomon, may have the thousand, and the keepers of the fruit two hundred!

Song 8:14 Make haste, my beloved, and be like a gazelle or a young stag upon the mountains of spices!

The Consummation of the Church

Eph. 5:25 Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her,

Eph. 5:26 in order to make her holy by cleansing her with the washing of water by the word,

Eph. 5:27 so as to present the church to himself in splendor, without a spot or wrinkle or anything of the kind — yes, so that she may be holy and without blemish.

Eph. 5:28 In the same way, husbands should love their wives as they do their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself.

Eph. 5:29 For no one ever hates his own body, but he nourishes and tenderly cares for it, just as Christ does for the church,

Eph. 5:30 because we are members of his body.

Eph. 5:31 “For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two will become one flesh.”

Eph. 5:32 This is a great mystery, and I am applying it to Christ and the church.

Eph. 5:33 Each of you, however, should love his wife as himself, and a wife should respect her husband.

Rev. 22:20 “Surely I am coming soon.” Amen. Come, Lord Jesus!

AFTERWORD

In my study of the whole Bible, including the Apocrypha, I left the study of the Books of Wisdom for last. Even then, it was difficult to keep people interested. Studying the Psalms was the most difficult. It was like studying the Hymn Book. Classifying the Psalms and studying them according to topics helped, but most people complained of boredom. I could find very little in the way of video on most of these books. I did find some video on Job, and I believe that most of the people, who studied with me, liked Job the most.

I'll never stop studying the Bible. It's the most well-known book in history, and it contains plenty of wisdom. All we have to do is search for that wisdom. During my first study of Job, one of the members of the Church I was serving, had a brain tumor, which finally caused his death, after about three years of treatment. During those three years, I visited him every week. I read the entire book of Job to him, and he delighted in talking about Job's friends. They reminded him of his own friends. I received the telephone call informing me of his death as I was getting ready to preach on Easter Sunday morning. I felt more joy than I did sorrow. His long suffering was over, and I believe his questions about his own suffering were answered.

Although the search for wisdom will be an eternal search, wisdom is clearly defined in every book of Wisdom, except for the Song of Solomon. My favorite book on Wisdom is Job, but my favorite verse is Ecclesiastes 12:13;

The end of the matter; all has been heard.
Fear God, and keep his commandments;
For that is the whole duty of everyone.

If I were to sum it all up, I would agree with Ecclesiastes that the wise person (1) fears God, (2) keeps the commandments, and (3) flees from sin and evil. I'm tempted to say that the wise person will overcome sin and evil by love. I don't have any difficulty using the term "fear" when talking about God. As a child I feared a spanking from my father whenever I misbehaved, but over the years I came to realize that he disciplined me because he loved me.

I'm always looking for stories about wisdom. If you have one to tell, I would love to hear it. I've tried to eliminate all my mistakes from this book, but as in life, we all make mistakes, no matter how hard we try to avoid them. If you'll point them out to me, I will correct them and print a new edition. I hope you will join me in the Search for Wisdom, and upon finding it, join me in living it out in heart and life.

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