

Job • Proverbs • Ecclesiastes • Song of Solomon



The Ruins of the Library of Celsus in Ancient Ephesus

Wisdom Literature

by Charles Speer

SUNSET BIBLE STUDY LIBRARY

Wisdom Literature

by
Charles Speer



Published by

SUNSET INSTITUTE PRESS

3710 34th Street ♦ Lubbock, Texas ♦ 79410
(800) 687-2121 ♦ Email: extschool@sibi.cc

Wisdom Literature

© Sunset Institute Press

Copyright © 2016
All rights reserved.

All Scripture quotations, unless indicated, are taken from
THE HOLY BIBLE: New International Version®.
Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984 by the International Bible
Society. Used by permission of Zondervan Publishing House.

Printed in the United States of America.

Cover Design by
Beth Miller and Richard Cravy
Edit and format by Darlene Morris
Publisher: Virgil Yocham

ISBN: 978-1-938335-75-4

All rights reserved. No portion of this book may be
reproduced in any form without the written permission
of the publisher, including translation.

***This book is dedicated
to the following Sunset Brothers:***

Wisdom is extracted from the accessible spiritual mines of Scriptures, especially from what is termed "Wisdom Literature." Wisdom is also available from the spiritual minds of those who have allowed God's wisdom in Scripture to become their wisdom, too. It is to the latter that I dedicate this book. My association with Sunset International Bible Institute has allowed me to glean wisdom from so many colleagues:

***Richard Rogers from Job and
Ted Kell from the Psalms.
I used to say of Richard Baggett,
"He wreaks with wisdom!"
And then I met Norman Gipson,
another spiritual giant who was
full of the Spirit and wisdom.
Thank you, my brothers,
for contributing to my wisdom.
I, too, love to share with others
who want to be wise.***

A companion workbook on the study of Jeremiah by Dayton Keese is available for purchase through Sunset international Bible Institute External Studies: 1 (800) 687-2121

Table of Contents

Preface	vii
I. Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom Literature ...	1
II. The Challenge of Job	14
III. Job's Friends Speak	30
IV. Job's Response to His Friends.....	41
V. Job's Arguments With God	54
VI. Elihu's Assessment of Job	68
VII. God's Final Words for Job	83
VIII. Introduction to Ecclesiastes	96
IX. False Philosophies of Life (1)	109
X. False Philosophies of Life (2)	121
XI. False Philosophies of Life (3).	135
XII. False and True Philosophies of Life.	150
XIII. True Philosophies of Life.	162
XIV. Introduction to Proverbs	172
XV. Solomon on Riches.	192
XVI. Solomon on the Tongue	207
XVII. Solomon on Fornication	221
XVIII. Solomon on Purposeful Parenting	236
XIX. Introduction to the Song of Solomon	252
XX. Solomon on Marital Sex (1)	262
XXI. Solomon on Marital Sex (2)	274

Additional Volumes of the
SUNSET BIBLE STUDY LIBRARY
in print in English include:

1. Acts – Abe Lincoln
2. Bible History 1 – Richard Rogers
3. Bible History 2 – Richard Rogers
4. Biblical Interpretation – Charles Speer
5. Biblical Theology of Missions – Richard Rogers
6. Case For Historical Christianity – Ed Wharton
7. Christ and the Church – Ed Wharton
8. Christian Counseling, Introduction to – Truman Scott
9. Colossians and Philemon – Bob Martin
10. 1 Corinthians – Abe Lincoln
11. 2 Corinthians – Abe Lincoln
12. Daniel – Ted Stewart
13. Ephesians – Gerald Paden
14. Excellence in Leadership – Richard Rogers
15. Hebrews – Gerald Paden
16. History of the Church in Acts – Richard Rogers
17. Isaiah – Richard Rogers
18. James – Ron Bontrager
19. Jeremiah – Dayton Keesee
20. John, The Epistles of – Gerald Paden
21. John, The Gospel of – Doyle Gilliam
22. Leader Strong Churches – Truman Scott
23. Levitical Sacrificial System – Gerald Paden
24. Life of Christ – Richard Rogers
25. Minor Prophets – Richard Rogers
26. New Discoveries (Apologetics II) – Ted Stewart
27. Peter, Epistles of – Ted Stewart
28. Philippians – Doyle Gilliam
29. Psalms – Charles Speer
30. Power of Biblical Thinking, The – Ken Wilson
31. Redemption Is. . . – Ed Wharton
32. Revelation – Richard Rogers
33. Romans – Richard Rogers
34. Shepherds Among the Sheep – Truman Scott
35. Spiritual Living for Ministers – Truman Scott
36. Theology of Ministry – Jim Harris
37. 1 & 2 Thessalonians – Doyle Gilliam
38. 1 & 2 Timothy and Titus – Tex Williams

Preface to the Sunset Bible Study Library

Since 1962 Sunset International Bible Institute has been a leader in teaching God's Word, training local church leaders, and preparing preachers and missionaries for an effective ministry. Developed in the laboratory of preacher training and proven in the crucible of a practical ministry, the Sunset curriculum has grown to forty core courses used both in our resident school and distance learning applications. In 1989 the Sunset Video Studio was inaugurated to record each course of study in a professional format. Those courses, each with a companion study guide, have been used to teach thousands of individual students and develop a worldwide network of video satellite schools in local congregations and mission fields.

Now, in printed form, that same library of trusted Bible study material is available through Sunset Institute Press for an even wider circle of Bible students thanks to a benevolent God, an excellent editorial staff, and a number of faithful supporters who believed in the project. This book is the result of a multi-step process which began with a video taped course. The voice track of the video tape was first transcribed, then formatted and edited from spoken to written style. The goal of the editorial process has been to produce a readable document while protecting the course content and the style and personality of the teacher. We believe the goal has been achieved and that each of the forty books planned for the Sunset Study Library will likewise achieve that goal.

Special gratitude must be expressed to Cline Paden and Truman Scott who began the video course series in 1989, to Bob Martin, who directed Sunset Video Studio, to Virgil Yocham and the staff of the Sunset External Studies Division who wrote the study guides, to Darlene Morris and the staff of Sunset Translation/Editing Center who edited the manuscripts, and to each faculty member of Sunset International Bible

Institute who took extra time to prepare and present these courses in the studio.

This book and its companion volumes are being translated into the major languages of the world to produce a Bible Study Library which can be used on the mission fields of the world to mature Christians, train church leaders, and grow churches that plant other churches.

Introduction to Old Testament Wisdom Literature

Introduction

This book covers the course Wisdom Literature from the Old Testament. It is what I call the music and poetry appreciation course in the Bible. I grew up in a family of scientists and logical thinkers. My dad was a biochemist. My mother's college major was biology. She and my dad would sit at the kitchen table during dinner and discuss my father's work in the scientific world. He did research consistently on blood coagulation and the platinum compounds that were used in chemotherapy to treat tumors. He was constantly reading literature about new research and trying to decide what the next tests would be in his area of responsibility. He was always looking logically and scientifically at methods that could be applied to his work. My brother's PhD is in Physics. He has worked in the electronics industry for many years. He has worked on quality control and has developed the computer programs to test products. His work has to do with logic, scientific approach, and problem solving. My university degree is in Electrical Engineering which has to do with problem solving in design and how things fit together in a logical and scientific way. We are a family of critical thinkers and problem-solvers. Our approach is logic and reasoning.

However, from early on something interesting was taking place in my home. My mother and father, especially my dad, loved classical music. Perhaps he knew that both sides of the brain needed to be engaged and stimulated. While he read scientific journals and plotted the next day's research, he listened to Bach, Chopin, Mozart, Strauss, Brahms, and, of course, Beethoven. It was an interesting combination, Amadeus and Science! My dad was also incorporating in me the

importance of the artistic side, not just the scientific and logical side.

God does the same thing in Scripture. Some Scripture is very logical and uses reasoning in its approach. Paul was a very logical thinker as he wrote his letters in the New Testament. He presented God's messages in a very logical way in step one and step two or this truth and this truth equal this truth. I love those books and I know why I gravitate toward those books. God is wrapping up logic and reasoning in those particular books.

However, when you get to Wisdom Literature, it is quite different. Within those books there are the artistic, musical, and poetic sides of Scripture. God is still presenting truth, but He has packaged it differently. These books appeal to a different part of the Bible scholar. Some biblical books appeal more to the right brained person and then other books may appeal more to the left brained person. The Scriptures appeal to every man in different ways. God is packaging different kinds of truth in different packages. When someone gives a gift to a friend, it is usually wrapped for the occasion, Christmas or birthday. As children we are usually more interested in what the present may be. A child will tear off the wrapping paper without even considering how the present was wrapped. As adults we usually appreciate the wrapping as well as what is inside. The wrapping indicates something about the person who wrapped it because they took the time to wrap it in a certain way. The wrapping paper, the bow, and the card or note says something about the person who wrapped it. This is the aurora in which the gift was given that is also important. That is what God has done in Wisdom Literature. It is biblical truth that is reasonable and logical and still a part of God's thinking, but it has been packaged differently. For the Bible scholars who think more logically and scientifically to some degree, they need to come to appreciate this part of Scripture as well as the Gospels and Paul's epistles. This part of Scripture has been somewhat neglected in churches. Christians need to get back to a balanced approach because Wisdom Literature is truth just packaged in a different way. These books are just as important as any other parts of Scripture.

The Scope of the Course

The first purpose for studying Wisdom Literature is to become acquainted with the books in this genre of the Bible. These books are not the most familiar to Bible students. Wisdom Literature contains 243 chapters of Scripture. Surely if God wrote 243 chapters about something, then it deserves attention. Wisdom Literature is almost two and half times the size of Isaiah, which is considered a great prophetic book in the Old Testament. Wisdom Literature contains more Messianic references to the New Testament Christ and more references quoted in the New Testament than almost every other part of the Old Testament. Psalms is the most quoted Old Testament book in the New Testament.

Another purpose for studying this portion of the Bible is to come to know God. God reveals Himself throughout Scripture. The Bible is the Book that reveals God to man. Sometimes men approach Scripture to find out how they should live or what they should think. The first question one should ask when studying any part of the Bible is what does that passage tell me about God. What do the scriptures reveal about Him? John 17:3 says, *“Now this is eternal life: that they may know you, the only true God, and Jesus Christ, whom you have sent.”* Scripture reveals the complete picture of God and His Son.

Another purpose for studying Wisdom Literature is to learn to appreciate another kind of literature. This involves looking at how God packaged truth in different packages. There are certain rules and tenets that are applicable to this kind of literature that are different from interpreting other kinds of literature. It is important to learn these things.

Another purpose for this kind of study is that man needs to learn to wrestle with some of the major questions of life. Perhaps God packaged the material in this form because this approach was necessary to present certain major questions in life. It is important to know who God is and what He is like. These scriptures address the question what is true wisdom. Wisdom is a major theme in these Wisdom Literature books.

There is a lot of emphasis on what is wise and what is right especially in the Book of Proverbs.

Another major question that is addressed in these scriptures is why do people suffer. Every society has wrestled with this question. A more direct question would be why do the righteous people suffer? The Book of Job addresses that question. Job has one answer to that question, but it is not the answer that society appreciates. The New Testament also talks about suffering. James 1:2–5 says:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything. If any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to him.

In Paul's letter to the Romans he said:

. . . we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us (Romans 5:3–5).

There is something the LORD uses in man's sufferings that produces the right kind of character. First Peter 4:12 says, "Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you." The New Testament writers address the fact that man is going to suffer and some of the benefits from suffering, but Job has a different answer and a different part of the puzzle when we consider why men suffer.

Another question that is addressed in Wisdom Literature deals with man's purpose for being here. These introspective books make men look at themselves. They answer the questions

as to who I am, why I am here, and how I should proceed in life. It is good to pull back from everything in life and all the things that are vying for our attention and thought processes and get back to the basics. Who am I? What am I doing here? Where am I going? Wisdom Literature helps answer these questions.

Another question that Wisdom Literature answers is how can man communicate with God. He is God, the invisible One. He is powerful. He is not someone man can put his hands on. He is out of man's reach in one sense, but in another sense He is here. It is hard to communicate with someone who is not a human being. How is man to worship God? He commands men to worship Him, but how do we speak to Him? The Book of Psalms will answer these questions.

Another question that arises is why should man serve God at all. Even though He is God and He made the world, why should man serve Him. The Books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes answer that question. Ecclesiastes will ask over and over in the early chapters, "What does man gain from serving God?" Solomon wanted to know if there was any bottom line gain from taking this approach in life. At the end of Ecclesiastes he will say that the only gain in life that will benefit man is for man to ". . . *Fear God and keep his commandments . . .*" (Ecclesiastes 12:13). Job wrestled with the same questions asking if there was anything to gain in his suffering for staying faithful. He found out near the end that there is gain in remaining faithful.

Another question that Wisdom Literature answers is what should man teach his children. The LORD blesses mankind with children and we are responsible for them. Children are the primary stewardship for parents. What should we teach them? What curriculum should we use? In a messed-up world where children do very ungodly things and end up in all kinds of ditches in life, what can a parent do who loves his children and wants to give them all the tools to live a prosperous and fruitful life. Proverbs is the book which will answer those questions concerning youth instruction.

Another purpose for the study of Wisdom Literature is to bolster the student's personal and devotional life and

meditational activities. This study will encourage the student to slow down. We live in a very fast paced world. We have appointments and things to do. When we get home from our jobs, there are always things to do around the house. Then there are all kinds of entertainment vying for our attention. Where is God in all of that? Where is my personal relationship with God? When do I make time for a personal talk with God? When do I make time to worship God? Where does my meditational time fit into this fast paced schedule? The Book of Psalms talks about meditation. Psalm 119 in particular and other psalms talk about this important part of man's spirituality. How can I find the time to develop that? Wisdom Literature is reflective material. It looks into the window of the soul and causes man to ask questions about himself. This meditational approach is also the way in which man hopes to gain wisdom. He reflects and ponders how he can become wise as he gets older.

Why Is it Called "Wisdom Literature"?

These books contain much about the subject of wisdom. A simple definition for the word wisdom is knowledge applied. It is not just knowledge by itself. A person can know many things and still not be very wise. A person can know numerous scientific facts or artistic things in the world. There is a flood of knowledge that can be learned from the internet. There are things to read and things to see readily available, but does that knowledge always turn into wisdom? That is not what always happens. Man desires wisdom. Wisdom gives us insight into how life is to be led. It gives man insight into the fact that one day we are going to die. How should man prepare for his death? Wisdom gives us insight into our past and how we should interpret what has happened to us. How do we interpret the sufferings that we have gone through or the choices that we have made? How do we interpret the things that have happened to us that did not have anything to do with the choices that we made? How do we live in the present? How do we teach ourselves not to focus on the past or constantly look to the future? How can we live in the present in a way that is productive? How do we view ourselves? Do we know who we

are? How do we deal with the fact that I am not like so and so because I am not as pretty as so and so and I do not have as much talent as so and so? Wisdom teaches man how to deal with himself. It tells him how to deal with his relationship to God. Man has to have divine wisdom from One who is eternal and immortal to tell him how he relates to himself. He will also tell him how to relate to other people. Wisdom Literature is talking about insight and a way to think. It will talk about the pragmatic, the way to live or behave. It will talk about being able to translate the wisdom of God into a form that man can understand and incorporate into his thinking and behavior.

Wisdom was also a theme in other books that were not in the Bible. The Jews knew about these extra biblical sources:

- Ecclesiasticus (180 B.C.)
- Wisdom of Solomon (50 B.C.)
- Poem of Baruch (100 B.C.)

Solomon would have written Proverbs in approximately 900 B.C. The Israelites had been concerned with and wanting to know more about wisdom for centuries. The Israelites were not the only ones who were concerned about the theme of wisdom. There were kings in other nations as well as the kings of the Israelites who usually surrounded themselves with people who were considered to be wise. Sometimes it was wise women and sometimes it was wise men. Kings needed this insight to know how to make decisions and how to proceed. Sometimes the wise men were prophets. Sometimes the kings were not paying any attention to the prophets of God and they surrounded themselves with so called wise men.

The Wise People of the Ancient World

Consider some of the references in the Old Testament concerning wise men and women:

- Isaiah 29:14 — “. . . *the wisdom of the wise will perish, the intelligence of the intelligent will vanish*” referring to the wise men of Judah.

- Proverbs 22:17; 24:23 — *“Pay attention and listen to the sayings of the wise . . . These also are sayings of the wise . . .”*
- 2 Samuel 14:2 — *“So Joab sent someone to Tekoa and had a wise woman brought from there . . .”* Tekoa was in Edom, so it was not just in Israel that they were interested in wise people.
- Obadiah 8 — *“In that day . . . will I not destroy the wise men of Edom, men of understanding in the mountains of Esau?”*
- 2 Samuel 20:15–16 — *“. . . Joab came and besieged Sheba in Abel Beth Maacah . . . a wise woman called from the city, ‘Listen! Listen! . . .’”*
- Judges 5:29 — *“The wisest of her ladies answer her . . .”* talking about the wise women who attended Jabin’s wife.
- Esther 1:13 — *“Since it was customary for the king to consult experts . . . he spoke with the wise men who understood the times”* talking about the wise men of Babylon.
- Daniel 2:12–14 — *“This made the king so angry and furious that he ordered the execution of all the wise men of Babylon . . . Daniel spoke to him with wisdom and tact.”*
Daniel, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego were all part of the wise men of Babylon. Nebuchadnezzar called upon Daniel to interpret his dream. There are many verses in the Book of Daniel that refer to wise men.

Some of the world’s wisdom literature has been unearthed by the archeological spade that tells about the world’s approach to wisdom and wisdom literature. Men in other nations grappled with the same problems in life that Israel grappled with. The world wrestles with the same questions of life that Wisdom Literature addresses. There are some correlations between what the Israelites were wrestling with and what these foreigners wrestled with. Israel did not borrow from the writings of foreigners because the Old Testament was inspired of God. There would be some overlap in themes and the things that people talked about because those problems and questions of life face all men. The bottom line about wisdom is seen in the proverbial writings in the following texts:

*For lack of guidance a nation falls, but **many advisers** make victory sure . . . Plans fail for lack of counsel, but with **many advisers** they succeed . . . By wisdom a house is built, and through understanding it is established; through knowledge its rooms are filled with rare and beautiful treasures. A wise man has great power, and a man of knowledge increases strength; for waging war you need guidance, and for victory **many advisers** (Proverbs 11:14, 15:22, 24:3–6).*

There is wisdom in surrounding ourselves with not only Scripture, but also with wise people who have been trained and have studied the depths of Scripture.

Wisdom Theme

Wisdom seemed to be a highly favored and sought after virtue in Solomon's day. Wisdom is defined as knowledge put into practice, but consider the uses of the word wisdom in Old Testament literature as a general rule. In his Introduction to Wisdom Literature, Dr. John Willis from Abilene Christian University notes different connotations and uses of the term wisdom in the Old Testament. The following are some of the uses of the word wisdom:

- Wisdom is used in reference to the skill in a particular art or craft. This would be applicable to those who built the tabernacle and the temple. They had to have wisdom and in that case it would have been an inspired wisdom to be able to construct these buildings.
- Wisdom was used in reference to discretion or good judgment in running the affairs of state. A king has a thousand decisions to make so he would need wisdom to discern what would be best for the nation, for his kingdom, and what would be best as far as the Word of God is concerned. He had to decide whether to go to war or not and what laws needed to be instituted. He had to decide

what taxes should be levied. He had to decide what people should be put into certain work situations, who to give certain responsibilities.

- Wisdom was also used in reference to the sense of being shrewd or crafty or cunning. Sometimes this was not in a particularly good connotation but it could be.
- Wisdom was used in reference to know how to behave in certain situations.
- Wisdom was used in reference to being sharp, smart, and/or intelligent.
- Wisdom was used to refer to magicians, sorcerers, and enchanters.
- Wisdom was used in the sense of being able to understand a certain situation or to be discerning.¹

Wisdom was an important theme in the Old Testament. There is also another connection that needs to be remembered. Wisdom is often connected to the phrase “*the fear of the LORD.*” In these Wisdom Literature books wisdom is directly linked to fearing the LORD:

- *Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man* (Ecclesiastes 12:13).
- *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline . . . The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom, and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding* (Proverbs 1:7, 9:10).
- *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom; all who follow his precepts have good understanding. To him belongs eternal praise* (Psalm 111:10).

Solomon had wandered through all the paths of false approaches to life and as he arrived at the end of the Book of Ecclesiastes he was able to say man needs to fear God and keep

1. Willis, John T., *The Old Testament Wisdom Literature* (Abilene, TX: Biblical Research Press, 1982), pp. 11–12).

His commandments — *“for this is the whole [duty] of man.”* He reached the conclusion that fearing God was the wise approach to life even though he did not use that wisdom. He tried all the other approaches to life that did not work and learned that fearing God and keeping His commands are *“the whole of man.”* In Proverbs 1:7 and 9:10 Solomon said, *“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge . . .”* There is a connection between wisdom and an appropriate *“fear of the LORD.”* That *“fear of the LORD”* is echoed in Psalm 111:10.

What did Solomon mean when he said, *“The fear of the LORD is the **beginning** of wisdom”*? The *“fear of the LORD”* is the starting place for wisdom. Wisdom is the kernel in the core of the heart where wisdom really starts. If man does not have the proper *“fear of the LORD,”* then he is not going to behave himself in all the other ways that God is trying to instill as a wise life. The *“fear of the LORD”* has to do with respect for God and all that God has done. Psalm 103:13 says, *“As a father has compassion on his children, so the LORD has compassion on those who fear him.”* It has to do with being in awe of God and having a certain amount of reverence for God. Psalm 22:23 says, *“You who fear the LORD, praise him! All you descendants of Jacob, honor him! Revere him, all you descendants of Israel!”* Man is to have *“fear”* and reverence for God as Ecclesiastes 12:13 says.

The Wisdom Literature Books

The **Book of Job** will talk about the fear of God and His awesome and powerful nature. That is wisdom and that is the difference between humanity and deity. Humanity is not what God is because there is an awesomeness and power in God. The **Book of Psalms** talks about reverence for the Great One who is worthy of worship. The **Book of Proverbs** is about having respect for God’s wisdom about life. The **Book of Ecclesiastes** deals with the fear of God in judgment. And finally, the **Song of Songs** shows awe at the mysteries of man’s relationships with a mate and with God. Wisdom and the *“fear”* of God will go hand in hand throughout this study.

Literary Background

The most prominent characteristic of Wisdom Literature is that it is mostly poetry. There are characteristics like alliteration and some acrostic approaches. There are word plays or puns which are not seen in the English because these were written in Hebrew or Aramaic words. The literary technique of parallelism is used. There is not a lot of rhyme or rhythm in these books like the poetry that many are used to. There are terse, pithy sayings that get directly to the point of the passage. There is a lot of imagery and figurative language because that is the kind of artistic language being used.

These books are not necessarily historical in their purpose. There are occasional references to history particularly in the Book of Psalms (the Book of Psalms is a separate course on its own for the students studying at SIBI) when certain events refer to incidents in the life of David especially during the time he was hiding from Saul. These books do fit into the lives of the authors. This is a question that needs to be asked and answered. When was the Book of Ecclesiastes written? At what time in the life of Solomon did he try all of these approaches to life? When did Job live? Some of these questions are not answered because there is no time reference. Scholars make the assumption that perhaps Job lived during the Patriarchal days during the time of Abraham or Isaac or Jacob. The literature itself does not reveal that. History was not the main part of these presentations. Which part of Solomon's life does the Song of Songs relate to? What woman out of his seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines does that book refer to?

These books deal with major philosophical questions of life and godly wisdom that need to be applied to situations in daily lives. In his introduction to Wisdom Literature, James Smith says there is philosophical wisdom in the books of Job and Ecclesiastes.² In other words, how do we look at life and the big picture? That is philosophical wisdom. There is

² Smith, James E., *The Wisdom Literature and Psalms* (Joplin, Mo: College Press Publishing Company, 1996), pp. 22.

practical wisdom in the Book of Proverbs. That is the nuts and bolts of life and the way to behave in a particular situation. The big view is the philosophical view, then the practical view shows the way to apply the teachings of God in a certain situation. There is also praise wisdom which comes from the Psalms. The psalmist conveys the way God would like to be spoken to saying this is the way I (God) want you (man) to approach Me or this is the way I want you to sing to Me. Man had to be given instructions in this. He did not know how to approach God without these instructions. The Song of Songs is passion wisdom. It tells how man must approach a very significant part of who he is as a human being. It addresses man's relationship to the person who hopefully is going to be a mate for the rest of his life.

The wisdom of God is approached in different ways in Wisdom Literature. This book will approach it from different standpoints. There is not a lot of "*this is the word of the LORD*" statements in these books. This is not a prophetic kind of literature that will say this is what the LORD said. It is not a letter written by a prophet conveying God's message. It is philosophical inspiration from different people and different writers. The reader gets to hear what these people were saying to God. We are able to hear different ones give their monologue about life. These books are inspired. They are part of the canon and need to be appreciated as a different kind of literature. There are not a lot of voices saying, "*the LORD said . . .*" because the message is always seen through other people who were inspired to give the reader a wise approach to life. These books are very introspective and very personal. They are also very instructive and helpful in many different situations in which different emotions are found. These books approach different questions of life that men grapple with today. These books can become dear friends and personal instructors from God Almighty!

The Challenge of Job

Introduction

There was a man in the old times who was blessed with a fine family, healthy children, an abundance of wealth, and possessions. It looked like he was living the perfect life. He was also a deeply religious man, much more than most of his day. There was no flaw in this man. Even God said of him, “See there is no one like him!” God liked to show him off before His angels and the Devil. He was proud of him. That was not the end of this story. This is the story of Job, the man God used to show Satan the faithfulness of His servants. Things began to change and all kinds of things happened to Job to challenge the very core of who he was. He lost everything — he lost his health, wealth, posterity, possessions, reputation. He lost his children and even the respect of his wife. Job 19 lists all the things that Job lost:

How long will you torment me and crush me with words? Ten times now you have reproached me; shamelessly you attack me . . . He has blocked my way so I cannot pass; he has shrouded my paths in darkness. He has stripped me of my honor and removed the crown from my head. He tears me down on every side till I am gone; he uproots my hope like a tree. His anger burns against me; he counts me among his enemies. His troops advance in force; they build a siege ramp against me and encamp around my tent. He has alienated my brothers from me; my acquaintances are completely estranged from me. My kinsmen have gone away; my friends have forgotten me. My guests and my maidservants count me a stranger; they look upon me as an alien. I summon my servant, but he does not answer, though I beg him with my own mouth. My breath is offensive to my

wife; I am loathsome to my own brothers. Even the little boys scorn me; when I appear, they ridicule me. All my intimate friends detest me; those I love have turned against me. I am nothing but skin and bones; I have escaped with only the skin of my teeth . . . the hand of God has struck me (Job 19:1–21).

Questions naturally began to arise not only to Job, but also to those who read the Book of Job — “Why do the righteous suffer? Why is evil not punished in this life? What kind of God rules this world?” That is the ultimate question. These were troubling questions for Job and his friends and they are troubling questions for people of every generation. For that reason, the Book of Job is relevant today.

Job is probably the best known of Bible books outside Christian circles. It is the story that is perhaps known around the world. Yet, it is not just a story. There are important themes for men to gather out of this great book relevant for today. There is quite a bit that can be read and said about the background of this book. For the purposes of the study in this book most of the time will be spent in the text itself trying to understand what God is saying through the Book of Job. What was Job wrestling with? What were his friends saying? Those are the questions this study will address.

Background of the Book of Job

Job 1:1–22

Job is accepted as an inspired book that belongs in the canon of the Old Testament. Paul quoted Eliphaz the Temanite in Job 5:13 in 1 Corinthians 3:19 as if this passage was something that had been written that was inspired like many of the other references in which Paul and others used the phrase — “*it is written.*” Paul said, “*For the wisdom of this world is foolishness in God’s sight. As it is written: ‘He catches the wise in their craftiness.’*” This does not mean that every statement in the Book of Job is true. It has been recorded accurately, but some of the things said by Job’s friends are not

correct. Some of the things that Job said about God are not correct. The Book of Job is inspired and accurately recorded.

Job is a book of “*integrity*.” It is a book about “*integrity*.” It is not a romantic legend. It is a book about real people. James spoke about the patience of Job in James 5:11:

As you know, we consider blessed those who have persevered. You have heard of Job’s perseverance and have seen what the Lord finally brought about. The Lord is full of compassion and mercy.

This reference conveys the fact that Job was a real person living during Old Testament times. It is not just a story or a legend that someone made up.

It is difficult to know the date of the Book of Job. It is interesting to note that this book is put with Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon in the Wisdom Literature section. The Book of Job belongs in this section thematically, but concerning the date most scholars say that this book is much older than the time of David and Solomon. In his book on Wisdom Literature, James Smith gives the following reasons for why the Book of Job dates back to the time of the patriarchs such as Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and perhaps even as far back as 2000 B.C.

- Smith says that Job performed his own sacrifices. Under the Law of Moses and during the time of Solomon and David, sacrifices were only to be done by the priest. Job offered his own sacrifices more like Noah and Abraham did.
- Smith says Job’s wealth and his possessions were measured in flocks. This description is more like Abraham and the things described in the Book of Genesis.³

Job is mentioned in the Old Testament Book of Ezekiel:

3. Smith, James E., *The Wisdom Literature and Psalms* (Joplin, Mo: College Press Publishing Company, 1996), pp. 51.

The word of the LORD came to me: “Son of man, if a country sins against me by being unfaithful and I stretch out my hand against it to cut off its food supply and send famine upon it and kill its men and their animals, even if these three men — Noah, Daniel and Job — were in it, they could save only themselves by their righteousness, declares the Sovereign LORD . . . Or if I send a plague into that land and pour out my wrath upon it through bloodshed, killing its men and their animals, as surely as I live, declares the Sovereign LORD, even if Noah, Daniel and Job were in it, they could save neither son nor daughter. They would save only themselves by their righteousness” (Ezekiel 14:12–20).

This reference indicates that Job was an historical character like Noah and Daniel. With this background material it is easy to see that the Book of Job belongs in the canon. It was a real story dating back to perhaps the time of Abraham. Some copies of the Hebrew Bible put the Book of Job after Psalms or Proverbs, indicating a belief that maybe Solomon wrote it.

The Book of Job is thematically very modern. It is a book that in many respects is timeless. In fact, perhaps the fact that there is no specific date is helpful. In this regard the theme of Job is very applicable to the time of Job, but also to the time of David, to the time of Jesus, and to the modern times in which man now lives.

The Problems Discussed in the Book of Job

The Book of Job raises five great questions:

- Is there any goodness that does not receive reward? In this life when a man does good, does he receive a reward? Is there ever a time when a man does good that he is not rewarded?
- Why do the righteous suffer? Why does sin go unpunished? In this life, why do people who do wicked things get away

with their wickedness? These are the questions that Job really wrestled with.

- Does God really care for and protect His people who fear Him? Job also asked that question. Does God really care? Does God really see? Is God on a journey? Does He really care about what is happening to mankind in this life?
- Are adversity and affliction signs that the sufferer is wicked? Since trials have fallen upon man in this life, is that an indication that he has sinned? Is that an indication that God is unhappy with mankind? There are all kinds of disasters that happen like tornadoes and hurricanes that blow through different countries. Sometimes things happen individually to man that he has brought upon himself, but a lot of times it is just a part of being in this world. What does that mean to man? Perhaps the first question he might ask is have I done something wrong?
- Is God a god of pity and mercy? Bad things happen to man, but how does God feel about that? Does He look down and see? If He does see, does He really care? Is He willing to do anything about it?

These five questions are some of the main questions in the Book of Job. Job presented five possible solutions to the problem of suffering, but not all of Job's solutions were correct. The following solutions from the Book of Job come from different perspectives:

- A test of character is rewarded in the end. That is one way to look at the suffering Job endured. In other words, a man's character and his significance in relation to God will be rewarded on the final day. This can be seen in Job 1–2 as God talked about His servant Job. In Job 38–42 God talked directly to Job and complimented him for enduring.
- Job's friends suggested that every time man does something wrong he was punished for it in this life. If man was experiencing affliction in this life, then he had to conclude that he had sinned. It is always that way. Every affliction that comes to man is always a punishment for sin.

- A fourth friend came along in Job 32–37. His name was Elihu. He suggested that the affliction that came to man was not necessarily punishment for sin, but it was closely connected with the things that man had done wrong. He pointed out that it might be a voice from God to call man back to Him. It was discipline to draw man back to Him.
- Job really did not have a solution for what he was enduring. Job might conclude that God was arbitrary in this life. Job did not really know what was going on, but he did blame God for it.
- In some aspects Job would say afflictions were a mystery. There is not always an answer for the afflictions that come to man. At the end of the Book of Job, God really did not answer Job's questions or the charges that he had made against God. God evaded the questions and told Job that he really needed to take a good look at God and remain faithful until it was all over at the end of time. Man should submit because of faith in God to know what is best.

It is a bit of a mystery why trials and tribulations come. If one looks at the rest of Scripture, there are some answers beyond the Book of Job concerning the sufferings that man may endure. If the Bible student looks only in the Book of Job he will not find all the answers for why trials and tribulations come.

The Layout of the Book — the Outline

The Book of Job has 42 chapters. The outline proceeds as follows:

- **The Warfare:** the first two chapters contain a conversation between God in heaven and the devil about Job. Then God allowed the devil to do certain things to Job to strain him at every place in his life. The warfare was between Job and the devil (Job 1–2). Job 3 is really a part of the introduction to the Book of Job in which Job starts asking the “Why” questions: Why, LORD? Why does it have to be this way? Why did I have to be born?

- **The First Cycle of Discussions:** In the middle of the Book of Job there is a rather extended section covering the dialogue between Job and his “so-called friends” (Job 4–31). Three friends came to see Job. They sat down and basically wept with him for seven days and seven nights without saying a word because they saw how great his suffering was. Then once the dialogue started there was a rather lively dialogue between Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, Zophar the Naamathite, and Job. They talked to him back and forth about what had happened to him and why these things had happened to him.
- **The Second Cycle of Discussions:** In this discussion Job’s fourth “friend” was introduced. His name was Elihu the Buzite. It is not clear if Elihu was there all along or if he just appeared. Perhaps he had waited on his older friends out of respect for them. He was not happy with what they have said and he offered his perspective to Job (Job 32–37). Some of his arguments seemed to be a little more on target than the older friends.
- **God appeared to Job:** “*Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm . . .*” (Job 38–42). Job had been calling out to God saying, “Come to me, show up, let’s dialogue about this.” Job wanted to make his case. He wanted someone to referee between the two of them to see which one would come out on top. Job was sure that he was right. However, at the end of the Book of Job, God told Job that He was God and Job needed to listen. This conversation brings the Book of Job all together at the end.

The Purposes of the Book of Job

Job was written to justify God in matters of human suffering. Is God to blame for human suffering? Are pain and suffering all His fault? Is He arbitrary? Does He really care? The answers in the Book of Job are only a part of the answers to all of Job’s questions:

- God is not to be put on trial for the things that man may think He has done.

- God can trust man to serve Him no matter what comes his way. God can trust His faithful servants to serve Him all the days of their lives even though He might not explain everything that happens. God can count on man's trust in Him to stand up and remain faithful until the end.
- Although man cannot understand God's dealings in regard to human suffering, he can trust God. Faithful men can endure even though they feel like they cannot hang on. The Book of Job tells man that he can hang on no matter how bad it gets. There may be a lot of things he does not understand and there may be a lot of things that man does not think he can endure, but the promise of the New Testament tells man that God will not bring anything his way that he cannot endure:

No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it (1 Corinthians 10:13).

God loves His children so much that He will always provide an escape:

- The Book of Job allows, and even encourages, honest doubt. Sometimes the Book of Job presents Job talking to God in such a way that the reader wants to tell Job not to talk to God in that way. Some of his accusations were so bold that one can imagine God striking Job dead for what he had said. God does not! God allows His child to have that kind of questioning attitude. He understood that Job was suffering mightily. Knowing the significance of that difficulty, He allowed Job to question Him without striking him dead.
- The Book of Job, like many other stories in Scripture, talks about the value of human suffering. Job will get through his trials and suffering and on the other end of it, he will have grown. The New Testament has a passage that says it this way:

Consider it pure joy, my brothers, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything (James 1:2–4).

- When man really sees God, he is willing to repent. Job had this attitude toward God that He needed to show up so that I can make my case and everything will come out all right. Job felt like he could win this argument with God, but when he saw God and he heard God's argument, Job repented. He collapsed as he should. When we see God, we as mankind will be put into the right perspective. He is God and we are man. That perspective must be kept in view. Job did a good job of that.
- There is restrictive power for Satan. The Book of Job gives a view concerning what Satan was allowed to do. Is Satan allowed to do today the things that he was allowed to do by God to Job in the first two chapters of Job? We have a view into heaven to hear the relationship between Satan and God. The devil is the destroyer. He is the adversary. God is the Savior. He is the great Physician. God may allow the devil to do certain things or allow certain things to happen to man, but God has a purpose in mind and Satan has something else in mind. There is a point at which God tells Satan that he cannot do that. So even though he is a roaring lion seeking whom he can devour (cf. 1 Peter 5:8), he does not have all power over human beings. God is the One who protects mankind.
- There is an implication from the Book of Job that the righteous people must suffer. It is a part of being a part of this world. This is a cursed earth. Righteous men will suffer, but beyond that if the devil is trying to destroy those who are righteous and if he does have certain power, then we, too, will suffer in his hands at times, not necessarily directly, but through his agents and other people.

- A man can stand tough even after he has lost a great deal. Think about what Job lost. He lost all his wealth, but that was probably not what was most important to him. He lost the respect of his wife. He lost his reputation in the community. He lost his children. He loved them so much that he would even offer sacrifices so that their sins would be covered if indeed they had sinned. He was dedicated to his family and he lost them all in just one event. Job held on in spite of all that he had lost — the love of his life, his influence, his own health, his ability to influence others in the community, but he continued to hang on because of his “*integrity*.”
- There is a theme in the Book of Job, a thread that runs through the entire book, that talks about Job’s “*integrity*.” This man believed what he believed and held on to his convictions no matter what. Even though he seemed to be at odds with God, when he was convinced in what he believed, he held onto those beliefs. The LORD respects that conviction. Job could not lose as long as he held on to his “*integrity*.”

The Warfare Job 1:1–22

Description of Job (Job 1:1–5)

In the land of Uz there lived a man whose name was Job. This man was blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil. He had seven sons and three daughters, and he owned seven thousand sheep, three thousand camels, five hundred yoke of oxen and five hundred donkeys, and had a large number of servants. He was the greatest man among all the people of the East. His sons used to take turns holding feasts in their homes, and they would invite their three sisters to eat and drink with them. When a period of feasting had run its course, Job would send and have them purified. Early in the morning he would sacrifice a

burnt offering for each of them, thinking, “Perhaps my children have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.” This was Job’s regular custom.

The land of Uz was probably the land of Edom which was close to Israel. Lamentations 4:21 talks about the land of Edom and that is probably where Job lived. These verses say that Job was the “*greatest man among all the people of the East.*” His wealth was measured by his possessions and his reputation. Job was a “*blameless and upright*” man. It is interesting that the narrator, as he wrote this book (whoever it may be speaking in the early part of the Book of Job), talked about this man who was “*blameless and upright; he feared God and shunned evil.*” This passage also says that he was a man whose regular custom was to offer a burnt offering sacrifice for each of his children. Job was a very devout man.

Satan in Heaven (Job 1:6–12)

One day the angels came to present themselves before the LORD, and Satan also came with them. The LORD said to Satan, “Where have you come from?” Satan answered the LORD, “From roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it” (Job 1:6–7).

The New International Version says “*the angels*” came to present themselves, but the Hebrew actually says “*the sons of God.*” Satan was there also. This is an interesting insight into heaven. What was Satan doing there? He was allowed into heaven at this occasion, and I would assume that he is allowed into heaven even at this point in time. Perhaps he has the same conversation with the LORD about some of His children today. Perhaps Satan is allowed to do things to us, only as God allows and with His permission, just as Satan did to Job. God is doing something here that Christians need to understand. The “*sons of God,*” who I think were “*angels,*” were coming before God to present themselves. They are messengers of God who do His bidding. They do what God tells them to do. We see that in the Old Testament and the New Testament especially in the life of

Jesus. Angels are there to help God get His work done. This conversation between God and Satan continued.

Consider what the LORD said to Satan in Job 1:8 — . . . *“Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil.”* God described Job exactly as the narrator had. That was for the sake of emphasis. First the narrator spoke about Job and then God said the same thing. This is what God thinks about one of His children. It is amazing that God would ask Satan to consider *“my servant Job.”* Isn’t it possible that God thinks the same thing about His servants today when we are faithful to the LORD? God is very proud of His children. He knows we are not perfect, He knew Job was not a perfect man. God was so proud that He put His servant on display before Satan. He asked Satan to take a good look at His child. God really appreciated how Job was living.

The conversation continued with Satan asking:

“Does Job fear God for nothing?” Satan replied. “Have you not put a hedge around him and his household and everything he has? You have blessed the work of his hands, so that his flocks and herds are spread throughout the land. But stretch out your hand and strike everything he has, and he will surely curse you to your face.” The LORD said to Satan, “Very well, then, everything he has is in your hands, but on the man himself do not lay a finger.” Then Satan went out from the presence of the LORD (Job 1:9–12).

Satan knew that the power to do anything to Job was in God’s hand. Satan accused God of putting a protective hedge around Job. Satan accused Job of loving God because of His protection. God gave Satan the permission and the power to do anything to Job with the limitation that Satan could not strike Job himself. God believed that Job would stay faithful, but Satan believed Job would curse God.

**Satan Touched Job
(Job1:13–19)**

One day when Job's sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, a messenger came to Job and said, "The oxen were plowing and the donkeys were grazing nearby, and the Sabeans attacked and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The fire of God fell from the sky and burned up the sheep and the servants, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" While he was still speaking, another messenger came and said, "The Chaldeans formed three raiding parties and swept down on your camels and carried them off. They put the servants to the sword, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" While he was still speaking, yet another messenger came and said, "Your sons and daughters were feasting and drinking wine at the oldest brother's house, when suddenly a mighty wind swept in from the desert and struck the four corners of the house. It collapsed on them and they are dead, and I am the only one who has escaped to tell you!" (Job 1:13–19).

Job lost his possessions, his flocks and his herds, and his servants. All his wealth was taken away. It was hard to lose everything in such a short time, but it would be even harder to lose all his children. One of the messengers said, "*the fire of God fell from the sky*" giving God the responsibility for destroying Job's sheep and his servants. How would Job respond to all of this? How would any man respond to such a great loss?

Job Mourns and Then Worships
(Job 1:20–22)

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: “Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.” In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing.

Job immediately tore his robe, shaved his head, fell down, and worshiped the LORD. Job worshiped! Job 1:21 is one of the most remarkable passages of Scripture as Job said: “*Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised.*” Link this verse with the response of Job to his wife in Job 2:

So Satan went out from the presence of the LORD and afflicted Job with painful sores from the soles of his feet to the top of his head. Then Job took a piece of broken pottery and scraped himself with it as he sat among the ashes. His wife said to him, “Are you still holding on to your integrity? Curse God and die!” He replied, “You are talking like a foolish woman. Shall we accept good from God, and not trouble?” In all this, Job did not sin in what he said (Job 2:7–10).

Job believed the trouble he had endured had come from God. He did not try to figure out a way to excuse God for what was happening. He believed the Sabeans and the Chaldeans and the fire were from God. He also believed the boils had come from God. In spite of all that had happened Job believed they should accept the “good” and the “trouble” from God. He was willing

to accept both from God. Job did not want to accept the good and curse the bad from God. Job's first response to all the trials and tribulations that had come his way, and even the loss of his children, was *"Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised."* Job's response to all of this was remarkable.

Job had a **"programed-in"** response. This was not something Job had to sit down and think about this time. Long before these trials happened to Job, he knew trials and tribulations would come his way. He had probably already experienced some problems in his life. No matter what happened Job knew he had come into this world with nothing and he would leave with nothing. He believed God was the One who gave and He was the One who would take things away. In all of that Job worshiped God. He had made a decision to worship the LORD in all things. Worship involved falling down. Worship involved adoring God. Worship involved praising God. He worshiped God — *"May the name of the LORD be praised"* (Job 1: 21). Job lost everything, but he still believed God was worthy of praise. That was Job's initial response. That is remarkable. Later in the Book of Job, he has trouble with his initial response. In spite of the fact that he had the first initial response right, he struggled with his losses later, but that was okay. Do not miss what happened in the very beginning of Job's trials and tribulations. What should man's initial response be as trials and tribulations come along? What has been programed spiritually into his heart and mind to say and to believe and to act upon when trials and tribulations come? Job's response said the LORD gives and the LORD takes away, but He is worthy of worship anyway.

When man can turn to nothing else, he can turn to God. Job's first statement was one of resignation to God's will. What faith! Later Job voiced some inner doubt. He wished he had never been born (Job 3:1–26). This was not fatalism, but confessional faith. The blessings from God are not prerequisites for one's devotion to God. Job did not curse God. He worshiped God.

Conclusion

What have you programmed into your heart? What should your initial response be when trials and tribulations come? What have you prepared as your first response? What have you programmed spiritually into your heart and mind to say and believe and act upon when trials and tribulations come your way? God is still worthy of worship anyway.

Job's Friends Speak

Job, Stricken by Satan a Second Time

Job 2:1–13

The previous chapter was about Job's warfare as Satan attacked him and his children. In Job 2 Satan was allowed to attack Job himself. Satan and the angels came before God a second time. Again God was very proud of His servant Job:

Then the LORD said to Satan, "Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still maintains his integrity, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason." "Skin for skin!" Satan replied. "A man will give all he has for his own life. But stretch out your hand and strike his flesh and bones, and he will surely curse you to your face." The LORD said to Satan, "Very well, then, he is in your hands; but you must spare his life" (Job 2:3–6).

It is interesting that God took the responsibility for what Satan did. God knew that He was the One in control and He had given Satan the power to do what he did to Job. In spite of all that Satan had done, Job had still maintained his "integrity." Satan challenged God again for protecting Job physically, so God said, "He is in your hands, but you must spare his life."

Satan struck Job's body with boils from the top of his head to the soles of his feet. Job must have been one miserable creature. Not only had Job lost everything that he had in terms

of his possessions and his children, but he also lost his health. He probably could not sleep or eat. What a miserable existence. He had been in pain for some time and his wife wanted him to curse God and die. She urged Job to just give up, to let go and curse God and die. Job told her he could not do that. God could bring good things, but He could also allow troubles to come to man.

The narrator speaks to say, “. . . *In all this, Job did not sin in what he said*” (Job 2:10). That is a repeat of Job 1:22. Job did not sin. He did not give up on God. He did not give up on his “*integrity*.”

Job 2:11–13 names three of Job's friends who came to sit with him: “*Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite and Zophar the Naamathite*.” They sat with Job for seven days and seven nights and “. . . *did not say a word to him, because they saw how great his suffering was*.”

The Language of Agony

Job 3 (The “Why?” Chapter)

Job 3 gives a very interesting look into the heart and soul of Job. This is the “Why?” Chapter. Most people have asked “Why?” as they go through trials and tribulations. Listen to Job as he asks the “Why?” questions of God:

After this, Job opened his mouth and cursed the day of his birth. He said: “May the day of my birth perish, and the night it was said, ‘A boy is born!’ That day — may it turn to darkness; may God above not care about it; may no light shine upon it. May darkness and deep shadow claim it once more; may a cloud settle over it; may blackness overwhelm its light” (Job 3:1–5).

Job used this kind of poetic language as he cursed the day he was born:

“May its morning stars become dark; may it wait for daylight in vain and not see the first rays of dawn, for it did not shut the doors of the womb on me to hide trouble from my eyes” (Job 3:9–10).

Job was saying that he wished the day he had been born could just be wiped off the map. He wanted to just remove that day completely. In other words, Job wished that he had never lived. If he had never lived, he would have never gone through all the trials, hurts, and difficulties. He would not have ever known the pain that he was enduring. Job wished all of this had never happened:

“Why did I not perish at birth, and die as I came from the womb? Why were there knees to receive me and breasts that I might be nursed? For now I would be lying down in peace; I would be asleep and at rest with kings and counselors of the earth, who built for themselves places now lying in ruins, with rulers who had gold, who filled their houses with silver. Or why was I not hidden in the ground like a stillborn child, like an infant who never saw the light of day? There the wicked cease from turmoil, and there the weary are at rest. Captives also enjoy their ease; they no longer hear the slave driver's shout. The small and the great are there, and the slave is freed from his master” (Job 3:11–19).

Job was saying that even if he had been born, he wished that he had gone straight to the grave because in the grave there were kings and captives, slaves and free, the rich and the poor all in the same place because only in the grave they had peace.

Being out of the world would mean that they were away from all the turmoil. Death is the great equalizer. No matter what had happened in life, in death there would be peace. Job wished that he was dead.

Job wished he had never been born, but if he had to be born, then now he wished that he was dead. How severe the pain must have been for this man. There is no evidence for how much time has passed for Job and when his friends came and when he spoke these words. It is possible that he had been in pain for several months. There had been no relief for Job from the pain and suffering so everything was beginning to take its toll. Job continued:

“Why is light given to those in misery, and life to the bitter of soul, to those who long for death that does not come, who search for it more than for hidden treasure, who are filled with gladness and rejoice when they reach the grave? Why is life given to a man whose way is hidden, whom God has hedged in? For sighing comes to me instead of food; my groans pour out like water. What I feared has come upon me; what I dreaded has happened to me. I have no peace, no quietness; I have no rest, but only turmoil” (Job 3:20–26).

Remember when Satan came to God to say that He had hedged Job in by giving him so much and protecting him from all the trials and tribulations of the world? Job used the same words asking God why He had given him life, but hedged him in with so much pain. Job wanted out of his life to be able to die. Satan's perspective was that God had protected Job from harm. Job's perspective was that God had hedged him in and made him miserable. It is possible that Job had already thought about this kind of thing happening. These words seem to indicate that Job had already thought about these things. This was a very difficult time for Job. He was a man who had suffered a great deal.

The Conflict Between Job and His Friends

At first Job's friends came to give him comfort. They were there just to sit with him. Beginning in Job 4 there is a rather extensive dialogue between Job and his three friends. It is also very repetitious. The friends basically said the same things over and over again. Job responded to them each time. There were three rounds with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. It is important to get a taste of what these men were saying. They used a different language than what is used today. It is flowery, ornate, and very straight forward.

There seem to be three parts to what each man said to Job. First each one of the friends talked to Job on a personal level. They chided him for some of the ways he was reacting. Then they presented their own theology explaining why they thought this had happened to Job. Finally they presented their authority sources telling Job why they thought the way they did. These were aged men who had been around a long time and they were supposed to have insights into life.

Eliphaz (Job 4–5, 15, 22)

Then Eliphaz the Temanite replied: "If someone ventures a word with you, will you be impatient? But who can keep from speaking? Think how you have instructed many, how you have strengthened feeble hands. Your words have supported those who stumbled; you have strengthened faltering knees. But now trouble comes to you, and you are discouraged; it strikes you, and you are dismayed. Should not your piety be your confidence and your blameless ways your hope? Consider now: Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed? As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it. At the breath of God they are destroyed; at the blast of his anger they

perish. The lions may roar and growl, yet the teeth of the great lions are broken. The lion perishes for lack of prey, and the cubs of the lioness are scattered" (Job 4:1–11).

It is hard to know whether or not what was said was how these people really talked to one another or not. It seems to be really straight forward talk and even a little harsh. Job responded rather strongly later on in such a way that this does not seem to be merciful talk at all. Eliphaz said Job used to minister to other people in this kind of circumstance, but when it happened to him, he was having a hard time dealing with it.

The theology of Eliphaz is found in Job 4:7 — *"Who, being innocent, has ever perished? Where were the upright ever destroyed?"* In other words, if a man is righteous, then bad things do not happen to him. Eliphaz turned that statement around to say — *"those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it."* If you are evil, bad things happen to you. The implication for Job was that since bad things have happened to him, he was evil. Job must have sinned. This same theology goes on and on and on with Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar in their conversations with Job. They have concluded that since bad things have happened to Job this implied that Job had sinned in some way. Their job seems to be to convince Job that he has sinned so that he will confess his sins and then he can get back to the life that he was living.

Job 4:12–21 reveals the authority source for Eliphaz:

"A word was secretly brought to me, my ears caught a whisper of it. Amid disquieting dreams in the night, when deep sleep falls on men, fear and trembling seized me and made all my bones shake. A spirit glided past my face, and the hair on my body stood on end. It stopped, but I could not tell what it was. A form stood before my eyes, and I heard a hushed voice: 'Can a mortal be more righteous than God?"

Can a man be more pure than his Maker? If God places no trust in his servants, if he charges his angels with error, how much more those who live in houses of clay, whose foundations are in the dust, who are crushed more readily than a moth! Between dawn and dusk they are broken to pieces; unnoticed, they perish forever. Are not the cords of their tent pulled up, so that they die without wisdom?'"

Eliphaz said that he saw a vision. It sounds like he was saying that he was inspired and that this dream came from God. Eliphaz told Job that he needed to face up to what he had done. He had the authority to say this because he had a vision in which a spirit told him what truth was. Job 5:27 reveals the inner spirit of Eliphaz: *"We have examined this, and it is true. So hear it and apply it to yourself."* Eliphaz proclaimed that what he had said was the truth and Job needed to just accept all of this without any discussion. Eliphaz thought he had everything figured out.

Beginning in Job 15:7 there is more from Eliphaz with a bit of a different authority source to add to the vision earlier:

"Are you the first man ever born? Were you brought forth before the hills? Do you listen in on God's council? Do you limit wisdom to yourself? What do you know that we do not know? What insights do you have that we do not have? The gray-haired and the aged are on our side, men even older than your father . . . Listen to me and I will explain to you; let me tell you what I have seen, what wise men have declared, hiding nothing received from their fathers (to whom alone the land was given when no alien passed among them): All his days the wicked man suffers torment, the ruthless through all the years stored up for him. Terrifying sounds fill his ears; when all seems well, marauders attack him. He despairs of escaping the

darkness; he is marked for the sword. He wanders about — food for vultures; he knows the day of darkness is at hand. Distress and anguish fill him with terror; they overwhelm him, like a king poised to attack, because he shakes his fist at God and vaunts himself against the Almighty, defiantly charging against him with a thick, strong shield. Though his face is covered with fat and his waist bulges with flesh, he will inhabit ruined towns and houses where no one lives, houses crumbling to rubble. He will no longer be rich and his wealth will not endure, nor will his possessions spread over the land” (Job 15:7–30).

At this point Eliphaz seemed to claim that all the people in the past, the wisemen and sages, were all saying the same thing that his three friends were saying. This is a different authority source for Eliphaz. All the men and prophets who had written and were respected in the past agreed with what Eliphaz and the friends were saying. It sounds like he might be trying to scare Job a little bit. He was telling Job exactly what happened to those who were wicked. They cannot sleep at night and things scare them and fill them with terror. Eliphaz accused Job of shaking his fist in the face of God. Job needed to know what happened to that kind of wicked people. He was trying to scare Job into repenting of all the things he had done.

The same theology continues in Job 22 as Eliphaz continued his discussion with Job. Eliphaz continued to talk to Job about what he saw as Job's self-righteousness. Look at Job 22:

“The righteous see their ruin and rejoice; the innocent mock them, saying, ‘Surely our foes are destroyed, and fire devours their wealth.’ Submit to God and be at peace with him; in this way prosperity will come to you. Accept instruction from his mouth and lay up his words in your heart. If you return to the Almighty, you will be restored: If you remove

wickedness far from your tent and assign your nuggets to the dust, your gold of Ophir to the rocks in the ravines, then the Almighty will be your gold, the choicest silver for you. Surely then you will find delight in the Almighty and will lift up your face to God. You will pray to him, and he will hear you, and you will fulfill your vows. What you decide on will be done, and light will shine on your ways. When men are brought low and you say, 'Lift them up!' then he will save the downcast. He will deliver even one who is not innocent, who will be delivered through the cleanness of your hands" (Job 22:19–30).

Eliphaz was telling Job that if he would repent then all the good things that he had lost would be returned to him. Basically he was telling Job that he had to repent. Eliphaz did not realize that Job did not have anything to confess. Job did not have any hidden sin; he was not covering up anything. As a human being Job had sinned, but there was no big, black, dark sin that he needed to repent of.

Bildad (Job 8, 18, 25)

Then Bildad the Shuhite replied: "How long will you say such things? Your words are a blustering wind. Does God pervert justice? Does the Almighty pervert what is right? When your children sinned against him, he gave them over to the penalty of their sin. But if you will look to God and plead with the Almighty, if you are pure and upright, even now he will rouse himself on your behalf and restore you to your rightful place. Your beginnings will seem humble, so prosperous will your future be" (Job 8:1–7).

Bildad basically tried to get Job to do the same things that Eliphaz had tried. He began by telling Job that he was just a lot

of hot air. He spoke directly to Job saying hurtful things. He even brought Job's children into the accusations which would have been very hurtful. He felt Job's children must have been out of order having some orgy or something horrible. That is why the wind killed them. That is why the house collapsed on them and they all died. He accused Job of blaming God for what had happened to him.

Bildad used "*former generations*" as his authority source:

"Ask the former generations and find out what their fathers learned, for we were born only yesterday and know nothing, and our days on earth are but a shadow. Will they not instruct you and tell you? Will they not bring forth words from their understanding?" (Job 8:8–10).

Bildad agreed with Eliphaz saying that all the elders from all the ages past would have agreed with them. He really did not have much that was different to say from what Eliphaz had already said. Bildad continued to talk to Job:

"When will you end these speeches? Be sensible, and then we can talk. Why are we regarded as cattle and considered stupid in your sight? You who tear yourself to pieces in your anger, is the earth to be abandoned for your sake? Or must the rocks be moved from their place? The lamp of the wicked is snuffed out; the flame of his fire stops burning. The light in his tent becomes dark; the lamp beside him goes out. The vigor of his step is weakened; his own schemes throw him down. His feet thrust him into a net and he wanders into its mesh. A trap seizes him by the heel; a snare holds him fast. A noose is hidden for him on the ground; a trap lies in his path. Terrors startle him on every side and dog his every step (Job 18:1–11).

Bildad said a lot of the same things that Eliphaz had said. His theology was the law of retribution. He was telling Job that whatever he had sowed would be what he reaped. If you are reaping difficulties and trials that means you have sowed sins. He used a lot of illustrations trying again to get Job to repent. He put many illustrations together as if to say there was a one to one correspondence to the situations Job was in. He was comparing Job to one who was caught in a trap or someone caught in a noose. Just because he was able to list all these illustrations did not mean they were all truth. Basically the same things were said in Job 25. Eliphaz and Bildad agreed that Job was to blame because he had done wrong and all the sages of all the ages agreed with what these friends had to say.

Zophar (Job 11, 20, 27:12ff)

Then Zophar the Naamathite replied: "Are all these words to go unanswered? Is this talker to be vindicated? Will your idle talk reduce men to silence? Will no one rebuke you when you mock? You say to God, 'My beliefs are flawless and I am pure in your sight.' Oh, how I wish that God would speak, that he would open his lips against you and disclose to you the secrets of wisdom, for true wisdom has two sides. Know this: God has even forgotten some of your sin" (Job 11:1–6).

These men show a bit of arrogance when speaking to Job. Zophar seemed to say that since God was not there he would speak for Him. He had the same attitude, the same theology, and his authority was basically the same as the other two friends.

Job's Response to His Friends

Review

God allowed Satan to afflict Job in various ways, to even take away from him a lot of the essence of who he was, but Satan could not take away Job's character. Job's friends came to him and at first seemed to be good comforters, but after sitting silently for seven days and nights, they began to attack and criticize him. Job came back at them with retorts of his own. They tried to prove their theology, which was "Wicked people suffer and righteous people do not suffer. Since you are suffering that means, you have sinned. If you would just repent and change, then all of the things God has taken away from you would be restored to you. And your fellowship and everything else would be restored also." One of the friends wanted Job to consider that his children died because they, too, had sinned.

The theology of Job's friends was what is called the "Law of Retribution" — the righteous do not suffer, the wicked suffer. These men tried to convince Job that they were right by using authority sources. One had a vision, a dream, or a spirit who visited. They all talked about days of the past saying that the sages of the past who were supposedly wise men agreed with them. They wanted Job to confess his sins so that everything could be restored to him.

Job's Criticism of His Friends

As Job responded to his friends at first he seemed to talk directly to his friends, but then he would shift his attention

toward God and begin to talk directly to God in the text. Job responded to his friends saying:

Then Job replied: "Doubtless you are the people, and wisdom will die with you! But I have a mind as well as you; I am not inferior to you. Who does not know all these things?" (Job 12:1–3).

Job was being sarcastic and used cutting criticism to respond to these people. He thought these friends were conceited and lacked consideration for his situation. He felt like they were treating him as a dummy and a second class citizen. They did outnumber him, but he did have wisdom of his own. Job did not appreciate how his friends were treating him.

Job continued this kind of language responding to his friends:

Then Job replied: "I have heard many things like these; miserable comforters are you all! Will your long-winded speeches never end? What ails you that you keep on arguing? I also could speak like you, if you were in my place; I could make fine speeches against you and shake my head at you. But my mouth would encourage you; comfort from my lips would bring you relief" (Job 16:1–5).

Once again Job said they were not really comforters. He felt like they should have had encouraging words when they saw what he was going through. He asked them to consider what he would do if they were in their place. Job wanted someone to offer him relief and to reach out to him. It is questionable whether these men were really friends at all. He needed comfort and solace but that was not what he received.

Consider the way Job responded to Bildad:

Then Job replied: "How long will you torment me and crush me with words? Ten times now you have reproached me; shamelessly you attack me. If it is true that I have gone astray, my error remains my concern alone. If indeed you would exalt yourselves above me and use my humiliation against me, then know that God has wronged me and drawn his net around me" (Job 19:1–6).

There is no real difference in this reply from Job. He wanted his friends to comfort him and if they could not do that, then they needed to back off and let him have space to breathe. Job really wanted his friends to let him have his time to talk with God.

Consider one last text from Job as he tried to get his friends to either give him a little comfort or just leave him alone:

Then Job replied: "How you have helped the powerless! How you have saved the arm that is feeble! What advice you have offered to one without wisdom! And what great insight you have displayed! Who has helped you utter these words? And whose spirit spoke from your mouth?" (Job 26:1–4).

Job was very sarcastic in his response to Bildad in this text. He felt powerless and feeble and yet his friends were being condescending and denigrating to him. Job did not appreciate the fact that they acted as if they had no respect for him and who he was and what he was dealing with.

Bedside Manner

This is a good place to stop and look at some practical applications from the Book of Job. It is important to see Job in relation to his friends. It is important for Christians to know how to respond to someone who is experiencing trials and

tribulations. As the people of God we need to know how to react to all kinds of people. We know that some people make poor decisions and they reap the consequences of that. It happens to us and to friends who may be experiencing the depths of pain. Trials and tribulations come to everyone because we live in a cursed earth. Other people may make decisions that affect others negatively. It is important to know how we should treat people in difficult situations. That is called bedside manner.

What is the bedside manner that the people of God should know and do in relation to people who are hurting especially our brothers and sisters in Christ? Consider the following seven things:

- **Be there:** Job's three friends started out just being available for Job. They did come and travel to be there with Job. They made the effort and were willing to be with Job. For those who struggle with trials and tribulations, we all know how important it is to have the right people around us. They do not have to say much, just their presence, touch, closeness, or an arm around the shoulder and a hug can be important. It helps just to know that someone is there. I think about different people in my life. I think about a family who lost a granddaughter in a tragic accident. My wife and I went to their house as did many other members of the congregation. What could we say to these people who had lost a granddaughter whom they had raised? There is not a lot that you can say in the early hours, but our presence on that occasion endeared us to that family even more closely. It showed itself in later years after we had moved from that place and would go back there. There was always a special bond between us because of our presence in the early hours of their very difficult trial.

- **Avoid “preaching”:** Avoid raising different theological concepts initially like the men did with Job. They brought up all of their theologies and laid it on Job. That really was not the best thing to do at that time, because he was suffering so much. When someone is in the throes of pain that is not the time to present all the theological points that might relate to the situation. Sometimes preachers are the worst at this because they feel like they have to share a biblical perspective. That is not always the right thing to do in the early hours of tribulation. Perhaps it would be better to offer it further down the line when people might need a different perspective on things. Early in the hours of such trials may not be the best time to whip out the Sword of the Word of God. There are things that might sound good, but they are not helpful at the beginning of such a time. In the example of our friends losing a granddaughter we could have said she was in a better place, and biblically that would have been correct, but that probably was not what they needed to hear. Consider whether or not what you say will bring comfort at that time and in that situation. Many times we feel the pressure as the people of God perhaps to say something biblical to explain or give some kind of clarification for what is happening, but that is a self-imposed pressure of some thing that we might not need to do.
- **Be willing to be uncomfortable:** The person may be in pain and saying things that are difficult for others to hear. They may be saying things about God or themselves that are hard for us to hear. Sometimes we just need to be there and to be uncomfortable in difficult circumstances. I will never forget a student in the school of preaching where I teach who was very ill with leukemia and in the hospital in a lot of pain. As I sat by his bedside day in and day out as people came into the room, they did not know what to say. Sometimes these people were other students and even

faculty members from the school and they did not know what to do. They were feeling uncomfortable and instead of dealing with their uncomfortableness, they would shift their feelings to the person lying in the bed. The person in the bed felt the necessity to minister to his visitors instead of the other way around. We just need to feel uncomfortable and be willing to deal with it. Sometimes people feel so uncomfortable that they do not go to visit people in their trials and tribulations. We need to be the ones who are the servants and to minister to those who need to be served!

- **Avoid cliches, pat answers, and easy solutions:** Sometimes Christians feel compelled to use a biblical statement. It may be a true statement, but not very helpful at that point in time. A number of years ago my wife lost her job. Several Christian friends in trying to encourage her would say things like “You know God will bring something better along.” That might have been a true statement, but at that point, it was really not helpful. She was grieving over what she had lost and it was difficult to deal with. We need to think about the things that sometimes come out of our uncomfortableness. Avoid the need to say something that is a cliché or a pat answer as an easy solution. These things do not always help the situation.
- **Do not short-circuit the grief process:** Do not tell a person who is grieving to get over it or to just accept it. Grief comes in a lot of forms, not just because someone has died. It can be over the loss of a number of different kinds of things. There is grief over any loss. In our uncomfortableness we want those people to get through the grief process and get on their way because we are the ones feeling uncomfortable. When we hurt because they are hurting, sometimes we want them to move on. Even

when we feel the right way about grief and want them to feel better, we short-circuit the grief process. People have to go through certain stages to be able to get on their way with the loss. They may never get over the loss of something or someone and the process may go on for quite some time. Even in Job's case, we know that at the end of the book, he was given more children, but what about the children he lost? Can he ever get over the grief of those children? Do we short-circuit the grief process by trying to replace it with something else too quickly?

- **No need to respond or correct angry outbursts:** When people are emotionally and even physically hurting sometimes they make emotional blasts blaming God. Angry outbursts from one who is in pain are normal and even acceptable. People say all kinds of things in these situations. It is like what women will say sometimes when they are going through certain transition stages of giving birth. They say things they would not say at any other time. We do not hold people accountable for what comes out of their mouths during the trauma and tension during these kinds of moments. We need to allow for things that are said in moments of distress. God allows this reaction from people who are in pain.
- **Read books, go to seminars on the grief process:** Find ways to minister better to hurting people and those in need. Allow yourself to be put in the position to minister to people in need. Remember to be there for hurting people in the long haul. Christians need to strive to do a better job of ministering than what Job's friends did.

Job's "*Blameless*"-ness and "*Integrity*"

Consider the word "*integrity*" that has already been used to describe Job in the text:

- Job 2:3 — *“Then the LORD said to Satan, ‘Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil. And he still **maintains his integrity**, though you incited me against him to ruin him without any reason.’”*
- Job 2:9 *“His wife said to him, ‘Are you still holding on to your **integrity**? Curse God and die!’”*
- Job 6:29 — *“Relent, do not be unjust; reconsider, for my **integrity is at stake**. Is there any wickedness on my lips? Can my mouth not discern malice?”*
- Job 27:5–6 — *“I will never admit you are in the right; till I die, **I will not deny my integrity**. I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live.”*

“*Integrity*” is a really important concept in the Book of Job. Consider some verses that help explain exactly what integrity means:

- Job 6:8–10 — *“Oh, that I might have my request, that God would grant what I hope for, that God would be willing to crush me, to let loose his hand and cut me off! Then I would still have this consolation — my joy in unrelenting pain — that I had not denied the words of the Holy One.”*

Going through all his pain, Job did not want to lose his convictions and beliefs just because the pain was so severe. He did not want to give up or even to be tempted to think maybe if I did repent then this pain would go away. When anyone is in severe pain, they can become desperate. Someone in severe pain may be willing to try anything to get out of the pain they are in. In Job 6:29 Job cried out to the friends, and possibly to God, telling them that he knew his “*integrity*” was at stake. He surely felt that God and the friends were pushing his “*integrity*” to

the limits. Job was determined not to give up his “*integrity*” even if it meant he would disagree with God.

- Job 10:4–7 — *“Do you have eyes of flesh? Do you see as a mortal sees? Are your days like those of a mortal or your years like those of a man, that you must search out my faults and probe after my sin — though you know that I am not guilty and that no one can rescue me from your hand?”*

This is an interesting statement with Job talking to God. He seems to be saying, “God, I will not deny that I sin, but I do deny that there is one big thing that I am supposedly covering up. I will not confess to something I am not guilty of.” Job apparently felt that God was pressing him to confess so much so that he was losing his sense of “*integrity*.” Job wanted God to back off and respect his “*integrity*.”

- Job 23:10–12 — *“But he knows the way that I take; when he has tested me, I will come forth as gold. My feet have closely followed his steps; I have kept to his way without turning aside. I have not departed from the commands of his lips; I have treasured the words of his mouth more than my daily bread.”*

Job likened himself to be like a precious metal, silver or gold after it has been tested and gone through the purifying process. Job had treasured God's will, His way, and His words more than the food he ate. Job was holding on to his “*integrity*.” He believed that if he kept holding on, then after everything was said and done, he would be refined like gold. He was being tested, but he would come out more pure and holy.

- Job 27:2–6 — *“As surely as God lives, who has denied me justice, the Almighty, who has made me taste bitterness of soul, as long as I have life within me, the breath of God in*

my nostrils, my lips will not speak wickedness, and my tongue will utter no deceit. I will never admit you are in the right; till I die, I will not deny my integrity. I will maintain my righteousness and never let go of it; my conscience will not reproach me as long as I live."

If God was going to continue to come against Job, he was determined to go to his death holding on to his convictions and beliefs. Job believed he was righteous and right and God had mistreated him in this particular case. Job was going to maintain his "*integrity*" through this whole matter even if it cost him his life.

Job Made a Case for His Innocence

Job 31 is an extensive chapter in which Job made his final defense, not for his novice sinlessness, but for having been taken over by some deep, dark sin. In his defense he listed all of the things that he had not been a part of in any way. Consider the list of the things Job was innocent of and the things that he was doing right:

- **Immorality:** *"I made a covenant with my eyes not to look lustfully at a girl. For what is man's lot from God above, his heritage from the Almighty on high? Is it not ruin for the wicked, disaster for those who do wrong? Does he not see my ways and count my every step? . . . If my heart has been enticed by a woman, or if I have lurked at my neighbor's door, then may my wife grind another man's grain, and may other men sleep with her. For that would have been shameful, a sin to be judged. It is a fire that burns to Destruction; it would have uprooted my harvest"* (Job 31:1–4, 9–12).
- **Lying and Deceit:** *"If I have walked in falsehood or my foot has hurried after deceit — let God weigh me in honest*

scales and he will know that I am blameless — if my steps have turned from the path, if my heart has been led by my eyes, or if my hands have been defiled, then may others eat what I have sown, and may my crops be uprooted” (Job 31:5–8).

- **Deals with his servants with “integrity”:** *“If I have denied justice to my menservants and maidservants when they had a grievance against me, what will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account? Did not he who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same one form us both within our mothers?” (Job 31:13–15).*
- **Helping the needy:** *“If I have denied the desires of the poor or let the eyes of the widow grow weary, if I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing it with the fatherless — but from my youth I reared him as would a father, and from my birth I guided the widow — if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing, or a needy man without a garment, and his heart did not bless me for warming him with the fleece from my sheep, if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, knowing that I had influence in court, then let my arm fall from the shoulder, let it be broken off at the joint. For I dreaded destruction from God, and for fear of his splendor I could not do such things” (Job 31:16–23).*
- **Covetousness:** *“If I have put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, ‘You are my security,’ if I have rejoiced over my great wealth, the fortune my hands had gained” (Job 31:24–25).*
- **Idolatry:** *“If I have regarded the sun in its radiance or the moon moving in splendor, so that my heart was secretly enticed and my hand offered them a kiss of homage, then*

these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high” (Job 31:26–28).

- **Rejoicing in another's downfall:** *“If I have rejoiced at my enemy's misfortune or gloated over the trouble that came to him — I have not allowed my mouth to sin by invoking a curse against his life — if the men of my household have never said, ‘Who has not had his fill of Job's meat?’” (Job 31:29–31).*
- **Hospitality:** *“But no stranger had to spend the night in the street, for my door was always open to the traveler” (Job 31:32).*
- **Peer Pressure:** *“If I have concealed my sin as men do, by hiding my guilt in my heart because I so feared the crowd and so dreaded the contempt of the clans that I kept silent and would not go outside” (Job 31:33–34).*
- **How he treated the land:** *“If my land cries out against me and all its furrows are wet with tears, if I have devoured its yield without payment or broken the spirit of its tenants, then let briers come up instead of wheat and weeds instead of barley” (Job 31:38–40).*

Being True to Self-identity

Consider “*integrity*” and being true to your self-identity. Another word that is likened to the word “*integrity*” is the word “*blameless*,” which is used many times in the Book of Job (cf. Job 1:1, 8; 2:3, 4:6, 8:20, 9:20–22, 12:4, 22:3, 31:16). I think that is what Job was saying. There was not some big thing to get a handle on about him. There was not a big flaw in his character or a real hole in his life. He did not confess to a problem with this sin or that sin. That is being “*blameless*.” In

the New Testament the word "*blameless*" is used when people are being considered for an elder (cf. Titus 1:6). All men are sinners, but a "*blameless*" man is not a presumptuous sinner and he is not someone who hides his sin. He is true to knowing who he is. He holds on to his convictions. That is a man of "*integrity*." In Job's case he held on to his convictions.

As Christians we must hold on to our convictions about who God is and what He says in His Word. A person of integrity will hold on to the truth of God's Word no matter who is bothering him and no matter what anyone says. No matter what trials a Christian is going through and no matter what the past or the future looks like he holds on to the Word of God, what it says, and the truth of it. There is no ulterior motive, no naivety about what has happened. There is hanging on to the convictions that one believes in. For Job it was not just holding on to the convictions of his internal being, it was also holding on to the practices that come out of what he believed, what he valued. He not only held convictions about what God said as true and what God would say is the right way to treat people, but he practiced these convictions in his life.

Job had a lot to say about convictions, how strong the beliefs are, and are you willing to hold on to those convictions because they are what you believe God has said is true.

Job's Arguments With God

Review

Job had gone through many trials. His friends came to offer comfort and to encourage him to confess his sins to be able to receive forgiveness. Job responded to his friends in a sarcastic way accusing them of being poor comforters, denying there was any hidden sin in his life, and insisting that his life was one of “*integrity*.” Job argued with his friends and he argued with God asking Him to talk to him and tell him what was going on.

Repudiation of the Law of Retribution

Job repudiated his friends theology that the wicked always suffer and the righteous never suffer. He rejected their theology of the law of retribution. Job said:

“Although I am blameless, I have no concern for myself: I despised my own life. It is all the same; that is why I say, ‘He destroys both the blameless and the wicked.’ When a scourge brings sudden death, he mocks the despair of the innocent. When a land falls into the hands of the wicked, he blindfolds its judges. If it is not he, then who is it? (Job 9:21–24).

Job believed that both the wicked and the righteous suffered at different times. He questioned whose fault it was if bad things happened to the righteous. And if bad things happened to the wicked whose fault was that? Who caused

these things? It had to be God. Job was obviously looking around and could see that both the wicked and the righteous suffered which made the law of retribution wrong. Job spoke about how the wicked lived:

“Why do the wicked live on, growing old and increasing in power? They see their children established around them, their offspring before their eyes. Their homes are safe and free from fear; the rod of God is not upon them. Their bulls never fail to breed; their cows calve and do not miscarry. They send forth their children as a flock; their little ones dance about. They sing to the music of tambourine and harp; they make merry to the sound of the flute. They spend their years in prosperity and go down to the grave in peace. Yet they say to God, ‘Leave us alone! We have no desire to know your ways. Who is the Almighty, that we should serve him? What would we gain by praying to him?’ But their prosperity is not in their own hands, so I stand aloof from the counsel of the wicked. Yet how often is the lamp of the wicked snuffed out? How often does calamity come upon them, the fate God allots in his anger? How often are they like straw before the wind, like chaff swept away by a gale? [It is said,] ‘God stores up a man’s punishment for his sons.’ Let him repay the man himself, so that he will know it!” (Job 21:7–19).

Job called for his friends to look at the wicked and see how they lived. They seem to do quite well. They had lots of children and flocks that produced. A lot of times wicked people are very rich and appear to be very blessed. When do the wicked people get punished? When do they suffer? Job said the wicked did not want any part of knowing God. Should not God

repay the wicked for the way they talk to Him? Job pointed out what should be evident to most people — the wicked get away with a lot of things. They seem to be blessed in this world, but the righteous were not always blessed and sometimes had difficult things happen to them. That was the opposite of the theology that Job's friends were pointing out. Job continued his argument:

“Why does the Almighty not set times for judgment? Why must those who know him look in vain for such days? Men move boundary stones; they pasture flocks they have stolen. They drive away the orphan's donkey and take the widow's ox in pledge. They thrust the needy from the path and force all the poor of the land into hiding. Like wild donkeys in the desert, the poor go about their labor of foraging food; the wasteland provides food for their children. They gather fodder in the fields and glean in the vineyards of the wicked. Lacking clothes, they spend the night naked; they have nothing to cover themselves in the cold . . . The groans of the dying rise from the city, and the souls of the wounded cry out for help. But God charges no one with wrongdoing” (Job 24:1–7, 12).

Job compared the wicked getting away with a lot of things to the righteous who were at the mercy of the wicked ones. Job wanted God to see the conditions of the righteous. There was no evidence that God brought the wicked into court in this lifetime.

Think about the law of retribution. Was this just something that Job was dealing with? Most people are able to see that the wicked really do get away with many things and it seems like they are the blessed ones and the righteous are the ones who suffer. There are times though that it seems that people hold on to the law of retribution. Sometimes when something comes that is a bad thing or hurtful, one of the first questions people

may ask is, "Did I do something wrong?" People still wonder if God is unhappy with me. We might even smile about this as Christians, but deep down inside we do wonder sometimes why did this happen to me. Did I do something that was evil? That is not to say that God is not able to and capable of and sometimes does bring some sort of consequences on His children for their sins. That is not necessarily a bad thing and it does not always happen that way. Sometimes immature Christians gravitate toward the law of retribution even though that is not how things are. We may also wonder about other people at times when we see people who are experiencing all kinds of difficulties. We wonder if God is punishing them for what they have done. That is a possibility, but that is not something God has said He will do every time in this life. That assumption is not always true. There are religious people who hold to this doctrine today. They really believe that on the positive side if you are righteous you are going to have wealth and privileges and the best job. If you are righteous, you are on God's side and the world opens up anything that you want as long as you have faith it can happen. On the other side of that, there is the belief that when difficult things come it is connected with the fact that you must be doing something wrong. Or perhaps you just do not have enough faith. In certain Christian religious circles the law of retribution is still in place.

Modern Day Applications

Consider what the New Testament has to say about trials and tribulations. The writer of Hebrews said:

And you have forgotten that word of encouragement that addresses you as sons: "My son, do not make light of the Lord's discipline, and do not lose heart when he rebukes you, because the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son." Endure hardship as discipline; God is

treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you are illegitimate children and not true sons. Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it (Hebrews 12:5–11).

God disciplines His children, but that discipline is not always in relation to the things that we have done wrong. The LORD may want us to have more self-discipline in our lives. He may want us to have more spiritual discipline in our lives, so He chastens us. It might be for things that we have done wrong and we grow from that. He allows things to come our way not necessarily because of something wrong, but to build our character and our faith. Peter wrote to “*God’s elect*”:

Dear friends, do not be surprised at the painful trial you are suffering, as though something strange were happening to you. But rejoice that you participate in the sufferings of Christ, so that you may be overjoyed when his glory is revealed (1 Peter 4:12–13).

Peter said Christians need to rejoice that God is allowing us to suffer like Jesus suffered. Do not be surprised at the painful trials you may be suffering. It may not be because someone has done something wrong. That is not always the case. Be aware that another force is in place. Consider what James had to say about trials:

*Count it all joy, my brethren, when ye **fall** into manifold temptations; Knowing that the proving of your faith worketh patience. And let patience have (its) perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, lacking in nothing (James 1:2–4, ASV).*

James used the word “fall” for a reason. You did not make a pit and then dive into that pit. You fell into it as something that was not your fault — count it all joy because you know that the proving of your faith brings patience. In Romans 5:1–5 Paul said:

*Therefore, since we have been justified through faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ, through whom we have gained access by faith into this grace in which we now stand. And we rejoice in the hope of the glory of God. Not only so, but we also **rejoice in our sufferings**, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.*

Trials come to the Christian for a number of different reasons that have nothing to do with some deep, dark sin. That is the New Testament perspective on the opposite side of the law of retribution.

Demands and Wishes of God (Job 7:11–21)

This portion of the Book of Job is a very significant part of Job. Job spoke very forthrightly and sometimes strongly to God. God accepted this approach because He knew that Job was in deep pain. Job was God's child and God was giving Job some room to express his inner feelings. Listen to what Job said to God about what he wanted to happen from God's side:

“Therefore I will not keep silent; I will speak out in the anguish of my spirit, I will complain in the bitterness of my soul. Am I the sea, or the monster of the deep, that you put me under guard? When I think my bed will comfort me and my couch will ease my complaint, even then you frighten me with dreams and terrify me with visions, so that I prefer strangling and death, rather than this body of mine. I despise my life; I would not live forever. Let me alone; my days have no meaning. What is man that you make so much of him, that you give him so much attention, that you examine him every morning and test him every moment? Will you never look away from me, or let me alone even for an instant? If I have sinned, what have I done to you, O watcher of men? Why have you made me your target? Have I become a burden to you? Why do you not pardon my offenses and forgive my sins? For I will soon lie down in the dust; you will search for me, but I will be no more” (Job 7:11–21).

Job was really in agony. He asked God why He scrutinized and put His thumb on him. Job felt as if God had made him a target every morning. It was as if God had called him into an examining room to examine every part of him and sift through his very being. Job wanted God to realize that he was soon to die and God was going to miss him. Job wanted an answer from God. He was in such agony that he really did not think he would live much longer. He was begging God to back off. Consider how Job continued his dispute with God in Job 9:

“Indeed, I know that this is true. But how can a mortal be righteous before God? Though one wished to dispute with him, he could not answer him one time out of a thousand. His wisdom is profound, his power is vast. Who has resisted him and come out unscathed? He moves mountains without their

knowing it and overturns them in his anger . . . How then can I dispute with him? How can I find words to argue with him? Though I were innocent, I could not answer him; I could only plead with my Judge for mercy . . . He is not a man like me that I might answer him, that we might confront each other in court. If only there were someone to arbitrate between us, to lay his hand upon us both, someone to remove God's rod from me, so that his terror would frighten me no more. Then I would speak up without fear of him, but as it now stands with me, I cannot" (Job 9:2–5, 14–15, 32–35).

Job 9:4 is a key verse in this chapter of Job: *"His wisdom is profound, his power is vast. Who has resisted him and come out unscathed?"* Job knew God's mighty power — how could anyone question God? Job knew that he was just a man and God was all powerful and full of wisdom. No one would dare to say that Job was right and God was wrong. Who would challenge God to change? Job felt overwhelmed with all of this and felt he could not get a fair trial. Job knew that he could not face such a One in court. He really did believe that if there was a fair and level playing field he could argue his case against God, but God was too powerful and there was no mediator for him. Job questioned whether or not God was holding him accountable for the sins of his youth. Job knew that he had sinned, but was God still holding him accountable for the things that he thought had been forgiven.

Job continued his conversation with God pleading for two things in Job 13:20–28:

"Only grant me these two things, O God, and then I will not hide from you: Withdraw your hand far from me, and stop frightening me with your terrors. Then summon me and I will answer, or let me speak, and you reply. How many wrongs and sins have I

committed? Show me my offense and my sin. Why do you hide your face and consider me your enemy? Will you torment a windblown leaf? Will you chase after dry chaff? For you write down bitter things against me and make me inherit the sins of my youth. You fasten my feet in shackles; you keep close watch on all my paths by putting marks on the soles of my feet. So man wastes away like something rotten, like a garment eaten by moths."

Job felt like God was not dealing fairly with him anymore. There was a time when Job had felt forgiven. He felt like God was no longer just. Job continued his dispute with God on a very personal nature. Job even said that God was his opponent:

"Yet if I speak, my pain is not relieved; and if I refrain, it does not go away. Surely, O God, you have worn me out; you have devastated my entire household. You have bound me — and it has become a witness; my gauntness rises up and testifies against me. God assails me and tears me in his anger and gnashes his teeth at me; my opponent fastens on me his piercing eyes. Men open their mouths to jeer at me; they strike my cheek in scorn and unite together against me. God has turned me over to evil men and thrown me into the clutches of the wicked. All was well with me, but he shattered me; he seized me by the neck and crushed me. He has made me his target; his archers surround me. Without pity, he pierces my kidneys and spills my gall on the ground. Again and again he bursts upon me; he rushes at me like a warrior" (Job 16:6–14).

Job really believed God was at fault and everything that had happened to him was ultimately traceable to God. He continued to challenge God as not dealing fairly with him. Consider Job 19

again. Job cried out to God and then listed all the things that he had lost in the process of trials and tribulations:

“How long will you torment me and crush me with words? Ten times now you have reproached me; shamelessly you attack me. If it is true that I have gone astray, my error remains my concern alone. If indeed you would exalt yourselves above me and use my humiliation against me, then know that God has wronged me and drawn his net around me.”

- *Though I cry, “I’ve been wronged!” I get no response; though I call for help, there is **no justice**.*
- *He has blocked my way so I cannot pass; he has shrouded my paths in darkness.*

He had lost his **ability to progress**.

- *He has stripped me of my **honor** and removed the crown from my head.*
- *He tears me down on every side till I am gone; he uproots my **hope** like a tree.*
- *His anger burns against me; he counts me among his enemies.*

He felt he had lost his **fellowship** with God.

- *His troops advance in force; they build a siege ramp against me and encamp around my tent.*

He had no **peace**.

- *He has alienated my **brothers** from me; my acquaintances are completely estranged from me.*
- *My kinsmen have gone away; my **friends** have forgotten me.*
- *My guests and my maidservants count me a stranger; they look upon me as an alien.*

He had lost the **respect** from his servants.

- *I summon my servant, but he does not answer, though I beg him with my own mouth.*

- *My breath is offensive to my wife; I am loathsome to my own brothers. Even the little boys scorn me; when I appear, they ridicule me.*

He lost his **family**.

- *All my intimate friends detest me; those I love have turned against me.*
- *I am nothing but skin and bones; I have escaped with only the skin of my teeth.*

Job lost his **health**.

“Have pity on me, my friends, have pity, for the hand of God has struck me. Why do you pursue me as God does? Will you never get enough of my flesh? Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever! I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes — I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me! If you say, ‘How we will hound him, since the root of the trouble lies in him,’ you should fear the sword yourselves; for wrath will bring punishment by the sword, and then you will know that there is judgment” (Job 19:1–29).

Job had even lost his health and everything of any value. He even felt that God was blaming him. All of this was very difficult for Job to handle.

Thoughts about Afterlife

Job had an abiding difficulty with God. It is important for Christians to understand the context in which Job was saying these things. It has to do with Job's view of the afterlife. Different commentaries and different scholars say different things about

some of these passages. Some of the passages are hard to understand. Consider Job 7:6–10:

“My days are swifter than a weaver’s shuttle, and they come to an end without hope. Remember, O God, that my life is but a breath; my eyes will never see happiness again. The eye that now sees me will see me no longer; you will look for me, but I will be no more. As a cloud vanishes and is gone, so he who goes down to the grave does not return. He will never come to his house again; his place will know him no more.”

Job said, “*he who goes down to the grave does not return.*” One could argue that Job was just speaking out of the great pain that he was in. He did not see much hope because of the severe pain. Other passages accentuate Job’s views on the afterlife. Two thousand years before Jesus, did Job have an understanding of what was going to happen to him after he died? He certainly did not have the revelation of the New Testament which talks about heaven. He did not have the promises of Jesus or the writings of Paul which would be the passages to give him hope of a future with God. Job did not have any way of knowing that God would make it all right. He will banish the wicked to an eternal hell and He will bless the righteous with an eternity in heaven with Him, His Son, and His Spirit. All of this information is later revelation.

It is important to think about this and to understand that if Job did not have the developed idea of eternity after death then he really did not know what might happen after death. What he was dealing with was severe pain that had been going on for a long time. Job felt like he only had a few years left and God was wasting those years which could have been a time of fellowship if indeed that was all the time he had left in terms of his existence. Job 14:7–14 says:

“At least there is hope for a tree: If it is cut down, it will sprout again, and its new shoots will not fail. Its roots

may grow old in the ground and its stump die in the soil, yet at the scent of water it will bud and put forth shoots like a plant. But man dies and is laid low; he breathes his last and is no more. As water disappears from the sea or a riverbed becomes parched and dry, so man lies down and does not rise; till the heavens are no more, men will not awake or be roused from their sleep. If only you would hide me in the grave and conceal me till your anger has passed! If only you would set me a time and then remember me! If a man dies, will he live again? All the days of my hard service I will wait for my renewal to come.”

Job said, “*man lies down and does not rise; till the heavens are no more, men will not awake or be roused from their sleep.*” That is a strong statement from Job. He would have rather been a tree because when a tree is cut down it will sprout again. Its new shoots do not fail. Its roots may grow old in the ground, but it does not die in the soil. At the scent of water it will put forth shoots again. Man dies and he is no more. And just as water disappears from the sea or a river bed, man lies down and cannot be roused from his sleep.

When Job said that he would “*wait for my renewal to come*” was he talking about something beyond or was he talking about some one coming after his life to speak up for him in regard to what the LORD had afflicted him with? Job continued:

“Oh, that my words were recorded, that they were written on a scroll, that they were inscribed with an iron tool on lead, or engraved in rock forever! I know that my Redeemer lives, and that in the end he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been destroyed, yet in my flesh [some translations say “apart from my flesh”] I will see God; I myself will see him with my own eyes — I, and not another. How my heart yearns within me!” (Job 19:23–27).

This is one of the more difficult passages and there are a number of different views. When Job mentioned "*Redeemer*" was he talking about Jesus and/or God? It has been suggested that this "*Redeemer*" in Job 19:25 may be his kinsman redeemer. In other words, if Job did not have the idea that he was going to live after his death or that he was going to have some kind of audience with God after death, then who was going to stand up for him and make a case for his innocence after he died. Perhaps Job believed that even after he had laid down in the dust then there would be a kinsman redeemer to follow him. There would be somebody living who would say that he was innocent and that he had been wrongly charged. Job was still hanging onto his "*integrity*." Even after his death and even though there was no hope for him, there was still going to be vindication at some time in some circumstance. If it was to be something beyond that was okay or if it was someone on this earth who would stand up and say that he was right and innocent.

Consider how hard it was for Job if he did not have a view of the afterlife. He would have thought that his life, the days on this earth, was all that he had. If God was going to afflict him here and not answer him, then what a waste it was if this life of pain was all he had. Job wanted an answer from God. He did not want to go to his grave without having an audience with God. Job wanted to exalt and praise God, but he needed help from God. Christians are blessed to be on this side of Calvary to have an answer concerning afterlife. Job wanted to be strong with God, but he struggled with no view of afterlife. He wanted to be able to explain himself to God while he was still alive and to be able to vindicate himself with God.

Elihu's Assessment of Job

Review

Previous chapters have shown the warfare between Satan and God over Job and how that spilled over into the life of Job. He had to put up with all the trials that the LORD allowed to come his way through the hand of Satan. His friends came to try to put a perspective on the tribulations that Job was enduring. They were good at first as they spent time just brooding with him. When it came time for some discussion they were not very sympathetic. Their bedside manner was not good at all. They seemed to take the approach that it was all Job's fault telling him he was the one who had sinned. They seemed to say that people suffer because they have sinned. In their eyes Job needed to come clean and confess what he had done. He needed to reveal the deep, dark secrets that he was hiding. All the things that Job had lost would be returned if he would only admit his sins; then if he confessed his health and wealth and his family would all be returned. Job resisted their theology. He believed in his "*integrity*." His "*integrity*" told him there was not a big, deep, dark secret within. Job did admit that he had sinned, of course, he had sinned because he was a human being. Job said he was not hiding anything.

After Job put his friends off a bit, he turned to God in a very argumentative way accusing God of treating him unfairly. Job demanded an audience with God. He wanted to challenge God in court so that he could argue his case and he could prove God to be in the wrong. He believed that God would back off, but he knew that God was much too powerful for any man to question Him. Job appreciated and understood to some degree

the distinctive distance between him and God so he realized he could not challenge God. This was particularly acute for Job because he did not have a significant view of the afterlife. He could not see the hope that is beyond the grave. He could not see past what God was allowing to come into his life. Job saw only that he would die and it would all be over once he was gone.

Elihu — I Have the Right to Speak

Job 32 is the part of the book when Elihu comes on the scene. Up to this point in the Book of Job there were three friends and no mention of another character. Suddenly a man appeared whose name was Elihu. He was a younger man in relation to the other three men and perhaps even to Job. Elihu allowed each of these men to speak first in respect of their age. When things started to quiet down after the three rounds of discussions and bantering back and forth between Job and his friends, Elihu seized the opportunity to speak his mind (cf. Job 32–37).

The purpose of Elihu's speech is a bit unclear. There is a place in the Book of Job for this monologue. He was speaking to Job and Job was supposed to listen. When God finally appeared to Job He did criticize the three friends, but He did not criticize Elihu. That is an interesting fact. Perhaps that was because Elihu had some insights that were on target at least to some degree. Everything he said was not right, but perhaps there was a transition from the things the friends said that were wrong, for the approach that Job had that was wrong, and for what God would ultimately say to Job. Elihu may have been bridging the gap. Elihu was even given a brief genealogy:

So these three men stopped answering Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes. But Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite, of the family of Ram, became very angry with Job for justifying himself rather than God.

He was also angry with the three friends, because they had found no way to refute Job, and yet had condemned him. Now Elihu had waited before speaking to Job because they were older than he. But when he saw that the three men had nothing more to say, his anger was aroused” (Job 32:1–5)

Job's three friends could not break through the barrier of self-righteousness so they stopped answering him. They saw that Job believed what he believed. Elihu became angry because of Job's attitude toward God. He was right in that Job was justifying himself and not giving God his due respect. Elihu was also angry with the three friends because their arguments had not really brought condemnation. They were condemning Job without being able to prove that he was wrong. Elihu was also angry with Job. He did not believe Job was right.

Elihu was brash and arrogant, but perhaps with the insights of a young man:

So Elihu son of Barakel the Buzite said: “I am young in years, and you are old; that is why I was fearful, not daring to tell you what I know. I thought, ‘Age should speak; advanced years should teach wisdom.’ But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding. It is not only the old who are wise, not only the aged who understand what is right. Therefore I say: Listen to me; I too will tell you what I know. I waited while you spoke, I listened to your reasoning; while you were searching for words, I gave you my full attention. But not one of you has proved Job wrong; none of you has answered his arguments. Do not say, ‘We have found wisdom; let God refute him, not man.’ But Job has not marshaled his words against me, and I will not answer him with your arguments” (Job 32:6–14).

Elihu was upset with these men because even in their age, their wisdom, and their experience they did not really bring an argument that would convict Job of his sins. Remember the other men believed they had an authority source. Bildad had a dream and the others relied on the wisdom of the ages past and what older men had said to be true. Elihu believed his authority source was the fact that he believed he was inspired of God — *“But it is the spirit in a man, the breath of the Almighty, that gives him understanding . . . For I am full of words, and the spirit within me compels me; inside I am like bottled-up wine, like new wineskins ready to burst”* (Job 32:8, 18). Because of his inspiration, Elihu believed he had the right to speak. This first chapter of Elihu's monologue makes the statement “I have the right to speak.”

The three friends did not come through with any great argumentation:

“They are dismayed and have no more to say; words have failed them. Must I wait, now that they are silent, now that they stand there with no reply? I too will have my say; I too will tell what I know. For I am full of words, and the spirit within me compels me; inside I am like bottled-up wine, like new wineskins ready to burst. I must speak and find relief; I must open my lips and reply. I will show partiality to no one, nor will I flatter any man; for if I were skilled in flattery, my Maker would soon take me away” (Job 32:15–22).

Job did not answer their arguments correctly. Elihu believed no truth had come forth from these discussions. He believed that he had something to offer, but he had waited for each one of them to finish so he could say something from the Almighty. Elihu really believed he had something to say that was different than what the friends had said. Remember they proclaimed the law of retribution which says the wicked always suffer and the righteous always get what is good. Job had already proved that

to be wrong, but Elihu continued to speak. He basically said Job had some things that were really wrong, but God was speaking to mankind through various means and He was speaking to Job in these troubling times. Elihu questioned what Job was learning from God — “Job, what do you hear God saying in your trials and tribulations?” Elihu continued in Job 33:

“But now, Job, listen to my words; pay attention to everything I say. I am about to open my mouth; my words are on the tip of my tongue. My words come from an upright heart; my lips sincerely speak what I know. The Spirit of God has made me; the breath of the Almighty gives me life. Answer me then, if you can; prepare yourself and confront me. I am just like you before God; I too have been taken from clay. No fear of me should alarm you, nor should my hand be heavy upon you. But you have said in my hearing — I heard the very words — ‘I am pure and without sin; I am clean and free from guilt. Yet God has found fault with me; he considers me his enemy. He fastens my feet in shackles; he keeps close watch on all my paths’” (Job 33:1–11).

Elihu told Job he was also a man created by God so they should be able to have a dialogue. Elihu really did not have a dialogue with Job. It was actually Elihu's monologue. He represented Job in these verses as someone who had said he had not sinned, someone who was free from sin and had no guilt. That was partially true considering what Job said about having no deep, dark sin he was hiding. Job really never said I have never sinned or I am not a sinner so Elihu misrepresented Job in this particular case. Elihu did describe Job's unhappiness when he quoted Job as saying, “. . . ‘Yet God has found fault with me; he considers me his enemy. He fastens my feet in shackles; he keeps close watch on all my paths.’”

Elihu continued his monologue: *“But I tell you, in this you are not right, for God is greater than man. Why do you complain to him that he answers none of man’s words?”* (Job 33:12–13). Elihu told Job he was wrong. He was a sinner and it was not God’s fault. Job 33:14 is probably the key verse in this chapter of Job, *“For God does speak — now one way, now another — though man may not perceive it.”* Elihu confirmed that God speaks in different ways. Job 33:14–28 describes three different ways God does speak to man:

- *“For God does speak — now one way, now another — though man may not perceive it. In a dream, in a vision of the night, when deep sleep falls on men as they slumber in their beds, he may speak in their ears and terrify them with warnings, to turn man from wrongdoing and keep him from pride, to preserve his soul from the pit, his life from perishing by the sword”* (Job 33:14–18).

God spoke to mankind through dreams. Remember this book was probably dated during the time of the patriarchs. Think about how many times God appeared to Abraham in dreams or visions. The New Testament confirms this in Hebrews 1:1, *“In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways.”* Visions and dreams were one of the ways God spoke to His people especially to the fathers during the time of the patriarchal era.

- *“Or a man may be chastened on a bed of pain with constant distress in his bones, so that his very being finds food repulsive and his soul loathes the choicest meal. His flesh wastes away to nothing, and his bones, once hidden, now stick out. His soul draws near to the pit, and his life to the messengers of death”* (Job 33:19–22).

The second way God spoke to man was through trial and tribulation. This was the way in which Elihu thought God was speaking to Job. The LORD used afflictions to speak to mankind. It does not say exactly what God was saying, but that is one of the ways used by God. In Job's case the LORD allowed what was happening to Job as a message to him. Job, at this point, did not correctly understand God's message to him.

- *“Yet if there is an angel on his side as a mediator, one out of a thousand, to tell a man what is right for him, to be gracious to him and say, ‘Spare him from going down to the pit; I have found a ransom for him’ — then his flesh is renewed like a child’s; it is restored as in the days of his youth. He prays to God and finds favor with him, he sees God’s face and shouts for joy; he is restored by God to his righteous state. Then he comes to men and says, ‘I sinned, and perverted what was right, but I did not get what I deserved. He redeemed my soul from going down to the pit, and I will live to enjoy the light’” (Job 33:23–28).*

These verses may just continue the trial and tribulations manner of speaking, but they could also be a third way in which God speaks to man. Perhaps God speaks to men through angels. When man finally realizes that God is speaking to him, man will come back to God saying, *“I sinned, and perverted what was right.”* When man finally understands what God is saying, then he will know he has not been given what he truly deserved in the sense of trials and tribulations that have come his way. Man sins and yet God redeems his soul from the pit.

- *“God does all these things to a man — twice, even three times — to turn back his soul from the pit, that the light of life may shine on him. Pay attention, Job, and listen to me; be silent, and I will speak. If you have anything to say,*

answer me; speak up, for I want you to be cleared. But if not, then listen to me; be silent, and I will teach you wisdom” (Job 29:29–33).

Elihu was telling Job that God was speaking to him in these ways — and not just once, but two or three times just to be sure he understood. God was trying to get Job’s attention to be able to turn him away from the pit. Elihu definitely believed Job had sinned. In other words, his message is not really any different than the three friends. He believed Job had not been forthcoming with what he had done and as a result of that God brought these trials upon him.

Job 34 — God Can Do No Evil

Once again Elihu continued his monologue accusing Job of saying, “I am right and God is wrong” —

Then Elihu said: “Hear my words, you wise men; listen to me, you men of learning. For the ear tests words as the tongue tastes food. Let us discern for ourselves what is right; let us learn together what is good. Job says, ‘I am innocent, but God denies me justice. Although I am right, I am considered a liar; although I am guiltless, his arrow inflicts an incurable wound.’ What man is like Job, who drinks scorn like water? He keeps company with evildoers; he associates with wicked men. For he says, ‘It profits a man nothing when he tries to please God’” (Job 34:1–9).

The key verse in this chapter may be Job 34:7: “*What man is like Job, who drinks scorn like water?*” Elihu was saying Job was taking a glass of bitter and scornful water and drinking it willingly. He accused Job of being willing to go up against God

with all His might. Elihu considered this to be senseless and disrespectful of God. This chapter in the Book of Job really gets at the truth that God created mankind and He has the right to do whatever He desires to do with them. The fact that Job was scorning God, he wanted to bring Him into judgment, or judge Him in some way was not going to change who God is. On the bottom line, Elihu depicted Job as one who kept company with evildoers and saying there was no benefit in trying to please God.

Elihu came back to Job asking why any of this would make a difference with God. Who would dare to accuse God of doing wrong. God is bigger than that:

“So listen to me, you men of understanding. Far be it from God to do evil, from the Almighty to do wrong. He repays a man for what he has done; he brings upon him what his conduct deserves. It is unthinkable that God would do wrong, that the Almighty would pervert justice. Who appointed him over the earth? Who put him in charge of the whole world? If it were his intention and he withdrew his spirit and breath, all mankind would perish together and man would return to the dust” (Job 34:10–15).

The Almighty would never pervert justice and Job was wrong to ever accuse God of injustice. It just would not happen. God is right, He is God and Job was wrong.

Elihu continued to encourage Job to listen to his words:

“If you have understanding, hear this; listen to what I say. Can he who hates justice govern? Will you condemn the just and mighty One? Is he not the One who says to kings, ‘You are worthless,’ and to nobles, ‘You are wicked,’ who shows no partiality to princes and does not favor the rich over the poor, for they are all the work of his hands? They die in an instant, in

the middle of the night; the people are shaken and they pass away; the mighty are removed without human hand. His eyes are on the ways of men; he sees their every step. There is no dark place, no deep shadow, where evildoers can hide. God has no need to examine men further, that they should come before him for judgment. Without inquiry he shatters the mighty and sets up others in their place. Because he takes note of their deeds, he overthrows them in the night and they are crushed. He punishes them for their wickedness where everyone can see them, because they turned from following him and had no regard for any of his ways. They caused the cry of the poor to come before him, so that he heard the cry of the needy. But if he remains silent, who can condemn him? If he hides his face, who can see him? Yet he is over man and nation alike, to keep a godless man from ruling, from laying snares for the people” (Job 34:16–30).

Man is man and God is the Almighty who is in control. God is the judge of all and Job needed to understand that. Elihu continued:

“Suppose a man says to God, ‘I am guilty but will offend no more. Teach me what I cannot see; if I have done wrong, I will not do so again.’ Should God then reward you on your terms, when you refuse to repent? You must decide, not I; so tell me what you know. Men of understanding declare, wise men who hear me say to me, ‘Job speaks without knowledge; his words lack insight.’ Oh, that Job might be tested to the utmost for answering like a wicked man! To his sin he adds rebellion; scornfully he claps his hands among us and multiplies his words against God” (Job 34:31–37).

Another key verse in Job 34 would be verse 37 which again talked about Job and his rebellion: *“To his sin he adds rebellion; scornfully he claps his hands among us and multiplies his words against God.”* Elihu accused Job of wanting to get away from God’s sovereignty. He told Job he was speaking without knowledge. His words lacked insight. He accused Job of being insolent and arrogant. He was accusing God and did not have that right.

Job 35 — Creation Is a Classroom

Elihu continued to speak to Job. Listen to what Elihu was saying. Consider the way The Message presents Job 35:1–16:

Elihu lit into Job again: “Does this kind of thing make any sense? First you say, ‘I’m perfectly innocent before God.’ And then you say, ‘It doesn’t make a bit of difference whether I’ve sinned or not.’ Well I’m going to show you that you don’t know what you’re talking about, neither you nor your friends. Look up at the sky. Take a long hard look. See those clouds towering above you? If you sin, what difference could that make to God? No matter how much you sin, will it matter to him? Even if you’re good, what would God get out of that? Do you think He’s dependent on your accomplishments? The only ones who care whether you’re good or bad are your family and friends and neighbors. God’s not dependent on your behavior. When times get bad, people cry out for help. They cry for relief from being kicked around, but never give God a thought when things go well, when God puts spontaneous songs in their hearts, when God sets out the entire creation as a science classroom, using birds and beasts to teach wisdom. People are arrogantly indifferent to God — until, of course, they’re in trouble, and then God is indifferent

to them. There's nothing behind such prayers except panic; the Almighty pays them no mind. So why would he notice you just because you say you're tired of waiting to be heard, or waiting for him to get good and angry and do something about the world's problems? Job, you talk sheer nonsense — nonstop nonsense!"

Once again Elihu came across as arrogant, but he continued to tell Job this was God and he was just a man. People like God, but they do not pay Him any attention when good things are happening. When trials and tribulations come then people want to bring God into court. They want to challenge Him and charge Him with bad things. God is much bigger than that. That is the transition to Job 36–37 in which Elihu continued to speak, but he focused on God's greatness and strength in relation to man.

Job 36 — Nobody Knows God, But I Know Him!

Elihu brought his speech to a conclusion in Job 36–37. He really seemed to take the view of God as he sees it. He tried to convince Job one more time of his sin and tried to get him to repent and maybe understand a little bit of why God had brought all the afflictions on him. *Elihu continued:*

"Bear with me a little longer and I will show you that there is more to be said in God's behalf. I get my knowledge from afar; I will ascribe justice to my Maker. Be assured that my words are not false; one perfect in knowledge is with you. God is mighty, but does not despise men; he is mighty, and firm in his purpose. He does not keep the wicked alive but gives the afflicted their rights. He does not take his eyes off the righteous; he enthrones them with kings and exalts them forever. But if men are bound in chains, held fast

by cords of affliction, he tells them what they have done — that they have sinned arrogantly. He makes them listen to correction and commands them to repent of their evil. If they obey and serve him, they will spend the rest of their days in prosperity and their years in contentment. But if they do not listen, they will perish by the sword and die without knowledge. The godless in heart harbor resentment; even when he fetters them, they do not cry for help. They die in their youth, among male prostitutes of the shrines. But those who suffer he delivers in their suffering; he speaks to them in their affliction” (Job 36:1–15).

Elihu continued to be arrogant as he spoke to Job. The Almighty One was the same God who blessed the righteous and afflicted the sinners. That is not really a new theme. It is basically the same theme as before with the three friends. However, he did emphasize what Job needed to do in responding to what was happening to him:

“He [God] is wooing you [Job] from the jaws of distress to a spacious place free from restriction, to the comfort of your table laden with choice food. But now you are laden with the judgment due the wicked; judgment and justice have taken hold of you. Be careful that no one entices you by riches; do not let a large bribe turn you aside. Would your wealth or even all your mighty efforts sustain you so you would not be in distress? Do not long for the night, to drag people away from their homes. Beware of turning to evil, which you seem to prefer to affliction (Job 36:16–21).

Elihu said the same things again urging Job to realize he was having trials because he was in sin. This really is not anything

new. He did not want Job to be deceived by wealth or other things that could take him even deeper and farther into the hole of darkness and sin.

The turn in Job 36 begins to happen in 36:22 and will follow all the way through Job 37:

“God is exalted in his power. Who is a teacher like him? Who has prescribed his ways for him, or said to him, ‘You have done wrong’? Remember to extol his work, which men have praised in song. All mankind has seen it; men gaze on it from afar. How great is God — beyond our understanding! The number of his years is past finding out. He draws up the drops of water, which distill as rain to the streams; the clouds pour down their moisture and abundant showers fall on mankind. Who can understand how he spreads out the clouds, how he thunders from his pavilion? See how he scatters his lightning about him, bathing the depths of the sea. This is the way he governs the nations and provides food in abundance. He fills his hands with lightning and commands it to strike its mark. His thunder announces the coming storm; even the cattle make known its approach” (Job 36: 22–33).

Elihu began to talk about the greatness of God in creation. That is the transition into Job 38–42 in which God also emphasized His greatness in creation. In this part Elihu was really tuned into something that was absolutely true. Consider his illustrations of God's greatness: rain, clouds, showers, the storm seen in thunder and lightening. This continues in Job 37:

“At this my heart pounds and leaps from its place. Listen! Listen to the roar of his voice, to the rumbling that comes from his mouth. He unleashes his lightning beneath the whole heaven and sends it to the ends of the earth. After that comes the sound of his roar; he

thunders with his majestic voice. When his voice resounds, he holds nothing back. God's voice thunders in marvelous ways; he does great things beyond our understanding" (Job 37:1–5).

Elihu continued to speak of God's greatness and "majesty," but it is even better in Job 38–42 when God Himself describes His creation. Consider now Elihu's final exhortation to Job:

"Tell us what we should say to him; we cannot draw up our case because of our darkness. Should he be told that I want to speak? Would any man ask to be swallowed up? Now no one can look at the sun, bright as it is in the skies after the wind has swept them clean. Out of the north he comes in golden splendor; God comes in awesome majesty. The Almighty is beyond our reach and exalted in power; in his justice and great righteousness, he does not oppress. Therefore, men revere him, for does he not have regard for all the wise in heart?" (Job 37:19–24).

Elihu, in speaking to Job, wanted to be sure Job understood how marvelous and powerful God was. This portion of Scripture is probably the best of what Elihu had to say. He was wrong concerning Job's sins, he had been an arrogant friend, but when he focused on the power of God that is something that Job really needed to hear.

God's Final Words for Job

Review

Job has been demanding an audience with God, but there was a break when Elihu spoke to Job about the greatness of God and when God actually answered Job out of the storm. Job was quite angry and demanding. He wanted to meet with God. He wanted to face God in court so he could argue his case and God could argue His case. He wanted an umpire to listen and keep God backed off from His power, His might, and His majesty so that Job could endure his audience with God. He wanted someone to decide the case in court. Job believed he would win in a fair trial if God would come down, take away His glorious appearance, and stop overwhelming him. Under these circumstances Job believed his arguments would prevail.

Remember in the first chapters of the Book of Job the text said Job did not sin. This was in the initial part of what happened to Job when he lost his children and all of his possessions:

At this, Job got up and tore his robe and shaved his head. Then he fell to the ground in worship and said: "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The LORD gave and the LORD has taken away; may the name of the LORD be praised "In all this, Job did not sin by charging God with wrongdoing . . . In all this, Job did not sin in what he said" (Job 1:20–22, 2:10).

Job did not sin even after he was struck by boils from his head to his toes. He did not sin when his wife told him to just curse

God and die. Job told her that they needed to accept trouble from God along with the good. In all of this Job did not sin. That was in the first two chapters of the Book of Job. But in the middle part of the Book of Job when Job was arguing with his friends, he did sin. He was not right in the way he approached God and in his pain and all the trials and tribulations he indeed said things against God that he should not have said.

After Job's conversations with the three friends, there was the interlude of Elihu talking about the greatness of God in Job 32–37. These chapters lead into Job 38–42 when God finally spoke to Job. It is as if God had to say, "That is enough, son. You have said enough and we need to talk. Yes, you are in pain and in pain you may say some things that are hurtful and difficult, but there comes a time when we need to talk and straighten this out." That is indeed what happened beginning in Job 38.

The LORD Finally Speaks (Job 38–42)

Then the LORD answered Job out of the storm. He said: "Who is this that darkens my counsel with words without knowledge? Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me" (Job 38:1–3).

Notice that the LORD came to Job "out of the storm." He did not come in meekness, but in power. This is not incidental. In the Old Testament when the LORD came in the storm, He was coming in judgment. He was stating, "I am Sovereign and I will be the Judge and I will determine what is right. I will speak and man will listen!" There was not going to be a dialogue for Job to state his case. God was going to state His case and that was all. God was Sovereign and that was how He would speak to Job. Job was man and he needed to respect God. Man was meant to listen to God. This response was God's answer to Job's questions and his charges. The LORD really

does not answer Job's why and what is going on directly. It is interesting that God did not try to tell Job what had happened in heaven when the devil came. God did not tell Job He had been telling the devil about how wonderful Job was. He did not tell Job the devil had challenged Him concerning His servant Job. God did not tell Job the story and God did not feel the necessity to explain. He never revealed the reason for Job's trials and tribulations. God was not obligated to explain Himself or justify Himself for what he did or allowed to happen. God spoke to Job beginning in creation:

"Where were you when I laid the earth's foundation? Tell me, if you understand. Who marked off its dimensions? Surely you know! Who stretched a measuring line across it? On what were its footings set, or who laid its cornerstone — while the morning stars sang together and all the angels shouted for joy? Who shut up the sea behind doors when it burst forth from the womb, when I made the clouds its garment and wrapped it in thick darkness, when I fixed limits for it and set its doors and bars in place, when I said, 'This far you may come and no farther; here is where your proud waves halt?'" (Job 38:4–11).

God began with rhetorical questions about creation and all the inanimate parts of creation to silence and humble Job. These questions played on the fact that Job did not know what He was talking about. Job was ignorant. He lacked power and wisdom when it came to understanding the universe in which he lived. God wanted Job to look around to see all He had created and how things worked and how He sustained it all. How could Job call God into judgment when he did not understand God's creation? How could Job question God, the Creator of all things? God spoke in a poetic language with rhetorical questions about the cycles of waters and the stars in the sky. God continued His dialogue with some sarcasm:

“Have the gates of death been shown to you? Have you seen the gates of the shadow of death? Have you comprehended the vast expanses of the earth? Tell me, if you know all this. What is the way to the abode of light? And where does darkness reside? Can you take them to their places? Do you know the paths to their dwellings? Surely you know, for you were already born! You have lived so many years! Have you entered the storehouses of the snow or seen the storehouses of the hail, which I reserve for times of trouble, for days of war and battle? What is the way to the place where the lightning is dispersed, or the place where the east winds are scattered over the earth? Who cuts a channel for the torrents of rain, and a path for the thunderstorm?” (Job 38:17–25).

These verses once again refer to God's brilliance in creation in regards to the cycles of water. With the scientific information of this present day man understands the magnificent cycle water goes through from the heavens to the earth and back up to the heavens again. God asked Job if he really understood where and how all of that takes place. God questioned Job concerning the stars and the light and darkness. Could Job possibly understand all these things? The implication was that if Job could explain all these things, then God would answer the questions Job had asked. God wanted Job to see that he should humble himself before God instead of what Job wanted from God.

God continued to speak to Job about His creation:

“Can you bind the beautiful Pleiades? Can you loose the cords of Orion? Can you bring forth the constellations in their seasons or lead out the Bear with its cubs? Do you know the laws of the heavens? Can you set up [God's] dominion over the earth?” (Job 38:31–33).

God not only questioned Job about the earth, but also concerning the heavens asking Job to look at the constellations that reach beyond the earth and its cycles. The implications of God speaking to Job in this way called for him to consider how wonderful God's creations was. Could Job control any of these things? Surely Job could see that God was in control of all He had created.

God wanted Job to see not only His power but also His wisdom in sustaining all He had created:

“Who has the wisdom to count the clouds? Who can tip over the water jars of the heavens when the dust becomes hard and the clods of earth stick together?”
(Job 38:37–38).

Did Job have the wisdom to understand what God had created and how God was able to sustain it all? Think about all that God had described in this chapter covering inanimate objects. The words power, knowledge, wisdom, and control come to mind. God had to have all of these things to be able to create them in the beginning and then to sustain them as they are now. God had to have the power to control His creation and the wisdom and knowledge to sustain it all. Job had none of that. He did not have the power to create. He did not have the wisdom to understand creation. He did not have the control to continue to make everything work. Job did not have what was needed. So what right did Job have to question God? It would be presumptuous of Job to tell God that He needed to answer all of his questions.

At this point Job could have said that is enough, you do not need to continue. At this point surely Job could see that God was right, but that did not happen until later. Beginning in Job 38:39 God continued to question Job about creation but this time in the animal kingdom:

“Do you hunt the prey for the lioness and satisfy the hunger of the lions when they crouch in their dens or lie in wait in a thicket? Who provides food for the raven when its young cry out to God and wander about for lack of food? Do you know when the mountain goats give birth? Do you watch when the doe bears her fawn? Do you count the months till they bear? Do you know the time they give birth? They crouch down and bring forth their young; their labor pains are ended. Their young thrive and grow strong in the wilds; they leave and do not return” (Job 38:39–39:4).

God continued His questions for Job explaining about a variety of animals. Many of these animals would have been animals Job would have seen. Consider the lioness, the mighty hunter. God is magnificent in making this king of beasts in such a way that they can hunt for their food. The Old Testament confirms that lions were in Palestine and Edom. Job would have appreciated the lion and probably had been scared by one.

Mountain goats would also be something Job was familiar with. Consider the mountain goats giving birth under the watchful eye of God. The New Testament talks about God knowing about every sparrow. A bird does not fall to the ground without God knowing and caring about it. This is an Old Testament expression of that New Testament truth (cf. Matthew 6:25–27).

God continued His rhetorical questions asking about the wild donkey, the wild ox, the ostrich, and even the horse:

“Who let the wild donkey go free? Who untied his ropes? I gave him the wasteland as his home, the salt flats as his habitat. He laughs at the commotion in the town; he does not hear a driver’s shout. He ranges the hills for his pasture and searches for any green thing” (Job 39:5–8).

The wild donkey was made by God to be an animal who lived in the wild. He was not a domesticated animal and he was very happy to be out in the wild running in the salt flats. God made him exactly that way for that environment.

“Will the wild ox consent to serve you? Will he stay by your manger at night? Can you hold him to the furrow with a harness? Will he till the valleys behind you? Will you rely on him for his great strength? Will you leave your heavy work to him? Can you trust him to bring in your grain and gather it to your threshing floor?” (Job 39:9–12).

God made the wild ox also, wild and undomesticated. He is untamable by man, but God can tame him.

“The wings of the ostrich flap joyfully, but they cannot compare with the pinions and feathers of the stork. She lays her eggs on the ground and lets them warm in the sand, unmindful that a foot may crush them, that some wild animal may trample them. She treats her young harshly, as if they were not hers; she cares not that her labor was in vain, for God did not endow her with wisdom or give her a share of good sense. Yet when she spreads her feathers to run, she laughs at horse and rider” (Job 39:13–18).

There is the brilliance of God in the ostrich even though this bird is not particularly smart in certain ways. God created them brilliantly in their ability to run fast.

God is brilliant in creation. He continued to talk to Job about the animal kingdom talking about the horse:

“Do you give the horse his strength or clothe his neck with a flowing mane? Do you make him leap like a locust, striking terror with his proud snorting? He

paws fiercely, rejoicing in his strength, and charges into the fray. He laughs at fear, afraid of nothing; he does not shy away from the sword. The quiver rattles against his side, along with the flashing spear and lance. In frenzied excitement he eats up the ground; he cannot stand still when the trumpet sounds. At the blast of the trumpet he snorts, 'Aha!' He catches the scent of battle from afar, the shout of commanders and the battle cry" (Job 39:19–25).

Men who domesticate horses would be very familiar with the magnificence and the beauty in the strength and the power of the horse. The horse was exactly made by God in order for man to domesticate them so that man would have something to ride into the battle. The horse does not fear. He can be trained to go into battle and stay there and take man through the fray. Other animals would not be able to do what God intended for the horse to do.

In all of these examples it seems God was saying I have designed wisely the animal kingdom and I care for all of them even if I have made some of them differently. It is God's brilliance that made each animal. He made some animals especially for man's use. If God made the animal kingdom so amazingly wonderful and if He cares for each animal, then consider how much more He must care for a human being. Jesus spoke of God's care for even the grass of the field which is here one day and gone the next. God clothed the lilies of the field in splendor, so how much more will He cloth and care for man (cf. Matthew 6:25–34). Men and women are much more important than God's creations of the fields and animals. The implication is that Job needed to realize that God cared so much for the inanimate and the animals, and He indeed cared even more for man. Whatever had happened to Job and no matter how much pain Job had gone through, he still needed to know that God was wise enough, powerful enough, controlling enough, and caring enough to care for all men.

Intermission — Job 40–41

The LORD said to Job: “Will the one who contends with the Almighty correct him? Let him who accuses God answer him!” Then Job answered the LORD: “I am unworthy — how can I reply to you? I put my hand over my mouth. I spoke once, but I have no answer — twice, but I will say no more” (Job 40:1–5).

It is at this point that Job told God he was a sinner who could not reply. Possibly Job would want this to be the end, but the LORD was not through with him yet.

Then the LORD spoke to Job out of the storm: “Brace yourself like a man; I will question you, and you shall answer me. Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself? Do you have an arm like God’s, and can your voice thunder like his? Then adorn yourself with glory and splendor, and clothe yourself in honor and majesty. Unleash the fury of your wrath, look at every proud man and bring him low, look at every proud man and humble him, crush the wicked where they stand. Bury them all in the dust together; shroud their faces in the grave. Then I myself will admit to you that your own right hand can save you” (Job 40:6–14).

Job 40:8 is a powerful statement from God: “Would you discredit my justice? Would you condemn me to justify yourself?” Did Job have the right to discredit God because of the way he felt? He should have looked around creation and given God the benefit of the doubt understanding that God was the Creator. Job should have concluded that in spite of the way he felt God was all powerful. God asked Job if he thought he was wise enough to take over for Him. Could Job handle what God was doing?

After that God had two more illustrations from His brilliant creations in the animal kingdom. It is as if He has talked about the horse and hawk and the ostrich and all of these are wonderful, but now God wanted Job to look at two of the mammoth creatures:

“Look at the behemoth, which I made along with you and which feeds on grass like an ox. What strength he has in his loins, what power in the muscles of his belly! His tail sways like a cedar; the sinews of his thighs are close-knit. His bones are tubes of bronze, his limbs like rods of iron. He ranks first among the works of God, yet his Maker can approach him with his sword. The hills bring him their produce, and all the wild animals play nearby. Under the lotus plants he lies, hidden among the reeds in the marsh. The lotuses conceal him in their shadow; the poplars by the stream surround him. When the river rages, he is not alarmed; he is secure, though the Jordan should surge against his mouth. Can anyone capture him by the eyes, or trap him and pierce his nose?” (Job 40:15–24).

We really are not sure who the “*behemoth*” is. Some scholars think it may be the hippo or the elephant. In Job 41, God talked about the “*leviathan*.” Some people think that this creature may be a crocodile, but it looks bigger than that to me. I think it might be the Loch Ness monster, but still we are not sure. These creatures are magnificent creations from God. They are more powerful than any of the other animals God has created. Consider the “*leviathan*”:

“Can you pull in the leviathan with a fishhook or tie down his tongue with a rope? Can you put a cord through his nose or pierce his jaw with a hook? Will he keep begging you for mercy? Will he speak to you

with gentle words? Will he make an agreement with you for you to take him as your slave for life? Can you make a pet of him like a bird or put him on a leash for your girls? Will traders barter for him? Will they divide him up among the merchants? Can you fill his hide with harpoons or his head with fishing spears? If you lay a hand on him, you will remember the struggle and never do it again! Any hope of subduing him is false; the mere sight of him is overpowering. No one is fierce enough to rouse him. Who then is able to stand against me? Who has a claim against me that I must pay? Everything under heaven belongs to me” (Job 41:1–11).

The whole point of this illustration is that no man can subdue this creature. God talked about its magnificent strength, its power, and its defenses. This was an amazing, powerful, untamable animal. No one could control it except God Almighty.

Conclusion — Job 42

This point is the crescendo of what God was trying to say. He wanted Job to know He was Creator. He made the heavens, He created the cycles of the rain, He made the domesticated animals and the wild animals, and He made the mammoth creatures like the “*behemoth*” and the “*leviathan*.” God wanted Job to fully understand what He was saying. If Job could not subdue these creatures but God could, then how did Job think he could call God into questioning. God said, “I am God and you are man. I am Sovereign and you are man.” That was God’s final word. Consider what Job had to say:

Then Job replied to the LORD: “I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted. [You

asked,] 'Who is this that obscures my counsel without knowledge?' Surely I spoke of things I did not understand, things too wonderful for me to know. [You said,] 'Listen now, and I will speak; I will question you, and you shall answer me.' My ears had heard of you but now my eyes have seen you. Therefore I despise myself and repent in dust and ashes" (Job 42:1–6).

Job was finally penitent and he admitted and accepted that God is sovereign. He did not have to understand everything because he could look around and see God's brilliance in creation. He could conclude that God is the Creator, He is God and Job is only a man. He now accepted that God had the right to do what He did and Job did not.

The bottom line from the Book of Job is a very important principle for all men. We are prone to do what Job did. When things do not go exactly like we want them to, when things do not go according to our plans, when we have a certain view of what God should or should not do, and when He does not allow that particular thing to happen or He does not follow through when we think He should; our temptation is to say God is at fault here, where is He, does He care, does He know, why did He do that, why didn't He protect me from this, why did He let that happen? The bottom line from the Book of Job is not the full answer from Scripture, but when those things happen we have to come to grips with who God is and who am I? When we start comparing ourselves to God, we need to understand that God is Sovereign, He has made His will known in His Book and in His creation. He has made it known that He loves us and He wants us to be saved. There is no question about that, but we have to trust Him with the things we do not understand. Then we have to accept and rely on the sovereignty of God. He is God and we are man! We must bow down and worship Him as a sovereign God.

The Book of Job ends with the LORD telling Job that his friends were in error and they needed to repent and Job needed to pray for them. Then the LORD returned all the things that Job had lost. He had more children and he had more possessions. The Book of Job ends with all Job's possessions being restored to him. It is interesting that the LORD did all of that for Job. He did not have to. He is Sovereign. He could have just told Job I am God and you are man and we are going to just leave it that way. God could have allowed Job to continue to struggle and let him continue to be afflicted. Whatever God allowed to happen would have been fine, but in this particular case the LORD decided to give Job a lot of possessions because He knew Job would handle them the right way. Whether we have a lot or whether we have a little, whether you are in a peaceful time or whether you are in trial, remember the theme of this book — God is Sovereign and I am man. In all things we need to worship God no matter what.

Introduction to Ecclesiastes

Introduction

Wisdom Literature constitutes the books in the middle of the Old Testament — Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon. In this book we have excluded the Psalms because that is a different course for the students in the Sunset International Bible Institute. This book is part of the Sunset Bible Study Library series that follows the courses offered at SIBI in Lubbock, Texas. As the teacher for Wisdom Literature, in some ways I really wish that the Old Testament had arranged these books differently. In many ways, Ecclesiastes, philosophically and perhaps prophetically, should come before Proverbs. It has something to say that really precedes what Proverbs has to say. At the end of the Book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon wrote:

*Now all has been heard; here is the **conclusion** of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14).*

It is as if Solomon has gone through a number of different things in his thinking and his practice in the Book of Ecclesiastes and at the end, after wandering through the maze of life, he concluded that the real thing for man was to “*Fear God and keep his commandments.*” That was the “*conclusion*” to the end of Ecclesiastes. Then the first chapter of Proverbs

begins — “*The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel . . . The fear of the LORD is the **beginning** of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline*” (Proverbs 1:1, 7). Ecclesiastes reached a point at the end of the book that Proverbs starts with. That is the reason I think Ecclesiastes should be studied before the Book of Proverbs. In essence Solomon said the things I have shared with you in the Book of Ecclesiastes are not wise, but at the end he concluded man needs to “*Fear God and keep his commandments*” — and it is as if the Book of Proverbs is a continuation of this thinking for “*The fear of the LORD is the **beginning** of knowledge.*”

The Book of Ecclesiastes has been approached differently by many different commentaries and commentators. I have approached it a certain way and this book will use that particular approach.

False Philosophies and How They Affect One’s Life

I want to begin this study by asking a question. I know that most people watch at least some television. Some watch quite a bit of television. We are that kind of people in our culture. There are a lot of commercials on television or the internet. That is what pays the bills for the shows we watch. So what commercials do you like? What things really catch your attention and why? I can recall some commercials I have heard through the years, and some of these are from a long time ago, some even from my childhood. I remember a particular beer commercial (forgive me for bringing up beer in a Bible study) that was on during a Saturday baseball game. The bottom line of this particular beer commercial was the statement, “You only go around once in life, get all the gusto you can get.” I have remembered that statement years and years after I first heard it. Why did a beer company have that statement representing it? What was the commercial trying to say to the audience? They

were saying if you really wanted to get a hold of life you needed to drink this beer. Really? Is that true? That is a philosophy of life and that is really what I am driving at.

Advertising is a big business so commercials will be all around us. A lot of commercials have a philosophy of life. To market their products people are going to produce a product and use a philosophy of life to connect to their product. It may be a philosophy of life that is connected to the product itself or it may be, and perhaps more so, a philosophy of life that the company believes their viewers believe. If people embrace the philosophy then they will buy the product. Consider some of these examples:

- I lived in New Zealand for four years. Besides being the most beautiful place on the face of the earth, you are never more than seventy miles from the coast. Fishing is wonderful whether it is deep-sea fishing off the coast or fishing in one of the lakes internally. How do you sell fish to New Zealanders? First the fish have to be fresh. Just about every neighborhood has its own fish market close by. New Zealanders are able to buy fresh fish that had previously been caught a short time ago right off their coast. How would a company sell frozen fish in New Zealand? They used a philosophy of life that they thought would connect their product to what New Zealanders believed. One company advertised that for every package of frozen fish bought they would donate a particular amount to save the oceans. Since I now live in Lubbock, Texas, and we are surrounded by sand that philosophy does not mean much to me. However, it meant everything to New Zealanders. They love the environment. They believe man should be very meticulous in trying to preserve the environment and keep it clean. They are very connected to ecology so when this particular fish company wanted to sell frozen fish they said buy our fish and help us save the world. New Zealanders' philosophy is save the

world. Even though their fish does not taste like fresh fish, they would sell fish in New Zealand by appealing to something else besides frozen fish.

- A number of years ago there was a commercial for margarine that showed different people popping up and saying, “I’m three!” or “I am one!” These people were adults, but they were saying “It has been three years since I have been on a good diet that has given me a healthy outlook on life” instead of “I am three years old” They were saying that part of their diet was this margarine. In other words they were saying, “Life really began for me three years ago when I started using this margarine in my diet.” They were appealing to people who really believe in a healthy lifestyle. The commercial was saying if you want to be healthy then this is the kind of margarine you should eat. There was a philosophy behind the margarine that life is living a healthy life and that means dieting in a particular way.
- There was a commercial for an exercise machine that was about being in shape and building up your muscles. Showing the machine they made the following statement: “If you use this machine you will gain self esteem and have more confidence and you will have more power to control your situation.” This commercial was probably an appeal to young professionals who worked hard in the business world. They would come home after working long hours and dealing with a lot of tension, high pressure, and competition in the work place. They might feel intimidated and put off by the pressure to move up the corporate ladder. This company decided to appeal to their need to have a sense of well being and control in the work place. If the young professional would just use this machine he would have power and control in the work place. How do you go from using a weight/exercise machine to having power and control in the office? That is

quite a jump. They were trying to appeal to something that people want to believe.

Think about other commercials that you remember through the years. Some may catch your eyes and some may catch your ears. Some commercials will make you laugh. There are a lot of commercials in society within the United States that have a lot to do with making us laugh. When I asked my students in this class at Sunset International Bible Institute to tell me their favorite commercials much of the time they will talk about the ones that make them laugh. Sometimes when I ask them about the product that is connected to that commercial they do not remember. That is not a good connection.

We have a lot of humor in our society. Consider how many programs are about laughter and fun. Laughter is huge in our culture. It is almost as if we say life is about having a good laugh. That is how we would state a philosophy of life — “Life is _____” and then you fill in the blank with whatever your philosophy for a good life is. Years ago AT&T had a line in their commercials as they were trying to sell phones that said “Reach out and touch someone.” People got a little teary eyed as they thought about the phone being a good way to make connections to build relationships with people they loved. That philosophy may not have been that important to a phone company, but they were trying to sell their phone service as were others at that time.

What is your philosophy of life? Everybody has a philosophy of life even though they may not be able to verbalize or articulate exactly what his/her philosophy is. By our attitudes and our actions we reflect that we do have a certain philosophy of life. Think about the kind of music you listen to. That probably reflects something about your philosophy of life. Think about the clothes you wear and why you wear them or the clothes you will not wear. That says something about your life. Perhaps your attitude toward your work reflects your philosophy of life. My dad and my wife’s dad stayed with the same company for forty to fifty years. In the

twenty-first century people move around an average of ten times in their work life going to different companies and different jobs. We do not have the same attitude toward our work. Sometimes the moves are on the corporate side and we do not have a choice in the moves, but often times we switch jobs because we believe life is moving from here to here. There is not the same loyalty to the company anymore that perhaps there used to be. That is connected to a philosophy of life which may be different from our fathers and grandfathers.

Consider your attitude toward authority. What is your attitude toward government? What is your attitude toward leaders in the Church? What is your attitude toward your husband? What is your attitude toward your boss? These attitudes also reflect your philosophy of life. Many in an older generation would have had the philosophy that life is submitting to authorities. That attitude is not always true any more. That might be just a part of our philosophy of life, but it is all connected.

What do we do with our recreational time? That has something to do with our philosophy of life. What TV shows we watch and what movies we go to see reflect a philosophy of life. How we live our lives has a great deal to do with what we believe our philosophy of life is.

Definition, Description, and Nature of Philosophies of Life

A philosophy of life is the rule or set of principles or rules by which one lives. It is a description of what a person thinks makes his life tick. It is the approach he takes to life, defining for him his purpose and values in life. As you meditate on the kind of people you know at work, your family, and school you can describe succinctly several fairly common philosophies in our country. As you watch television, read the newspaper, or

listen to music think about what the catch phrase is and the philosophy of life that is being presented.

Determine What Your Philosophy of Life Is

Think about the time before you were a Christian. Paul wrote the Book of Romans to the saints in Rome, but in the first few chapters of Romans he talked about people who were not Christians. He talked about the ways in which their thinking and their minds were messed up. First consider what Paul had to say about the “*renewing of your mind*”:

Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God — this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is—his good, pleasing and perfect will (Romans 12:1–2).

“*The renewing of your mind*” is important. That is how man comes to please God. Before one becomes a Christian his mind has been changed by Satan. From the initial beginning of being a child a man’s mind, changed by Satan, thinks wrong things. A non-Christian adult does not think the correct way about people or God or even about himself. A non-Christian does not think correctly about a lot of things. Knowing this, now consider what Paul had to say in Romans 1:21–25:

For although they knew God, they neither glorified him as God nor gave thanks to him, but their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened. Although they claimed to be wise, they became fools and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images made to look like mortal man and birds and animals and reptiles. Therefore God gave them over

in the sinful desires of their hearts to sexual impurity for the degrading of their bodies with one another. They exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen.

What was wrong with the people Paul was describing here? They had a mind and a heart that was messed up — “. . . *their thinking became futile and their foolish hearts were darkened.*” That is the emphasis in Romans 1. These people “. . . *exchanged the truth of God for a lie, and worshiped and served created things rather than the Creator — who is forever praised. Amen.*”

In one of his books, Max Lucado used the following illustration which I think says what I am trying to say. There was a break-in at a department store one night while everyone was gone. The next morning no one discovered there had been a break-in for several hours. Nothing had been stolen but the perpetrators changed the price tags on different things. For several hours people came in to buy things and some got some incredible bargains because they paid very little for that which was very expensive. There were other people who paid way too much for that which was not worth much. Satan has come into society and changed the price tags in our world. If Christians are not thinking like God tells us to think then we are going to pay way too much for that which God says is worthless. Satan persuades man in his thinking to pay much for that. He convinces man that he needs to give himself over to this or that. He urges man that some things deserve a lot from man while God is saying do not bother because that is temporal. Worldly things will be burned up and it will no longer exist. God urges man not to pay the price Satan is asking for. On the other hand, Satan will diminish what is important as far as God is

concerned.⁴ A lot of people will ignore what is important saying they will not give themselves to that even though that is exactly what God wants His children to do. In changing the price tags in our world Satan has said this is what life is all about. This is the philosophy of life you need. God is saying His children need to commit to this philosophy of life:

So I tell you this, and insist on it in the Lord, that you must no longer live as the Gentiles do, in the futility of their thinking. They are darkened in their understanding and separated from the life of God because of the ignorance that is in them due to the hardening of their hearts. Having lost all sensitivity, they have given themselves over to sensuality so as to indulge in every kind of impurity, with a continual lust for more (Ephesians 4:17–19).

Notice all the words dealing with the mind and the heart: “*thinking*,” “*understanding*,” “*ignorance*,” and “*hardening of their hearts*.” They have messed up their behavior, but it all started with their mind — “*futility of their thinking*.” Christians understand from Romans 12 and other passages that man needs to “*. . . be transformed by the renewing of your mind*” through the Word of God.

Christians must try to figure out what God wants us to think. What does He want His children to see as that which is holy and pure? If Christians will concentrate on those things, if we strive to have the mind of Jesus, that is what God is trying to do. He is trying to bring about the mind of Christ. His desire is for His children “*. . . to be conformed to the likeness of his Son . . .*” (Romans 8:29). Paul urged the church in Philippi, “*Have this mind in you, which was also in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 2:5, ASV). Paul referred to that kind of theme

⁴ Lucado, Max, No Wonder They Call Him Savior, (Peabody, MA: Multnomah Press, 1986) pp.51–52.

throughout his books to all Christians. He wanted them to understand that the Spirit lives in you. He wanted them to know that God's eternal purpose for them is that they become like Jesus. That starts in the mind of Christians to be transformed into the likeness of God Almighty.

Solomon tried to present a number of philosophies of life in the Book of Ecclesiastes. They were all wrong until the very end of the book. It is possible that he might have even tried a lot of these philosophies himself. Reading through the history of Solomon in the Book of Kings it is difficult to determine when he might have tried all these different things. We do know that God gave him great riches. He was not just rich, he was extremely rich. We know that he had many wives and many concubines. We know that he had a lot of power. People paid tribute to him and he had power over foreign lands. Solomon had a lot of power, a lot of money, a lot of clout, and a lot of opportunities to try different things.

It seems as if Solomon was saying I have tried this, I tried this, and I have tried this. In each of the cases where he had tried something or at least he articulates that others may have tried it, he concluded they were "*meaningless*" or the King James Version uses the word "*vanity*." They are "*chasing after the wind*." These are some of the main words and phrases in the Book of Ecclesiastes. The word "*meaningless/vanity*" has to do with the idea of breath or vapor as if to say something was here and then it was gone. The idea is that something is elusive, something that you can not get your hands on because it is not real. They are not godly. The other part of this word as it is translated in most cases is that it is worthless. It is not just quick and fast and then it is gone, but it is worthless. What can you do with it? It is here and then it is gone. There is no way to grasp it. Consider looking at or even marking and counting how many times each of these words are used in the Book of Ecclesiastes. These words are used in almost every chapter; the words go on and on.

Solomon said some things in this book that are wrong. It is an inspired book, but not everything in it is true. You can not quote the Book of Ecclesiastes as truth without checking to understand the context. It is important to know who was speaking and what he was saying. Is what he was saying biblical truth from God's perspective or was it Solomon saying something that was only partially true. Consider the end of it when he concluded that it was "*meaningless*." He may be saying it all to explain that it was "*chasing after the wind*" and something not worth the time because it was wrong anyway.

That is the way we will approach this book. I have looked at paragraphs and sections of this book in which Solomon has talked about a particular approach to life. He has considered a philosophy of life that was not just an antiquity. It is very modern. I see the philosophies that he brings out in this book as very up-to-date and modern. We see people in our world going after the same things with the same results. These philosophies are "*meaningless*" and "*vanity*." They are dead end streets. They are pits of darkness. People pursue those things and then they end up on a dead end street. It is at that point that perhaps God has a chance to make them look at Him and see that He is the way, the truth, and the life. A lot of people get to the end of the street after trying something and they may see that it is "*vanity*" and then they are off on another philosophy of life. Solomon did a lot of different philosophies of life. In the end he finally came to the conclusion, "It is all junk. Don't bother. Don't go down those paths."

Key Concepts in Ecclesiastes

The brilliance of the Book of Ecclesiastes for Christians is that we do not have to discover every dark corner. We do not have to fall into every mud hole to figure out that is not where life really is or does something really matter. As we look at the Book of Ecclesiastes there are some key verses. Right up front

Solomon said very quickly that he wanted them to know what he was talking about:

The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem: “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless” (Ecclesiastes 1:1–2).

Another key thought is found in Ecclesiastes 1:9: *“What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.”* The phrase *“under the sun”* is very important and he used this phrase over and over again. It is as if (at least in the first ten chapters) Solomon was approaching life by leaving God out of the picture. He did not think about God intervening or think about His providence, but he was viewing life through God’s eyes. And yet he did not have a very good view of God. He mentioned God some, but his view was stale and rather unacceptable. It was not what the rest of Scripture says about God. Think about *“under the sun.”* Solomon was viewing life and wondering what to do with it. Keep in mind that the key word is *“meaningless/vanity.”*

King Solomon is the author of this book; he was the *“son of David, king in Jerusalem.”* He is also identified as *“the Teacher”* or *“the Preacher.”* In Hebrew the book is called ***Koheleth***, which means something like “The Words of the Preacher.” The Septuagint translation of the book uses the word ***Ecclesiastes***, perhaps meaning “one who spoke in the assembly or congregation about these things.” Others have suggested that the translation should be “Debater” or “Arguer.”

I picture Solomon preaching and teaching young people and old about the things he has discovered. He has gone through life and found out that many things are bad. He is going to tell about all the bad things and then he will tell all the good things when he gets to Proverbs. It is good for Christians to hear not just about the good things, but also to be able to identify the things that are inappropriate, the things that are

evil, and the things that God would say, “Man is lying about that one and Satan is telling you a lie. Do not buy into that. Do not pay a lot for that which is false or bad. Pay for that which is good.” This would be God’s way of looking at it.

There is much to gain from studying the Book of Ecclesiastes in sections that will look at the different philosophies of life. Consider knowing what Solomon was trying to say and perhaps even being able to put a title to that particular philosophy. Notice what is wrong and consider how many of these philosophies can still be seen in modern day examples. It is most important to look at these philosophies and then consider what the Bible has to say. What are the biblical philosophies of life?

Ecclesiastes is one of my favorite books because it is so applicable to modern day. It is an excellent book for youth. It is a great book for those of us who are adults because we are all tempted to fall into these false philosophies of life. For those of us who are faithful Christians I suggest we consider really examining these false philosophies of life. You might be able to say I have not fallen into that philosophy or I have not buried myself up in that at all. We might need to ask ourselves the question, have I bought into this philosophy just a little bit? Are there parts of our lives that are influenced by these false philosophies? Perhaps these things have become a part of the way we live.

False Philosophies of Life (1)

Introduction

Ecclesiastes 1:1 – 2:11.

Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon, to whom we do not really know, but it is about false philosophies of life. The right philosophies of life are presented more in the Book of Proverbs. In the Book of Ecclesiastes there is meaningless, chasing after the wind philosophies of life. Look at the Book of Ecclesiastes in segments and consider pieces of the text in order to identify the different philosophies of life that Solomon was talking about. Consider giving titles to these different philosophies and ask yourself what was Solomon, the teacher, trying to say?

The Vanity of a Life Unyielded to God

Philosophy #1 — You Cannot Beat the System

The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem: “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.” What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from,

there they return again. All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new?" It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time. There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow (Ecclesiastes 1:1–11).

This passage is depressing and about as negative and pessimistic as it could be. Solomon was talking about a false philosophy of life. Another verse to consider would be Proverbs 14:12 which says, *"There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death."* At first all these philosophies seem like the right path to follow, but then at some point it ends up being dead, pessimistic, hurtful, and harmful. The philosophy that Solomon was illustrating in this passage might be called "Why Waste the Heartbeats?" or "Same Old Same Old" or "Washing Machine Stuck on the Rinse Cycle" or simply "What Is the Use?" There is a lot of pessimism in this passage of Scripture.

When a man looks at life, when he looks at the world, as simply "***under the sun***" what does life look like? There is no God in this passage; He is on the outside and man is not including Him in this picture. As man looks at life "***under the sun***" he will conclude that things just keep going the way they have always gone. Solomon used the illustrations from nature — *"The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course . . . streams flow into the sea . . ."* Man does not know where it is coming from or where it is going. It is just a cycle and nothing really changes. Water is like that. It is in the sky, rain comes down,

evaporation takes it back up, and rain comes down again. What is accomplished by all of this?

The key verse in this passage of Scripture is Ecclesiastes 1:3 — “*What does man **gain** from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?*” The word “*gain*” is used a few times in the Book of Ecclesiastes. What is to be gained by taking this approach to life? In this particular case, Solomon said man lives in a closed system and he cannot do anything about it. That is just the way it is. It is pessimism. It is almost fatalism or determinism. Things were put in place a certain way, that is the way it is, and you cannot do anything about it. In other words, life can be pretty boring, it can be pretty discouraging. Man can become really frustrated because nothing can be changed. People come and people go. The sun comes up and the sun goes down. Rain comes down and water goes up. The wind blows, it is here and it is there. Streams flow into the sea and that is just the way it is. Man cannot make any difference. He cannot make any impact because nothing can change.

Is Solomon right? Is that the right philosophy of life? Are there people who have this philosophy of life? In the United States, we hear about the American dream. Basically, the American dream means that man can do anything he wants to do. He can become anybody he wants to be. Parents talk to their children telling them they can do anything in this world because we live in America. Nothing is impossible! There is a lot of that in the American culture and a lot of people believe that way. This is different. Some in America have developed this philosophy. People may get to the point that they have run up against a wall so much that they believe they cannot make a difference. They cannot get out of the rut or the cycle they are in.

What are some examples of this kind of philosophy seen in the world today? Think about people who are in deep deep poverty. Grandparents and parents may have been in poverty so they think that is just the way it is and there is nothing they can do about it. There are some rags to riches stories and we celebrate these stories, but for a lot of people who are in that

situation they think that is an aberration that does not really happen often. Even people who have been in deep poverty might not encourage their children to break the cycle. Some do, some do not. Even in the same culture where there is a lot of oppression and poverty, some will say they can get out, but many are saying this is just the way it is. Consider other cultures around the world and this philosophy may be more prevalent in oppressive societies where anything like the American dream is not known. Cultures where government, societies, rules, pressure, laws, and work have always been the same make this philosophy more prevalent. Parents have been this way and children are expected to be the same.

This philosophy might even show itself in certain religious cultures. It may show itself in the culture where the religion is very deterministic — what you are is what you were intended to be, you cannot break away or change. This philosophy might show up in certain brands of Christianity where God has determined before hand that you are going to be this or that, you are going to be saved, you are going to be lost, you are going to be in that country and in this family and so forth. This philosophy dictates that man cannot break the cycle. Even in America where the American dream has been fostered there are people who have run up against the brick wall and have decided to give up. They may decide to just lie down and quit because that is the way it is going to be.

The question for Christians is not whether it is for other cultures, but whether or not it is right. The answer is no. This philosophy of life is not right. Christianity is about change. People come out of idolatry and immorality and all others kinds of sin that have enslaved them. Christians “. . . *have been set free from sin and have become slaves to righteousness*” (Romans 6:18). The Lord broke the bonds of sin so that Christians can become the children of God. Not only is it not true that man is once lost always lost, but once man has come out of sin into Christ’s body as a Christian there is a continuing process of change. Christians are being changed into the

likeness of Jesus. The fruit of the Spirit is that which is being produced in the life of a Christian in ever increasing measure (cf. Galatians 5:22–25).

Paul told the Corinthians, “. . . we, who with unveiled faces all reflect the Lord’s glory, are being transformed into his likeness with ever-increasing glory, which comes from the Lord, who is the Spirit” (2 Corinthians 3:18). Christians do not believe in this philosophy. Christ’s message, the Gospel, can change lives. Many people who have been deep in sin have been changed by the Gospel message. They have chosen to believe and obey the Lord and to become His through baptism. Because of their belief they have become Christians saved from sin. It is amazing to watch new Christians grow over the years and put off those old habits and approaches to life. They truly believe they can change. If you buy into this philosophy to any degree you need to make the choice to believe in God’s philosophy. This philosophy which is pessimistic and deterministic is not correct.

Philosophy #2 — the Vanity of Intellectualism

I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven. What a heavy burden God has laid on men! I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind. What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted. I thought to myself, “Look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.” Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind. For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief (Ecclesiastes 1:12–18).

“Education, Education, Education — that is the panacea of society!” Many believe this philosophy. Americans are very keen on education. There is a lot of emphasis on educating our children correctly. There is a lot of emphasis on higher education because that is connected to getting a job. It is also connected to having enough money from the job to have a nice house, nice cars, and nice possessions. That is connected to having a nice life and that is connected to retirement. Education is connected to a lot of things that are connected to the American dream. Solomon put a lot of emphasis on education saying that it is very important — *“I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom.”*

Notice what Solomon said, *“What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted. . . . For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.”* This leaves the impression that he gave himself to learning and growing in all this knowledge, but it did not seem to do him any good because the more he learned the more he realized that things were out of whack and other things needed to be changed. He saw that things needed to be changed, but he did not have the ability to do it. He was able to see what was wrong and knew what was right, but that did not mean he could make it happen. This caused him to be frustrated. Just because he had learned and had much knowledge and wisdom did not mean that he could change the things that were lacking or the things that were not working.

The American society today has given itself heavily to this philosophy. Listen to the nightly news to hear about all the problems in our society. The solution to many of these problems is approached through the government and secular organizations as the need for more education. Educate the people better so they will be smarter so they will get better jobs so the economy will grow. When people think about the problem of teen pregnancies and how rampant other immoralities have become, they think the key is better education for our children. We need to educate people about

what is appropriate and what is safe and that should take care of the problem. We have tried those methods. It is not because of a lack of information that people continue to practice the wrong kinds of relationships and intimacies. That has nothing to do with it. The solution for this to change is not necessarily found in giving children and adults more knowledge.

I remember talking with a secretary of mine when I was preaching for the church in Oklahoma about one of the members who was not behaving as he should. She said, "Charles, they know better." I got this wry grin on my face because she was older than I and she should have known that just because people know better does not necessarily mean they will do better. Knowledge in and of itself is not the bottom line answer. A lot of the approaches such as exploration of the sea, exploration of space, or all the research scientifically into taking care of all the diseases that are present in mankind have become a huge issue. Man has become such a believer in learning all he can so that he can take care of himself because he has all the knowledge to know what to do. That was not Solomon's conclusion. In fact, Solomon's conclusion was that to have more knowledge about that sort of thing did not necessarily correct the problem.

This passage of Scripture contains the first mention of God. Solomon said, "*What a heavy burden God has laid on men!*" Is it God's fault? Solomon seemed to be saying that God gave man the ability to learn all of this, but he does not have the ability to change it all. Knowing about it and not being able to change it causes frustration.

Is education a problem? Is it a bad thing? Certainly not! Christianity is a religion that is faith based: "*So then faith comes by hearing, and hearing by the word of God*" (Romans 10:17, NKJV). It is the "***Word of God***" that is laid up in the Christians' hearts. With the help of the Spirit which lives within a Christian, we can be transformed; we can be changed. Transformation means change. If we are going to become like Jesus, we have to be transformed and that is change. That

change is connected to knowledge, but it is not knowledge by itself. It is not knowledge away from the plan and the purpose of God. If man tries to know more and does not invite God into the process, there is not going to be the change that He is looking for. The biblical view is the “*Word of God*” and wisdom. That is an advantage, but it has to be in the context of the way in which God wants man to proceed.

Philosophy #3 — the Vanity of Hedonism

I thought in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure to find out what is good.” But that also proved to be meaningless. “Laughter,” I said, “is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?” I tried cheering myself with wine, and embracing folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom. I wanted to see what was worthwhile for men to do under heaven during the few days of their lives. I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well — the delights of the heart of man. I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless,

a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun (Ecclesiastes 2:1–11).

The third philosophy that Solomon mentioned is probably the most prevalent in society today. It is in Ecclesiastes 2:1–11. The key verse in this passage of Scripture is Ecclesiastes 2:10: *“I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor.”* The key word is *“pleasure.”* Once again Solomon realized that everything he was doing *“... also proved to be meaningless . . . Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun ”* (Ecclesiastes 2:1, 11). *“Nothing was gained under the sun”* — Solomon used these words again to describe this philosophy of life.

It is obvious that Solomon had given himself over to all the different kinds of worldly *“pleasure.”* These verses could be titled “The Vanity of Hedonism,” “Get all the Gusto You Can Get Right Now,” “Keeping Up With the Joneses,” or “Life in the Fast Lane.” The New English Bible version translates Ecclesiastes 2:1, *“Come, I will plunge into pleasure and I will enjoy myself.”* The key word again is *“pleasure.”* The word *“pleasure”* is really a Hedonistic concept outside the Gospel of Christ and outside the biblical view of things. It is interesting that in this section the words “I,” “My,” and “Me” are really the focal points — It is about Me! It is about My *“pleasure”*! It is about what I enjoy! It is about what I want to do.

Notice the things that Solomon had given himself over to:

- ***“Laughter . . . is foolish. And what does pleasure accomplish?”*** — Laughter is something that is huge in most cultures today. We seem to be laughing all the time. There are lots of television programs that involve laughter. Unfortunately, a lot of that humor has become quite crude making it very inappropriate for Christians to listen to.

Many in today's culture enjoy that and feed upon that kind of humor. Some seem to have an insatiable appetite for it. Perhaps they think that as long as they are laughing they do not have to face the trials of life.

- *"I tried cheering myself with wine"* — In a modest and controlled approach, Solomon mentioned alcohol. There are all kinds of television commercials that portray all the alcohol consumed in the American culture. They try to make it seem like the beautiful, the successful, the young people, and everyone who is smart are the ones who drink. It is seen as part of the *"pleasure"* in society.
- *"I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards . . . gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees . . . reservoirs . . . male and female slaves . . ."* This is **materialism**. He had a lot of things. Many societies today have given themselves over to materialism. People want to have the bigger house, the bigger car, the boat in the driveway, the recreation vehicle, the summer home, the winter home, the exotic vacations, and on and on it goes. There is not anything wrong with material things. God is the giver of those things. The question is have those material things become the desire that takes over self?
- Solomon also listed his great **accomplishments** in these verses — building houses for himself which included gardens and parks. Sometimes men are tempted by wanting to have great accomplishments. It is about what they have built — "I have built a company," "I have built a house," or "I have built this legacy." The *"pleasure"* is in the accomplishments. Unfortunately when the building process comes to an end, if it does not have eternal consequences or eternal influences to it, they might back off and consider that it was not all that great.
- *"I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house."* Solomon enjoyed having control over people. How many people enjoy **power** over

people today? How many people are in politics because they are interested in power?

- *“I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women **singers, and a harem** as well — the delights of the heart of man.”* These verses talk about Solomon’s **amusements** which included men and women singers. He liked “*pleasure*.” Consider what happens on a Friday night where you live. Check out where the people are. They are out enjoying “*pleasures*” and amusements of all kinds. Maybe it is the movies, or the bar, or other kinds of amusements. It is all about “amuse me and keep me laughing.”
- Solomon had even “*acquired . . . **a harem** as well — the delights of the heart of man.*” Sex has a great hold on society. There is so much information given about the sex life — “if your sex life is good, then everything else is just fine.”
- *“I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me. In all this my wisdom stayed with me. I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure. My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor.”* These verses talk about Solomon’s **reputation**. Notice all the things that he wanted people to know about. It was all about his reputation.

Solomon gave himself over to all these pursuits of “*pleasure*.” Our society gives themselves over to all the same pursuits of “*pleasure*”: laughter, alcohol, materialism, accomplishments, amusements, illicit sex, and reputation. It is all about ME and MY “*pleasure*.” The twenty-first century society has bought into these pursuits in a big way. Solomon said:

*“Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, nothing **was gained under the sun.**”*

From a biblical perspective there is nothing wrong with having fun. There is nothing wrong with having material things. There is nothing wrong with the sexual relationship. These are all gifts from God. The question arises when you put these things all apart from the way God views them, when you view these things as an end within themselves, do not these things become “*meaningless*”? That is how the world approaches these “*pleasures*.” The world thinks that if they are feeling good and having enough “*pleasure*” then life is very fulfilling. There are stories though of people who have gone down these paths of “*pleasure*” and coming to the end of it they have not found the fulfillment and the ultimate significance in those things. The end is not what they thought it was going to be and they try to find another road to another false philosophy.

Christians must view things as God views them. All these things in our world are made by God and He has given us a biblical perspective of these things. Before we look at the biblical perspective in the Book of Ecclesiastes this chapter has looked at what Solomon was saying — “Do not go down this path! Do not head toward this direction because these things are all false. They do not give meaning to life, because they are meaningless.”

False Philosophies of Life (2)

Introduction and Review

Ecclesiastes was possibly written before the Book of Proverbs. It is at least theologically before the Book of Proverbs. Ecclesiastes is a book that talks about a lot of “*meaningless*” things, “*chasing after the wind*,” and a lot of “*vanity*.” Solomon used those words or that phrase a number of times in this book. He described the philosophies of life that he had tried or that he had seen others try and he said, “*Everything is meaningless.*” He was saying do not go down that road. Perhaps he was talking to young people, perhaps he was talking to his children, or perhaps he was just talking to a general audience. Whatever the case he seemed to be working through this group of philosophies of life that are really ungodly. They are not right and they are not according to “*God’s Word.*” Somewhere in these philosophies he used the word “*meaningless.*”

These philosophies are very instructive for Christians today because these philosophies of life are still very up-to-date. Lots of people today are trying these philosophies of life. And, of course, they come to the same conclusion, these philosophies do not work. At least that is the answer God will give. Most people going down these roads eventually find out this is not where they want to go. They discover that this really does not gain anything. They decide this is not what I am searching for. Perhaps this conclusion comes because of the inside voice God put in every man. This voice says there is a searching and seeking after God the Father in every man and

when he finds God that is when he will find complete satisfaction and joy and relationship.

Solomon had chosen these ungodly and unacceptable paths. The previous chapters talked about several of these philosophies. There is a repetition about life with things that happen over and over. This philosophy can be seen in Ecclesiastes 1:3–11. In Ecclesiastes 1:12–14 Solomon was saying education could be the answer to everything, but when he tried to be educated about different things in different problems in life, it really did not help. Just knowing about problems did not give him the power, the strength, to overcome those problems. That was very frustrating for Solomon.

In Ecclesiastes 2:1–11 Solomon tried the pursuit of pleasure, a very modern up-to-date philosophy of life that many people seek these days. This philosophy dealt with going after everything that gave man pleasure. At the end Solomon said, “. . . *everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun*” (Ecclesiastes 2:11).

The Dignified Approach to Doing Evil

Wisdom Is Better or Is It?

Solomon’s approach was to leave God on the side and pursue something that looked like it might make a difference, looked like it might gain him something in this life. Solomon was trying to pursue anything that would bring him satisfaction. The key word for Ecclesiastes 2:12–16 is “*gain*” —

Then I turned my thoughts to consider wisdom, and also madness and folly. What more can the king’s successor do than what has already been done? I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness. The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in the darkness; but I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both. Then I thought in my heart, “The fate of the fool will

*overtake me also. What then do I **gain** by being wise?" I said in my heart, "This too is meaningless." For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered; in days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die!*

The key verse is "*I saw that wisdom is better than folly, just as light is better than darkness*" (Ecclesiastes 2:13). Does it make any difference or do I gain anything because I have wisdom? Wisdom is better or is it? Solomon paused for a moment after talking about the foolishness that is connected to pleasure and questioned if he should live a life that is wise or should he give himself over to foolishness?

Consider whether this might be godly wisdom (cf. James 3:13–17) or is this the worldly wisdom? Surely this was a worldly wisdom approach, a pragmatic approach asking what really works. Should I be wise in dealing with people, should I be wise in dealing with life, should I be wise in dealing with finances or work or any other thing like that? Should I give myself over to foolishness taking advantage of people, only caring about myself? Should that be the way to approach life? It seems that Solomon concluded that wisdom is better than folly. Maybe he was making that conclusion because it hurts less, it takes advantage of people less, it has less consequences. Perhaps that was the way he was looking at it as he paused to say "*I saw that wisdom is better than folly . . .*" There really is not a comparison when we look at things from God's perspective, but when you look at it from the human perspective is wisdom really better than folly because the bottom line is "*What then do I **gain** by being wise?*" The reason this is the bottom line for Solomon is because wisdom does not "*gain*" any more than folly. Everyone dies, everyone is overcome by death itself. Everyone suffers the same fate whether they are wise or foolish. He concluded that he did not see anything to be gained by being wise.

When Solomon talked about madness and folly in this chapter, he was really talking about foolishness. He was talking about boastings and thick-headedness. In essence he was saying do not be and do not act like a complete idiot. That really will not get a person anywhere. Be sensible, dignified, and selfless. Do not be self-defaming and do not be a sinner who wallows in the mire. Even a society that does not believe in God recognizes that a foolish sinner is evil and stupid and does not gain anything that will benefit society. A person who is dignified tries to build up society. This approach may sound good, but nothing is to be gained by it and death overtakes everyone in the end.

The Value or Non-Value of Working Hard

Work to Get Ahead?

Solomon continued in Ecclesiastes 2:17–23 to talk about a very prominent philosophy of life concerning work that once again can be seen in many people today. Pay special attention to the words that relate to work, effort, toil and skill:

So I hated life, because the work that is done under the sun was grievous to me. All of it is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? All his days his

work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless. A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind (Ecclesiastes 2:17–26).

When I read this I am reminded of some old television commercials. One of them was about a prominent investment company that used a well known actor named John Huston. After advertising for this particular investment firm he would end with the statement, “They make money the old fashioned way, they earn it.” He would put the emphasis on the word “earn” to emphasize the work, toil, effort, and time that it took to make that kind of money. He wanted to convey that the company was really working hard.

Then there was a commercial in New Zealand that ironically dealt with hard work. It is important first to understand that New Zealanders, particularly the older people in New Zealand in the 1980s and 90s, prided themselves in being very hard workers. In the commercial there was an older woman in the kitchen being introduced to a new product on the market. It was some kind of sliced potatoes in a box and all you had to do was mix water with the slices, put the mixture in the microwave, and in just a few minutes out would come the same dish that tasted just as good as if she had made it all by hand from scratch. Her bottom line was the ease of making this product and she made the statement, “I just love hard work. I could watch it for hours.” Her statement was ironic in the New Zealand culture because here was an older woman who probably believed in hard work, but she was promoting this

quick fix, a shortcut to making potatoes by taking a box off the shelf in the grocery store and just adding water.

Hard work? Consider the words in the text: “*work, toil, effort, skill, toilsome labor, anxious striving.*” Solomon and others had tried the approach to simply work hard enough to make it happen. This might describe a workaholic. There are a lot of reasons why people are workaholics. More importantly this would be a person who believes if you simply work hard enough anything is possible. A person can overcome every obstacle. It is interesting that in the text several times the author, Solomon, will say, “*This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.*” He was saying do not go down this path.

This is interesting because a lot of times in today’s culture there is the same philosophy or sometimes the opposite of it. People who have been in the armed forces say that the motto behind the scenes for a person in the Army is do not volunteer for anything. Do not put yourself into a working situation that you are not forced to be in because it really does not get you anywhere. Perhaps some can refer to their days as a younger person or even as an adult when the father or grandfather would have this philosophy to share with them, “If you just work hard enough anything is possible.” They believed that philosophy and they wanted others to believe it also. This philosophy is not necessarily true. It is not true in the physical world and it is not true in the religious world either.

Think about the people who work very hard. Do they always benefit from that hard work? Do they always rise to the top? Do they always prosper well? I have a picture in my mind of my mother’s father. He is standing outside their house in Lipan, Texas. It was a very hard time right after the depression. There had not been a lot of rain so the crops were in pretty bad shape. He was standing with my mother who was a young girl. He was very thin and gaunt. He worked extremely hard, in fact, the whole family worked hard on the farm. There he stood not really benefitting from his hard work. In fact, the family was quite poor. Hard work did not get him where he, and perhaps

others, thought work would take him. Hard work does not always get people where they think it will. People who work very hard do not always accomplish a great deal in this life. These hard workers might ask where does that get you? Solomon asked, *“What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun?”* (Ecclesiastes 2:22). All the *“toil and anxious striving”* does not always get man where he thinks it should.

An Interesting View of God Introduced

All the hard work and striving does not always get man where he wants to be in the religious world either. If he knows the grace of God, then he understands that Christians are not saved by works. There is a biblical view of works, but that view is not that if you work hard enough you can get everything you want. Think about the biblical New Testament view in regard to grace: *“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith — and this not from yourselves, it is the gift of God”* (Ephesians 2:8). We are saved by grace and that is not something we can work for. It is not something we can earn. It is not something we can acquire by our own efforts. It does not happen by our toil. We are saved by the grace of Jesus Christ and His blood shed on Calvary.

Beyond the biblical view of grace, think about the biblical view of work. In the world of physical things, is there a biblical view of work? Consider 2 Thessalonians 3:6–13:

In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we command you, brothers, to keep away from every brother who is idle and does not live according to the teaching you received from us. For you yourselves know how you ought to follow our example. We were not idle when we were with you, nor did we eat anyone’s food without paying for it. On the contrary, we worked night and day, laboring and toiling so that we would not be a burden to any of you. We did this, not

because we do not have the right to such help, but in order to make ourselves a model for you to follow. For even when we were with you, we gave you this rule: "If a man will not work, he shall not eat." We hear that some among you are idle. They are not busy; they are busybodies. Such people we command and urge in the Lord Jesus Christ to settle down and earn the bread they eat. And as for you, brothers, never tire of doing what is right.

"If a man will not work, he shall not eat." There is a connection between working and taking care of your family, taking care of the needs that you have. Men cannot sit down and depend upon the grace of others if a man has the ability to take care of himself. There is a biblical work ethic even in the secular world and in the job world.

Consider what Paul wrote in Ephesians 6 and Colossians 3 when he talked about work especially among slaves in relation to their masters. I think the principle applies to work in any secular setting, in any job setting. He said:

Slaves, obey your earthly masters with respect and fear, and with sincerity of heart, just as you would obey Christ. Obey them not only to win their favor when their eye is on you, but like slaves of Christ, doing the will of God from your heart. Serve wholeheartedly, as if you were serving the Lord, not men, because you know that the Lord will reward everyone for whatever good he does, whether he is slave or free (Ephesians 6:5–8).

Slaves, obey your earthly masters in everything; and do it, not only when their eye is on you and to win their favor, but with sincerity of heart and reverence for the Lord. Whatever you do, work at it with all your heart, as working for the Lord, not for men, since you

know that you will receive an inheritance from the Lord as a reward. It is the Lord Christ you are serving. Anyone who does wrong will be repaid for his wrong, and there is no favoritism (Colossians 3:22–25).

Paul urged them to make sure they worked for the sake of pleasing the Lord, not just the master, not just the boss, but work to please the Lord as if they were working for the Lord. That is the biblical work ethic in regard to the secular world.

In the religious world, Christians know that faith without works is dead. Paul put a lot of emphasis on this fact. Paul was the one who talked about the grace of God in his letters. He understood that Christians are saved by grace through faith perhaps better than any other theologian. He taught that an outgrowth of grace, the way in which we express our thanks and a way in which we express our commitment to God, is to work for Him and to serve others. The biblical work ethic is connected to the way God sees it and not connected to the way in which man sees it. The problem with man is he thinks if he will just work hard enough and rely on himself, then everything will be fine.

Solomon was saying that work was not going to get a man where he wanted to be and it was not going to get him everything he wanted. He was saying to just relax a little bit and enjoy yourself; enjoy the things that God has given to you — “*eat and drink, and find satisfaction.*” Do not work yourself to death. Work really does not get you to the end that you think it will. Man needs to do what God wants him to do, but at this point Solomon still did not have a good view of God. He almost blamed God for the fact that whatever you gain in this life has to be handed over to somebody else who did not work for it. Man is going to die and he does not take anything with him and he does not even get to give what he has worked for to the ones he would like to.

Fatalism in its Various Forms **(Ecclesiastes 3 – 6)**

That's the Way Life Is

These verses may sound very familiar to some. A musical group called the Birds sang a song in the 1960s using these verses. There are extremes and contrasts in these verses. Solomon composed this poem and then in the following verses he gave a commentary — “*What does the worker gain for his toil?*” Solomon used the same work related words and asked the same questions again.

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, 4 a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak, a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace (Ecclesiastes 3:1–8).

What does the worker gain from his toil? I have seen the burden God has laid on men. He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil — this is the gift of God. I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will

revere him. Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account (Ecclesiastes 3:9–15).

Ecclesiastes 3:15 gives the key to this section of Scripture. This philosophy has already been seen in Ecclesiastes 1:3–11 describing things that go around and around “*under the sun.*” Things continue to be done the way they have always been done, people work the way they have always worked and circle the way they have always been circling. Solomon seems to be repeating the same theme again.

In Ecclesiastes chapters 3–6 the theme seems to be fatalism or determinism. In that there is a pragmatic approach that Solomon took since that was the way the world was. What is the best way to proceed so that man will gain the most in this life? Once again the philosophy says that is just the way life is. There is a time to do this, there is a time to do that, this happens and then this happens. There are a lot of opposites, a lot of positives, a lot of negatives all rolled up into one ball, and that is just the way life is. It is as if he was saying God made it this way and that is the way God designed things to be.

At least Solomon did bring God into this philosophy, but that is all still “*under the sun.*” In Ecclesiastes 3:10 he made an interesting statement, “*I have seen the burden God has laid on men.*” Really? This was the way life was and Solomon blamed God for that being the way it is. Then in Ecclesiastes 3:11 he seems to be upset about the fact that God “. . . *has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.*” Solomon seems to be asking if man could think beyond what is “*under the sun*”? Is there something in mankind, in his heart, in his brain, in his mind that is innate which says there is something beyond. This world is controlled by God and that is just the way it is. And that is just the way it is always going to be. Solomon said God is Sovereign and God is the Judge (cf. Ecclesiastes 3:14, 15, 17), but there is some

arbitrariness about the way in which He controls life. This is what Solomon called a heavy “burden” on mankind.

Having said that the universe is the way it is because God made it that way and God will hold man accountable for what he does in this life, Solomon concluded there was nothing to be gained. His solution was “*That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil . . .*” (Ecclesiastes 3:13). This philosophy is repeated from the previous chapter — “*A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work*” (Ecclesiastes 2:24). Toil is meaningless. It does not get man anywhere so he might as well just enjoy life.

God Is Arbitrary and Unfair

Solomon continued in Ecclesiastes 3:16–22 with the philosophy that God is arbitrary and unfair in the way in which He holds man responsible for the things he has done. There is a closed system so that there is not a lot man can do to break out of it to make a difference. That is just the “burden” that God has laid on man. God holds man accountable in that system. Notice the frustration that Solomon showed:

And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment — wickedness was there, in the place of justice — wickedness was there. I thought in my heart, “God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed” (Ecclesiastes 3:16–17).

In a world that is controlled by God, in a world that is “*under the sun*,” God holds man accountable. Instead of judgment and justice there is wickedness. Solomon used the same kind of language in this passage as he did in the first eight verses, there will be a time for judgment on both the righteous and the wicked “*. . . for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed.*”

I also thought, “As for men, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals. Man’s fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless. All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return. Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?” So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him? (Ecclesiastes 3:18–22)

Consider the verses at the end of this chapter. Solomon had a different thought which tells mankind something about the way which Solomon viewed God in relation to all that God had created, especially animals and mankind. Solomon did not know much about afterlife. He was asking the question at the end of this life what is the real difference between man and animal? In Solomon’s mind there did not seem to be much difference. The world which God has created is difficult to break out of, it is difficult to make an impact in to change the course of things, and yet that is the way God has made it. That is the “burden” on man’s thinking, but God holds people accountable for He will judge them as a result of that.

Solomon concluded by saying there is no difference between man and animals. It sounds like we are all the same and there is really no advantage in being a human being over the animals. He concluded, “*Everything is meaningless.*” Again Solomon said “. . . *there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?*” He was saying that man might as well enjoy what he is doing since he cannot break out of it. Enjoy your work, enjoy eating and drinking, enjoy the little pleasures of life, and make the best out of this life. He is very pragmatic, but it is also very deterministic and fatalistic.

Exhortation

Remember that these are false philosophies, but there is also a bit of what mankind believes. He may not fully give himself over to one of these philosophies, because he sees the foolishness. Christians certainly can see the foolishness and ungodliness of many of these. We see a little bit of truth sometimes in some of these philosophies. Think about that little bit of truth, but do not believe the overall picture. We do not want to find ourselves given totally over to work. Are you a workaholic? Have you bought into the philosophy of one who pours everything into work? Have you bought into the philosophy that says this is just the way it is; I cannot break out of it or change because this is just the way it is? Do you say I am just a Christian; this is my personality and I am just the way I am. Do you believe that your traits and your weaknesses are just who you are and others will just have to accept you the way you are? These are the times when we have bought into the false philosophies of Solomon. Whether we buy into his philosophies a little bit on the physical side, the workaholic, or whether we buy into the spiritual side saying that we are the way we are and we cannot change, each of these philosophies are exactly what Solomon was talking about. If we choose these false philosophies we will find ourselves just as frustrated as Solomon was.

Remember the biblical philosophy, the way God looks at life, the way God looks at work, and the way God looks at His children's ability to change. He did put the Holy Spirit within us when we were immersed into Christ. That Spirit along with His Word, the fellowship of other Christians, our prayers, and the providence of God are all spiritual blessing in Christ. These blessings make it very much a world in which we can be like God Almighty. He will judge us, but we will go to be with Him. We are not like the animals. We will be with Him in eternity and will be more like Jesus than we have ever been.

False Philosophies of Life (3)

Introduction

Solomon, the writer of Ecclesiastes, was talking about philosophies of life. Unfortunately for Solomon they were all wrong. He had been going down these different paths to find out what is life. Perhaps that question resonates in the heart of most of us. Jesus addressed this question in the New Testament giving a number of different answers in relation to a number of different topics. Solomon would have been wise to have that kind of insight, but he had a lot of worldly wisdom and he approached life with that worldly wisdom in a number of different ways that were incorrect.

Ecclesiastes 4 covers some different philosophies that Solomon pointed out. In each one he said, “*This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind*” (Ecclesiastes 4:4, 16 NIV). The New Kings James version says, “. . . *this also is vanity and grasping for the wind.*”

Dog Eat Dog — Oppression and Power Philosophy

Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun: I saw the tears of the oppressed — and they have no comforter; power was on the side of their oppressors — and they have no comforter. And I declared that the dead, who had already died, are happier than the living, who are still alive. But better than both is he who has not yet been,

who has not seen the evil that is done under the sun. And I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's envy of his neighbor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. The fool folds his hands and ruins himself. Better one handful with tranquillity than two handfuls with toil and chasing after the wind (Ecclesiastes 4:1–6).

God is not mentioned at all in this chapter. Solomon was talking about a closed system in which God was left outside. This passage of Scripture could be called the “dog eat dog—survival of the fittest” philosophy of life. Solomon had seen “. . . *oppression that was taking place under the sun* . . .” talking about oppression and power over other people. He was talking about one person oppressing another person or one person dominating others.

This philosophy might be likened to some of the interviews that are done of sports figures when someone asks what is their approach to the game. A lot of pro athletes will say that winning is everything. That would be an oppressor or power attitude. No one wants to lose and no one wants to be oppressed by others. In the sports world this may work since it is a game, but in life the “dog eat dog” or “survival of the fittest” philosophy is not right. Some have suggested the “iron rule” or “might makes right,” force and/or coercion is the only way to get the job done.

Solomon said all of this was “. . . *meaningless, a chasing after the wind,*” but it was so bad that he said it would have been better to be dead so that he did not feel pain. It would have been better to not ever be born than to be oppressed by someone else. This philosophy can be seen in the business world when someone who is in power and there are those who are the workers. There is not a good working relationship when the foreman, the owner, or when anyone is oppressive in a situation. He may be handing out the orders in such a way that he is demeaning the workers. He may be forcing them to do

things they do not want to do or making them work longer hours than they are supposed to. Many have been in this type of work situation and it not easy.

Consider different governments and certain rulers who have been on the throne in their countries or the president of their country. Some have ruled with an iron rod will. They have forced the people to do whatever they want them to do. They have persecuted the people and have taken advantage of them. They sometimes tax the people a great deal and even take away their land and possessions. They may have ruled by secret police, an army, or in other oppressive ways. The people reel under this type of ruler. They are usually very poor because they have had a lot of things taken away. Sometimes it is their privileges and rights that are taken.

Some oppressive and power relationships can be very personal. Think about the husbands who take this approach to their wives. They may even say, "I am in charge and the head of this house. I make all the decisions and you must do what I tell you to do." It is possible for the relationship to be different so that the wife is the oppressive and powerful one. The wife may think she is the one in charge. She may be the one who makes all the rules and is the one who is demeaning to her husband. She may be forcing her husband to do whatever she says. In a husband and wife relationship this philosophy can be so bad that it becomes domestic abuse. Sometimes these situations are so bad that the police must be called in to prevent further abuse.

An oppressive power situation can also be seen in a child's relationship with a parent or visa versa. The parents, bigger and stronger, abuse the children sometimes by making the children to do whatever they want them to do turning the children into their servants. That is not the right way and it can become a very painful situation.

Unfortunately, the oppressive and power situation is sometimes seen in the Church. Leaders in the church may be oppressive over the congregation. This happens to the rest of

the people whether it is in the eldership or with a strong personality in the congregation. Sometimes the abuse of power is seen when the leader or leaders use intimidation by handing down decisions saying this is the way it is going to be. They want to be the leaders and the congregation must follow. This can be a very oppressive relationship.

Looking at this philosophy of life it may seem to be good for the person in the power position, but considering the next philosophy Solomon pointed out that the power situation is not very good for the one in power. It is not a good situation for the people who are being oppressed. This is not a good philosophy of life. It is very hurtful and can be intimidating. It inhibits people from proceeding in the way they want to with their lives or how they need to be able to take care of their families.

Why would Solomon deplore such an approach? What are the problems? Consider the text one more time. He said:

- *I saw the **tears** of the oppressed.*
- *They have **no comfort**.*
- *I saw that all labor and all achievement spring from man's **envy** of his neighbor.*
- *Better one handful with tranquillity than two handfuls with **toil** and chasing after the wind.*

Solomon saw that this was a life without comfort and a life full of toil, troubles, and turmoil. The power person was taking power, controlling and oppressing others because they were envious of that power. They were selfish and probably materialistic.

As Christians we know this philosophy is nothing like what Jesus taught. In the New Testament Jesus said:

“You know that the rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and

whoever wants to be first must be your slave—just as the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many” (Matthew 20:25–28).

In John 13 Jesus took off his outer clothing and wrapped a towel around His waist. He took water in a washbasin and washed the feet of His apostles. He, the King of the universe, the Alpha and the Omega, the One who was to be served, and the One who will one day be the Judge, is the One who came to earth and submitted to mankind. Paul told the Philippians:

Your attitude should be the same as that of Christ Jesus: Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be grasped, but made himself nothing, taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness. And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself and became obedient to death — even death on a cross! (Philippians 2:5–8).

Oppression and power may work for some people because they reap all the benefits of that situation, but for most people, especially those who are oppressed, it is a very sad situation to be in.

Surround Yourself with People Philosophy

Again I saw something meaningless under the sun: There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. “For whom am I toiling,” he asked, “and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?” This too is meaningless — a miserable business! Two are better than one, because they have

a good return for their work: If one falls down, his friend can help him up. But pity the man who falls and has no one to help him up! Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken (Ecclesiastes 4:7–12).

In this philosophy, which is somewhat connected to the oppression one, something happened to the person who was the oppressor. Solomon saw “. . . *something meaningless under the sun: There was a man all alone.*” Could this “man” be the power broker, the one who had oppressed everyone and now he was all alone? Picture the man who had won the city. He had brokered the business deals, he had oppressed others, run over everybody, and climbed the corporate ladder. Now he sits in his magnificent office on the top floor of a building. He looks out through glass windows over the city that he in a sense owns. He has his feet propped up on a \$3000 desk. He is wearing a \$1000 suit. He looks out over the city and smiles with a wry grin about the city he owns knowing he got there by power and oppression. Then suddenly he realizes it is awfully quiet and he is all alone. He is alone because he ran over everybody getting there. No one wants to be his friend.

In response to the power broker who ended up all alone consider the philosophy that would have the opposite effect. Here is the one who had gained his wealth and his power by running over people. He asked himself, “*for whom am I toiling . . . and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?*” Power and oppression really do not bring a lot of enjoyment. Maybe this man realizes he is all alone because he ran over everybody. His toiling has not brought him any joy and he really has nothing to show for it. He sees “*This too is meaningless — a miserable business!*”

Ecclesiastes 4:9–12 are familiar verses that are often quoted. These verses are in a particular context and sometimes

they are quoted out of context and used in a way that Solomon did not intend them to. These verses use several illustrations about the power in numbers:

- *Two are better than one . . . If one falls down, his friend can help him up.*
- *If two lie down together, they will keep warm.*
- *Two can defend themselves.*
- *A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.*

When a man finds himself all alone that is no fun. The opposite of being all alone would be to surround yourself with people. Two are better than one and a group is better than being all by yourself.

Think about the American culture. Turn on the radio to almost any station that is not a talk radio situation and they are playing love songs. The majority of the music that has come out over the years has included songs expressing man's devotion to another person, expressing the desire to be with one another, there are songs about the courtship between a man and a woman. What is that all about? Why do we love those songs? Perhaps it is the music, perhaps it is the beat, perhaps it is the tune, but it is also our identity with the desire to have somebody in our lives because we do not like to be alone.

Look at the expressions in the American culture of man's desire not to be alone. In Lubbock, Texas, as well as most places in the world, on a Friday night there is a lot of traffic on the roads. People are headed to the restaurants, to the pubs or the bars because that is where other people are. That is where the social life is. They may mix a little alcohol with it or it may just be the fun of getting together. Younger people may be in one place and older people in another place. They are there because they want to be with other people. There are different kinds of clubs like the Lions Club or other service type clubs that people may join for the sake of fellowship. They want to be with other people who also want to serve the community.

Sometimes people come to church services because of this false philosophy of life. They want to surround themselves with people because they do not want to be by themselves. Christians hope people come to the assembly of the Church to worship God and for other right reasons, but sometimes people come because that is where people are. They are seeking nice people, people who will treat them well, and people who will make good friends. That is what it is all about. People come to church assemblies and associate with church members for a lot of reasons. Sometimes they are there because they want to be around people. If they are not coming for the right reasons then it falls into the false philosophy of just wanting to be around other people.

Why do people become members of cults? Is it partly because there is a sense of identity with a group of people? Why do they stay? Why don't they see through the false philosophy? Why don't people see through the ruler who is using them and taking advantage of them, sometimes monetarily, sometimes in other ways? Why can't they break out of something like that? Often times the reason they got into a cult in the first place was because they were accepted, there appeared to be some love and desire to have a relationship with them. Perhaps the person did not feel accepted in other situations.

Think about the philosophy of surrounding oneself with people and consider what the biblical view would be. What would God have to say about this philosophy? It is important to know that God made us to be with other people. There is nothing wrong with that desire. In the Garden of Eden when God looked at Adam He said, "*It is not good for the man to be alone. I will make a helper suitable for him*" (Genesis 2:18). In Ecclesiastes 4:8 Solomon said, "*There was a man all alone; he had neither son nor brother . . .*" That is ultimately not where God intended for man to be as human beings upon this earth. He intended for more than just man's relationship with Him even though that relationship is the best, the ultimate

relationship for man. If that is the only relationship man has like Jeremiah in the Old Testament who basically only had God, then that would be sufficient, but in most cases there are other righteous people that Christians can associate with and become friends. That is the kind of relationship God has planned for man, a relationship based on the right principles, based on the right purposes, based upon being a God glorifying person for Him. Those relationships can become everything God intended for them to be.

Marriage in the right context is everything God intended for man. In Ephesians Paul said husbands and wives were to love one another “. . . *just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her* (Ephesians 5:25). There is a holiness approach to being with somebody else in a marital relationship that is godly. Mankind has the desire to have children and to have a relationship with them. Godly moms and dads want to have a good relationship with their children for as long as they are alive.

In many respects the church is the belonging place. The Lord could have asked His children to worship Him on a mountain somewhere so that man could worship all alone by himself. That is not how God created the Church. The Church is a body of believers who come together on Sunday to edify one another and to provoke one another to love and good works (cf. 1 Corinthians 14). The relationships God created are good for Christians. They benefit us when the fellowship is for the right reasons.

Perpetuate Your Youth Philosophy

Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to take warning. The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom. I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the king's successor. There was no

end to all the people who were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind (Ecclesiastes 4:13–16).

Solomon concluded Ecclesiastes 4 with an interesting third philosophy which makes it look like it is always the younger man who gets the glory. It is always the younger man who brings something fresh and new. The old ways, the old king, and the old leaders seem to be out dated and antiquated. When the younger ones come along people get excited and want to support the young one until that young one becomes old. Then the people look for a new person who is young with new ideas and new ways — Perpetuate your youth! Here is an old king who is possibly considered foolish, and maybe he really is foolish, he is old and viewed as out of date. A young successor comes along, he may have come from prison, he may not be from a good background, but because he is young the people seem to flock to him. They want to know what he has to offer and see him as vibrant and energetic. They want the youth to take them along a different route so they will not be bored. That happens for awhile until the successor gets old and then those who came later were not pleased and another young person comes along and they follow him.

Surrounding yourself with youth is seen in many cultures today, but not in all cultures. I remember how the Fijian students I taught in New Zealand had so much respect for older people. It taught me a great deal, but when I came back to the United States, and in other countries, so much of the advertising on the media has to do with youth, trying to stay young and finding the fountain of youth. Advertisers urge people to make sure they get enough of the right kind of cosmetics, make sure you get a facelift, or other products that will keep you young and beautiful. Love yourself by perpetuating your youth.

Look beyond society in general and the same philosophy can be seen even in the church. Christians can become enamored with youth. What kind of preacher is a congregation looking for? Sometimes they want someone who is in their 30s, but they want him to have 40 years of experience and to have a nice family. How can a man have 40 years of experience if he is only 30 years old? That cannot be done. There is wisdom in the old, but we also know that we like that young face. We like the young vibrancy and the young family with little children running around. This gives the congregation great pleasure. There is nothing wrong with youth, but the question is do we worship youth, do we elevate youth beyond what God elevates it? If that is happening we bring down that which is wise, “*the hoary head*” as the Old Testament says (cf. Leviticus 19:32; Proverbs 16:31). The gray head has so much wisdom because of the years and godly living. Sometimes even in the Lord’s Church we have bought into perpetuating our youth.

Solomon saw the fallacy of this philosophy. We do not know how old Solomon was at this point. As David got older people began to look at his sons and even at men who were not his sons trying to grab David’s throne. These men were younger and some people were actually following after them. Remember the story of Absalom (cf. 2 Samuel 13–20) and even when David was lying close to death there were other people trying to take the throne. It is as if the Israelites were looking for that young dashing king because David was no longer able to rule the kingdom (cf. 1 Kings 1:1–2:10).

Once again people can be looking for what is new. There is always the new, lovely, young movie star. There is the young and strong athlete who becomes popular. There is fame in youth as far as people are concerned. As the text points out fame fades because the person does get older and wrinkles appear. They are not as strong as they used to be and perhaps their beauty is fading as well — “*This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.*” Surely it is wiser and more godly to believe there is beauty in growing old. There is wisdom and

strength in growing old. Perhaps the physical strength is diminishing, but there is spiritual strength based on the wisdom, the knowledge, and the experiences one has had.

Solomon's Conclusion – Tread Lightly with God Ecclesiastes 5:1–7

Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words. When you make a vow to God, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the [temple] messenger, "My vow was a mistake." Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God (Ecclesiastes 5:1–7).

Be Cautious in Your Relationship with God

Remember this passage of Scripture is still in the section where Solomon was talking about the false philosophies of life. Even though he brought up God it is important to remember the context of these verses. He was still talking about the things that are “meaningless” — “*Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore stand in awe of God.*” Solomon was talking about standing “*in awe of God*” being connected to something that he said was “*meaningless.*” Those two philosophies do not go together in the Christian's thinking.

Solomon was saying to be cautious in your relationship with God. Consider what he has already said about God. He said God has laid a burden on mankind (cf. Ecclesiastes 1:13, 3:10). He holds them responsible for the way he acts and the way he lives. Because Solomon believed God holds mankind responsible for the way he acts in this life he came to the following conclusion: Man should not unnecessarily offend God. He must make sure to pay his dues to God and be cautious in his relationship with God. Since God is awesome and since He will repay evil, a person should tread lightly and uprightly with Him to avoid punishment.

Consider some of the things Solomon said in Ecclesiastes 5:1–7 — *Guard your steps when you go to the house of God:*

- ***Go near to listen*** rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. As a dream comes when there are many cares, so the speech of a fool when there are many words. — Make sure you listen more than you are talking because the more you talk the more mistakes you will make. In Proverbs Solomon leaves the impression that the more you talk the more you sin. If your words are fewer you will sin less. Make sure you listen to God and pay attention to Him. Make sure you offer the sacrifice of a wise one and not the sacrifice of a fool. Do it right and go through the motions because you do not want to unnecessarily offend God.
- When you ***make a vow to God***, do not delay in fulfilling it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to vow than to make a vow and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the [temple] messenger, “My vow was a mistake.” Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? Much dreaming and many words are meaningless.

- Do not be too quick to make vows. Do not go into the Temple and tell God I will do this or I promise to do that. Solomon was saying make sure when you make a vow to God that you are going to fulfill it. Man cannot be hasty and make promises that he cannot keep. A vow is a promise to God. It was a very serious thing to the Israelites. This was similar to modern times of putting your left hand on the Bible and raising your right hand to take an oath to tell the truth in a courtroom. Actually in the Old Testament it was stronger because they were saying something before God. A person's word should be good enough, but when a person took a vow before God basically he was saying if I do not follow through on this vow, if I do not keep the promise I have made, strike me dead or bring a curse upon me that I deserve. When a man makes a vow he is saying God can bring His judgment upon him if he did not keep his promise. Solomon was emphasizing that a man must make sure what he was saying before he made a vow to God. Man must be willing to fulfil the vow. A vow should not be made in haste — *“Do not let your mouth lead you into sin.”* God holds men accountable for their vows.
- *Therefore stand in awe of God.* — Solomon was saying men need to respect God because He is the Judge. He is the One with the power so men need to *“stand in awe of God.”* This statement is different from Ecclesiastes 12:13 when he said, *“... Fear God and keep his commandments for this is the whole duty of man.”* The statement in chapter 12 is a lot more mature. In this early passage he was saying, “Make sure you stay out of the way of the Big God. Do not unnecessarily offend Him because you are going to pay a price for that.”

The Attitude of Modern Man

How do these philosophies appear in the world today? There may not be a lot of people who would follow these philosophies. There may be some who are not mature in their

understanding of the relationship Christians have to God in New Testament Christianity. We are offered a Father. We are offered a Brother in Jesus. We are offered the Spirit within. Perhaps some might take this approach: "I believe in God. He is real. He will be the Judge at the end of time so I need to behave myself. I need to live in such a way so God is not looking down to say, 'Wow! He is way out of line. He is making foolish decisions. He is doing everything wrong.' I want to do what is best in terms of keeping God off my back so when I come to judgment He will look at me and say, 'You did not step way out of line so you are okay with Me.'" It is possible that some come to church, watch their speech, and keep their promises only with the mind set to keep God off their backs. There are good, moral, upstanding citizens who really do not have a personal relationship with God Almighty and with the Lord Jesus Christ.

Remember these are false philosophies. They are meaningless, but it is important to exhort each other with the questions: how much do I allow these lies to affect my life, my thinking, and my behavior? Does my life reflect the influence of these false philosophies of power and oppression, being all alone, or perpetuating youth? Do I live morally just to keep God off my back? Consider why you attend church? Why do you put on makeup? Why do you want this or that in your life? Do these philosophies cause us to live a certain way. Christians must live according to God's Word and the way HE looks at life. These false philosophies are of the Devil.

False & True Philosophies of Life

Introduction

Continuing to look at the false philosophies of life with Solomon as the guide, Ecclesiastes 5:8–20 is a repeat of the ideas in Ecclesiastes 2:1–11. If riches are “*meaningless*,” as Solomon believed, it is good that man be allowed to enjoy himself:

Then I realized that it is good and proper for a man to eat and drink, and to find satisfaction in his toilsome labor under the sun during the few days of life God has given him — for this is his lot. Moreover, when God gives any man wealth and possessions, and enables him to enjoy them, to accept his lot and be happy in his work — this is a gift of God. He seldom reflects on the days of his life, because God keeps him occupied with gladness of heart (Ecclesiastes 5:18–20).

Solomon used the phrases “*for this is his lot . . . to accept his lot*” talking about the “*wealth and possessions*” God had given him. That is the fatalism, the determinism, that is the control that God has over life, but it is a gift from God that man be allowed to enjoy his life. That statement leads into Ecclesiastes 6, but it seems a bit contradictory to what he just said in the last part of Ecclesiastes 5.

If Only God Would Allow Enjoyment

I have seen another evil under the sun, and it weighs heavily on men: God gives a man wealth, possessions and honor, so that he lacks nothing his heart desires, but God does not enable him to enjoy them, and a stranger enjoys them instead. This is meaningless, a grievous evil (Ecclesiastes 6:1–2).

Ecclesiastes 6 begins by saying that God has given man “wealth, possessions, and honor” but he cannot enjoy these things. Perhaps Solomon was talking about two different situations. It is possible that he was not totally clear on this himself.

Though it never saw the sun or knew anything, it has more rest than does that man — even if he lives a thousand years twice over but fails to enjoy his prosperity. Do not all go to the same place? All man’s efforts are for his mouth, yet his appetite is never satisfied. What advantage has a wise man over a fool? What does a poor man gain by knowing how to conduct himself before others? Better what the eye sees than the roving of the appetite. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind. Whatever exists has already been named, and what man is has been known; no man can contend with one who is stronger than he. The more the words, the less the meaning, and how does that profit anyone? For who knows what is good for a man in life, during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow? Who can tell him what will happen under the sun after he is gone? (Ecclesiastes 6:3–12).

Solomon confirmed that God was the giver of prosperity, but man has never really been able to totally enjoy it. Again he

used “*This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind . . . For who knows what is good for a man in life, during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow?*”

Ecclesiastes 6 repeats some things that have already been discussed concerning false philosophies of life.

Wisely Pragmatic — the Moralist

Chapters 7–10 in Ecclesiastes have a lot to say about pragmatism — what works for man, what makes sense, and what gives pleasure. There is a little bit of cynicism at this juncture in the book. This is understandable since Solomon had proceeded through all these different philosophies of life and they had all come to dead ends. They do not get man any where. Everything is in the closed system of “*under the sun*” and no one can break through. Everything is controlled by God and there is no way to change that. Man cannot enjoy life and when he is dead everything he worked for will be given to someone else who may be a fool. Cynicism is to be expected.

In spite of all this, man is still alive. He still has to live in this world. He could say “I give up” or “I quit” and walk away from life. Or he can acknowledge that this is the way life is, so how should he proceed. That is how Solomon proceeded in Ecclesiastes 7–10. He was wisely pragmatic, the moralist. These chapters contain a lot of proverbs which make them seem a bit disjointed. It is hard to connect them together. He has strung different proverbs together that cover a lot of ground. He was saying this is the best we can do so you must live this kind of life.

A number of proverbs simply say if you will just lead a good moral life, then you will be reasonably happy. In other words, you will avoid the most trouble and prevent the most unhappiness. Consider the following proverbs as a group of loosely related statements of wisdom.

A good name is better than fine perfume, and the day of death better than the day of birth . . . The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than pride (Ecclesiastes 7:1, 8).

Solomon was talking about building a good reputation. It is better to have a good name than to have a bad name. If you have a bad name people will try to take advantage of you. If you have earned your bad reputation by paying someone in a bad way, they will try to do the same to you, vengeance in other words. People will treat you better if you have a good name. The end is better than the beginning, pragmatic. The “end,” being death, will be better.

It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, for death is the destiny of every man; the living should take this to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, because a sad face is good for the heart. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of pleasure (Ecclesiastes 7:2–4).

Stay sober, even sorrowful. That is an interesting way to say it — is better to be full of sorrow than it is to laugh a lot. Perhaps saying when you get so high and then you come way down off that high it does not feel good. Maybe man would be better off just staying down. Remain sorrowful emotionally so you will not be disappointed. Staying in the middle somewhere may be best emotionally.

It is better to heed a wise man's rebuke than to listen to the song of fools. Like the crackling of thorns under the pot, so is the laughter of fools. This too is meaningless. Extortion turns a wise man into a fool, and a bribe corrupts the heart. The end of a matter is better than its beginning, and patience is better than

pride. Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools. Do not say, "Why were the old days better than these?" For it is not wise to ask such questions (Ecclesiastes 7:5–10).

Stay around wise people and listen to their advice. Fools only lead you to no good. Be honest and fair with people. Avoid pride and arrogance. Avoid anger because it only renders you a fool. Do not live in memories of the past. It is a fruitless comparison to make with today's world. You are in today so why live in the past? It does not make you feel very good.

Wisdom, like an inheritance, is a good thing and benefits those who see the sun. Wisdom is a shelter as money is a shelter, but the advantage of knowledge is this: that wisdom preserves the life of its possessor. Consider what God has done: Who can straighten what he has made crooked? When times are good, be happy; but when times are bad, consider: God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future (Ecclesiastes 7:11–14).

God is in control of what is "*under the sun*." He has made some good times and some bad times. There is really not much man can do so he might as well roll with the punches. You might as well deal with the good world and the crooked world. Remember God is Sovereign. This is the best you can do under the circumstances. Solomon's solution — roll with the punches because men do not know the future. He cannot know whether he will live or die tomorrow. Even if you did know the future there is nothing you could do about it anyway.

Solomon was simply saying make sure you live a good moral life to keep yourself out of trouble. That will keep you in the good graces of man and God and that really is the best you can do because God controls it all. That may seem pessimistic

and it certainly is not the New Testament view. Christians know that prayers to God can change things. Our prayers must be in submission to God's will. James says, “. . . *You do not have, because you do not ask God. When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures*” (James 4:2–3). Prayer can be very powerful to bring man into submission with God's will. God hears man's prayers and works providentially in response to those prayers. The Spirit intercedes for us in prayer. As we pray He prays (cf. Romans 8:26–27). As a result of those prayers “. . . *God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose*” (Romans 8:28). This is a very different approach in the New Testament from what Solomon was saying. Solomon seemed to be saying that he was just trying to get by in this world by living a good moral life.

Take the Middle Road — No Extremes

Ecclesiastes 7:15–22 has some very interesting statements. These verses could be labeled “Take the Middle of the Road.” Know the extremes and do not go too far in one direction and do not go too far in the other direction. This is a pragmatic approach that involves staying in the middle. Solomon believed that doing this would help a person avoid most of the pain in life and he would get the most out of life. This was the best he could do. He had seen righteous men who did not seem to be blessed and they died. But he saw wicked men who seemed to get away with a lot and they were living a long life.

In this meaningless life of mine I have seen both of these: a righteous man perishing in his righteousness, and a wicked man living long in his wickedness. Do not be overrighteous, neither be overwise — why destroy yourself? Do not be overwicked, and do not be a fool — why die before your time? It is good to

grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man who fears God will avoid all [extremes]. Wisdom makes one wise man more powerful than ten rulers in a city. There is not a righteous man on earth who does what is right and never sins. Do not pay attention to every word people say, or you may hear your servant cursing you — for you know in your heart that many times you yourself have cursed others (Ecclesiastes 7:15–22).

Where is the equality in this life? Solomon seems to be saying, “That is just the way it is.” He told the righteous man not to be overly righteous. The New Testament writers would never say something like that. They would urge the righteous man to be as righteous as he could be. Live as good a life as possible. Solomon also said man should not be “*overwise — why destroy yourself?*” If a man is going to be over zealous or “*overwise*” he could destroy himself. He then balanced being “*overrighteous*” with being “*overwicked*,” being a “*fool*,” and dying “*before your time*.” There is an extreme on this side and an extreme on the other side. Solomon said, “Do not go to those extremes. Stay in the middle.” Do not be a fool and do not be a fanatic because neither one will get you where you want to go — “*It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. The man of God will avoid all extremes.*” Is man supposed to hold onto a little wickedness and a little righteousness?

Solomon said man should take the middle road; do not be a fanatic or an extremist because when he is he seems to call attention to himself. People become upset with an overly wicked person. Society does not want to put up with a wicked person. People in the middle consider an overly righteous person to be a fanatic. How is Solomon coming to these conclusions? He was being a pragmatist. He was trying to avoid the most pain in this life either from God or from other people. He concluded that man needed to take the middle road.

Think about extremes in this life. Surely the names of some fanatics come to mind. Consider the people you may know who take things to the extreme. Perhaps we could consider James Jones and the fanaticism of his religious cult. Think about the kamikaze pilots during World War II who dove their planes into American ships. Consider sports fanatics like English soccer fans or Denver Bronco fans. Think about certain people in the Bible who would be considered fanatics in their religious views — people like Saul of Tarsus. Think about Islamic Jihad and Shiite Muslims.

When thinking about fanatics some of them are not very good. There is not a good connotation when we think of Muammar Gaddafi in Libya and Idi Amin in Uganda. They are very extreme leaders who have done some very bad things. There are also religious extremists who are good people like Paul who became a fanatic for the first century Church. Jesus was probably considered a religious fanatic. Fanaticism, in and of itself, is not a bad thing. Think about what Jesus calls Christians to be in the Lord's Church. That might be considered fanaticism. There are people in the Lord's Church today who take the middle road. They do not want to be overly wicked, they do not want to be overly righteous so they take the middle.

There are middle of the road approaches that people take today. Some times that even happens with religious matters. Some times people come to church without out being committed. People might believe in a certain cause such as believing that nuclear weapons are not a good thing but they might not be committed enough to vocalize, protest, or march against the use of those weapons. There are people who are not fully committed to their jobs. They go to work and do what is necessary just to get the job done, but they do not work with the intensity that might be there if they were committed to the job.

Think about what Christianity says in regard to fanaticism or the intensity of a Christian's approach as believers to what the Bible teaches. What would Jesus say? What does the New

Testament say? Think about some of the statements that Jesus made that might be considered fanaticism or extremism:

- *“No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money”* (Matthew 6:24). Jesus was telling His disciples that either they were going to serve him fully or not at all. They had to be willing to serve to the extreme or not at all.
- *“Why do you call me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?”* (Luke 6:46). Jesus wanted His disciples to know they could not call Him “*LORD*” unless they were willing to follow through to extreme discipleship as He described it in His teachings.
- *As they were walking along the road, a man said to him, “I will follow you wherever you go.” Jesus replied, “Foxes have holes and birds of the air have nests, but the Son of Man has no place to lay his head.” He said to another man, “Follow me.” But the man replied, “Lord, first let me go and bury my father.” Jesus said to him, “Let the dead bury their own dead, but you go and proclaim the kingdom of God.” Still another said, “I will follow you, Lord; but first let me go back and say good-bye to my family.” Jesus replied, “No one who puts his hand to the plow and looks back is fit for service in the kingdom of God”* (Luke 9:57–62). As Jesus was walking with His disciples He called people to follow Him and He called them to make a drastic cut from the lives they were living to follow Him. People were having difficulty doing what He asked of them. He was calling them to live the same kind of life that He was willing to live. He had no place to lay His head at night. They could not put their hand to the plow and look back because doing that would be looking back at a previous life. They needed to put their hand to the plow, to look forward and keep plowing. That was the

extremism that He was calling His followers to. It was a religious extremism.

- *“Whoever acknowledges me before men, I will also acknowledge him before my Father in heaven. But whoever disowns me before men, I will disown him before my Father in heaven. Do not suppose that I have come to bring peace to the earth. I did not come to bring peace, but a sword. For I have come to turn ‘a man against his father, a daughter against her mother, a daughter-in-law against her mother-in-law — a man’s enemies will be the members of his own household.’ Anyone who loves his father or mother more than me is not worthy of me; anyone who loves his son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me; and anyone who does not take his cross and follow me is not worthy of me. Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it”* (Matthew 10:32–39). Jesus was saying they had to give all or nothing at all. They had to give all they had. He wanted His followers to give everything. When a man becomes a Christian he must surrender all. That is religious fanaticism. That calls for extreme discipleship. That is New Testament Christianity.

Live a Good Moral Life Because it Pleases God

All this I tested by wisdom and I said, “I am determined to be wise” — but this was beyond me. Whatever wisdom may be, it is far off and most profound — who can discover it? So I turned my mind to understand, to investigate and to search out wisdom and the scheme of things and to understand the stupidity of wickedness and the madness of folly. I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare. “Look,” says the Teacher,

“this is what I have discovered: Adding one thing to another to discover the scheme of things — while I was still searching but not finding — I found one [upright] man among a thousand, but not one [upright] woman among them all. This only have I found: God made mankind upright, but men have gone in search of many schemes. Who is like the wise man? Who knows the explanation of things? Wisdom brightens a man’s face and changes its hard appearance” (Ecclesiastes 7:23–8:1).

Solomon ended this section by coming back to a theme that he had been following throughout this section. He was saying that man really needed to choose a good moral life because it pleases God and keeps a man out of trouble. Once again he was making a very pragmatic statement. Notice in this passage of Scripture there is not a “*meaningless*” statement even though there are plenty of “*meaningless*” statements on either side of this passage. I do not think this was a brief look into a spiritual life tuned into the righteous way of looking at God and life. I think Solomon was still in the context of “*meaningless*” philosophies of life. He was still being very pragmatic — *“I find more bitter than death the woman who is a snare, whose heart is a trap and whose hands are chains. The man who pleases God will escape her, but the sinner she will ensnare.”* Man needed to put his life together as one who was trying to please God.

It is possible at this point that Solomon had reached somewhat of a turning point in this book. In subsequent chapters like 8, 9, and 10 he reverted back to some of his old ways of thinking which were not very spiritual. At this point in time there is at least a glimmer, a turning point perhaps, where he was saying maybe there is a different way to look at life. Later he introduced more of the right kind of thinking about God into this book. He began to look not just pragmatically and not just trying to keep God off man’s back. Maybe it was not

just the extremes of man and God not being on one's back. Maybe it was not just enjoying life and enjoying your food and drink, and enjoying your work. Maybe it was not about any of those things. Maybe there was something about God Almighty that man should be tuned into. Solomon does get closer and closer to the right philosophy. Before that happens though there are a few more false philosophies.

True Philosophies of Life

Review

This chapter will conclude the study of the Book of Ecclesiastes in this study of Wisdom Literature. Ecclesiastes fits the best if it is studied right before the study of Proverbs because of the way the Book of Ecclesiastes ends. Solomon presented these false philosophies for his hearers to help them see that they did not want to go down the paths of self-indulgence and self-satisfaction. People who followed those paths did not think about God because all they were really thinking about was self. The previous chapters of this book have given a good flavor of the false philosophies Solomon presented with a multitude of negative things. At the end of Ecclesiastes he finally made some progress out of the pit of false philosophies and saw some more acceptable philosophies of life. But by the end of the Book of Ecclesiastes he still had not reached the acceptable philosophy. In chapters 11 and 12 he made three statements that he had used before:

- *“However many years a man may live, let him enjoy them all. But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. **Everything to come is meaningless**”* (Ecclesiastes 11:8).
- *“So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, **for youth and vigor are meaningless**”* (Ecclesiastes 11:10).
- *“**Meaningless! Meaningless!**” says the Teacher. **“Everything is meaningless!”*** (Ecclesiastes 12:8).

The statement *“Everything is meaningless!”* and other statements like that are sprinkled through out the book. Even though it seems that Solomon had made some progress, these negative statements were still there. It seems like he had made some progress in the way he thought about himself, the way he thought about others, and the way he thought about God. As Solomon approached this last section he was still pragmatic in his view about things and he was still not totally submissive to God.

Do for Others

Cast your bread upon the waters, for after many days you will find it again. Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land. If clouds are full of water, they pour rain upon the earth. Whether a tree falls to the south or to the north, in the place where it falls, there will it lie. Whoever watches the wind will not plant; whoever looks at the clouds will not reap. As you do not know the path of the wind, or how the body is formed in a mother's womb, so you cannot understand the work of God, the Maker of all things. Sow your seed in the morning, and at evening let not your hands be idle, for you do not know which will succeed, whether this or that, or whether both will do equally well (Ecclesiastes 11:1–6).

This passage could also be entitled “Prepare for the Future.” There are a couple of things that are related in this section. When Solomon said, *“Cast your bread upon the waters,”* the word *“bread”* indicates he was talking about seed, as if he was saying man needs to go out and sow the seed to be able to have a crop in the future. Man must prepare for the future. When his crop comes in, man must *“. . . give portions to seven, yes to eight”* people. The number *“seven”* is the perfect number in the Bible and Solomon said they needed to

share with even more people than what the perfect number of “seven” would indicate. Solomon seems to say that it is not just about yourself, man should not just satisfy his own desires, he needs to be aware of other people and do what he can to help them.

There is also the idea of making a plan and looking to see what is going on with the weather. Man needs to be aware of the situations that might affect his crops. When the rain and the winds come he must be prepared. Solomon was saying, “Don’t be lazy. Don’t be tentative. Be focused.” Men need to be intentional about preparing for the future so they can receive a return one day. He needs to be prepared ahead of time in case disasters come. Man cannot manipulate the forces of nature and he cannot control God who controls those forces. Man can sow the seed, but then he must wait and accept the inevitable results. He must not be lazy, because he needs to prepare for any kind of results that come. He cannot predict or manipulate what is to come.

The bottom line is enjoy life. Do not get so uptight and tense about the things you cannot control. There is only so much that man can control. As Solomon finished this section of Scripture the emphasis is prepare for the future so you can be taken care of. He also realized there were others who might need some help also. Solomon had made some progress moving away from his selfishness. Keep in mind that Jehovah God is involved in man’s future and He indeed is the One with all the control — He is the One man must fear.

Begin Serving God at a Young Age

Light is sweet, and it pleases the eyes to see the sun. However many years a man may live, let him enjoy them all. But let him remember the days of darkness, for they will be many. Everything to come is meaningless. Be happy, young man, while you are young, and let your heart give you joy in the days of

your youth. Follow the ways of your heart and whatever your eyes see, but know that for all these things God will bring you to judgment. So then, banish anxiety from your heart and cast off the troubles of your body, for youth and vigor are meaningless (Ecclesiastes 11:7–10).

Another good philosophy that Solomon had reached at this point in his life dealt with serving God. This passage of Scripture might be titled “Begin Serving God at a Young Age.” In this passage Solomon wanted the youth to remember that God is going to judge them at the end of time. They should not waste their lives doing fruitless things that were opposed to the will of God because God is going to call everyone into judgment for those things. Solomon could be reflecting on his own life emphasizing he had gone down all these roads and he had tried all these different things. With those experiences his advice to young people was do not try those paths, avoid the things he had done and the mistakes he had made. If they followed those paths they would get caught in a web they could not escape.

Solomon was still pragmatic to the extent that he was not talking so much about a relationship with God as it was avoiding judgment and the implications of what that would be. He wanted to emphasize the importance of honoring and obeying God and enjoying life at the same time. He has mentioned enjoying life several times in the Book of Ecclesiastes — embrace and enjoy life. Do not let toil and work and the fact that God hedges you in at times keep you from enjoying the days before you.

Solomon was making some progress toward a more significant philosophy of life than self absorption. In the next passage of Scripture he continued to encourage the youth to enjoy life, but take into account that God is the Judge and He will hold you accountable.

Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them"—before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets. Remember him — before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it. "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Everything is meaningless!" (Ecclesiastes 12:1–8)

Once again Solomon said to make the most of your years while you are young, because life is meaningless, frustrating, and unpleasant in old age. The days are dark and man loses so many of his faculties and his vigor. Solomon used poetic language and descriptive illustrations in such a way here that the commentaries differ with exactly what he was describing. It is hard to tell if Solomon meant for these things to be funny or not. Some of these verses are funny in our modern times.

It is sometimes hard for a man to find "*pleasure*" in his old age. Solomon may have been talking about the loss of one's mental and physical health. When a man's life nears the end it is harder to find newness and vitality. Afflictions come, they are

harder to get rid of, and there is not much relief between the afflictions that come in old age. "*Keepers of the house*" probably refers to the arms and legs as the members of a man's body that takes care of the "*house*" indicating one's body. When those members begin to wane a man does not have the strength he once had and he no longer has the ability to take care of himself. "*Strong men*" lose their strength and they "*stoop*." "*When the grinders cease because they are few*" surely refers to our teeth. In old age the teeth begin to decay and fall out so they are fewer and fewer. A man's eyes lose their ability to see so that he can no longer drive and he stumbles over things.

Often times old people cannot sleep as well so they are early risers. Normally this would be a time when they would hear the sounds of the birds in the morning, but because their hearing is failing they no longer hear those sounds. "*The sound of grinding fades*" is a different grinding probably referring to the sounds out on the street or in the market place.

As people get older sometimes phobias set in. It might be phobias of height or fear of someone breaking into one's house. This does seem to be something that is a part of old age. The world tends to close in and sometimes there are fears that were never a problem before. In their youth men feel invincible and believe that no one can conquer them, but as we age we feel more vulnerable. "*When the almond tree blossoms*" may refer to the white hair that many times comes with old age. Near the end of the season the grasshopper does not jump as high or as far as he did in the beginning so it is as if he "*drags himself along*." The same is true for a man. In old age a man does not walk as he did in his youth. Maybe he needs a cane and it is difficult to get around.

Then Solomon said, "*. . . desire is no longer stirred*" which probably refers to a man's sexual desires. It may also refer to other desires or senses like taste and desires that are built in, but are no longer as sensitive as they used to be. Solomon has basically said old age is not glorious. There are ailments and decay that come with aging because we live in a

cursed world. Not only does man go through an aging process he also “*goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets.*” Old age is a natural part of life and so is death. Solomon used the following illustrations to talk about death: “*Remember him —*”

- “*before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken*”
- “*before the pitcher is shattered at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well*”
- “*and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.*”

Death is no respecter of persons; it takes the rich and the poor. The first illustration may refer to the death of a rich person. The ailments of old age afflict him and he finally dies. His death might be like a chandelier held by a silver cord. The silver cord breaks and the “*golden bowl*” falls to the ground and is shattered into pieces. The second illustration is a more common thing indicating the death of the poorer person represented by a “*pitcher.*” There is probably a rope that goes over the wheel and then down into the well. If the wheel breaks or the rope breaks the “*pitcher*” will fall into the water. And life is over for that person. Whether you are rich or poor, old or young you die and return to the dust from which you were made and your “*spirit returns to God who gave it.*” This does not necessarily indicate that everyone goes to heaven, he was saying that God takes back that which is a part of our eternity. Solomon does not discuss eternity in the Book of Ecclesiastes and we do not really know what Solomon believed in terms of the afterlife. He was making a comment acknowledging that death is the separation of the spirit and the body. The body returns to dust and the spirit returns to God who made it.

Fear God and Keep His Commandments

Not only was the Teacher wise, but also he imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true. The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one Shepherd. Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body. Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:9–14).

These last verses in the Book of Ecclesiastes are Solomon's most positive and the most spiritual part of the philosophies of life. Before he gets to the final, the best, philosophy that man can follow he presented a few preparatory thoughts. This is Solomon's epilogue and he presented his credentials as the one who was the wise teacher. He shared his methodology for writing this book. Not only did he have the right to impart this knowledge, he "*pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs.*" He wanted those who would listen to know that he did not just sit down and say things off the top of his head, he searched and investigated the different proverbs to find the right words. Solomon not only searched what he wanted to say, but he also put it down on paper so that those who would come after him could hear the results of his research. He wanted to share his research and he wanted the people to understand that what he was saying was "*upright and true.*"

Solomon also wanted the people to know that the words he had written might not be so easy to receive. They may be like “*goads . . . firmly embedded nails*” that were used to move the livestock along. His words were being given to the people, to those hearers in his time and to us as well, so that they would not make the same mistakes he had made. In Proverbs he says that his words were given to “*his children.*” His words were meant to move the people forward, to make the progression to the right kind of living. In other words, what he had written is good for man to hear. Solomon warned his “*son*” to be careful of the many things that are written beyond these words. Just because something has been written or said does not make it right. It is important to have the right filter in place, the right grid, so that one can know the right way to live. It is important to pick the right things to read including what Solomon had written in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

Solomon’s final words in Ecclesiastes 12:13 are well known:

*. . . here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God
and keep his commandments, for this is the whole
[duty] of man.*

The word “*duty*” is actually not in the original language but it is an appropriated implication. We do not know whether or not Solomon was where he needed to be in his spiritual thinking at this time. When we forward to Proverbs 1:7 he said, “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge . . .*” rather than being the ending point of man’s journey. Solomon finally wandered through all these false philosophies moving closer and closer to the beginning point of the right philosophy. He ended the Book of Ecclesiastes saying, “*Fear God and keep his commandments.*” In the first chapter of the Book of Proverbs he said, “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge . . .*” He said, “*for this is the whole of man.*”

This is what life is about. Man should not cloud his life with a lot of unnecessary things. Focus in, be intentional, be purposeful in regard to what God wants man to do. Man needs to make sure he has a right relationship with God. He must make sure he takes what God has said very seriously and not to be flippant, but to be obedient. Why should man make these efforts? Solomon's final words are: *"For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil."* Once again Solomon comes back to the reason why all men should *"Fear God,"* why we should look to helping others, and why we should *"remember the creator"* in the days of our youth. He said there will be a judgment when God will bring into account how we live and whether or not we have obeyed Him. The bottom line is knowing that God is in charge.

Solomon has written about these false philosophies and at the end of the book he said this is where he had ended up thinking there is a better way to go. Life is not just about pragmatism and whether or not something works or whether or not a philosophy will keep him out of the most pain. Man must *"fear God and keep His commandments."*

Use the Book of Ecclesiastes to reflect upon your approach to life. Are you heading down the paths that will take you nowhere? Are you heading down a path that is meaningless, full of air? Are you chasing after a life that has nothing of benefit? Have you given yourself over to these false philosophies in life? Maybe you are buying into the false philosophies in part, are you trying to mix these with the true and real Word of God? Solomon would say to wipe all of that away and make sure that you are in a right relationship with God.

Introduction to Proverbs

Introduction

Solomon wrote Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. In the text Proverbs proceeds Ecclesiastes. In this study of Wisdom Literature we studied Ecclesiastes first because in that book Solomon talked about all the different false philosophies and the different approaches that he took to life. In every one of those approaches he would head down a path and then he would say this is not the way to go because it just ends in a “*meaningless*” life and all kinds of consequences that were not good. He ended the Book of Ecclesiastes with the conclusion that “*the whole duty of man*” is to “*Fear God and keep his commandments.*” (Ecclesiastes 12:13). It is as if Solomon wandered through all these false philosophies to get to the beginning point which is the “*fear*” of the LORD.

The Book of Proverbs basically begins with “*The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge . . .*” (Proverbs 1:7). If “*the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge*” it seems appropriate to study Ecclesiastes first to find out all the things that are not right, all the false philosophies that take a man into a “*meaningless*” life style. Ecclesiastes talked about the wrong way to live. Proverbs has all these saying and topics that talk about the right way to live. In Proverbs Solomon said, “Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction” as he talked as the parent to son perspective saying this is the way you should live your life. Now Solomon is out of the wandering mode he used in Ecclesiastes and into the godly wisdom of Proverbs.

Proverbs 1:1–7 sets the stage for the whole book. I like to call this “Solomon’s Approach to Give a Disciplined Lifestyle to his Children”:

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel: for attaining wisdom and discipline; for understanding words of insight; for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life, doing what is right and just and fair; for giving prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the young — let the wise listen and add to their learning, and let the discerning get guidance — for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise. The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and discipline.

This book is really about how to live a life that is not only just and fair and right as far as God sees it, but also a life that produces fruit. This lifestyle keeps man out of a lot of trouble and gives him a lot of advantages. There are a lot of blessings that come out of living a self-controlled, self-disciplined lifestyle. This is in contrast to society as it is today which talks about excess and trying all the boundaries as far as one can push them. The Book of Proverbs takes a different approach. It will say these are the boundaries that God has established for life and if man will stay inside these boundaries then he will be blessed. He will be a wise person, one who fears the LORD, and lives a prudent and disciplined lifestyle.

Solomon talked to “*the simple . . . the young*” one. This is perhaps a naive person who has not lived the kind of life that Solomon talked about in Ecclesiastes. He has not lived a life on the perimeter and tried all the wrong approaches. He has been waiting to start his life. Solomon basically said if the “*simple*” “*young*” one would live his life this way he would have a good lifestyle.

General Information Concerning the Book

Some might conclude that Solomon wrote all the Proverbs, but that is not the case. He was the primary author of this book,

but Proverbs 30 was written by a man named “*Agur the son of Jakeh — an oracle.*” He used some words in that chapter that might make one wonder who Agur was. There really is not any information about him. He used two words that tie this chapter into a prophetic utterance. He used the word that is translated in English to the word “*burden.*” This is a word that the prophets used a number of times. They would talk about the LORD’s Word being a “*burden*” upon them; they would say that the LORD had burdened them with His prophetic utterance so that they could speak to the people. Agur also used the word “*oracle*” which is another word that the prophets used to talk about something that was from God or to say that this is the Word of the LORD. Agur’s use of these two words and the fact that Proverbs 30 was put in the text by those who arranged this book help me conclude that this chapter was a prophetic utterance.

The third author within the Book of Proverbs wrote the well known chapter of Proverbs 31. His name is King Lemuel and again there is no information as to who he was. It is possible that he was the king of a foreign country. King Lemuel also used the word “*burden.*” He is the one who talked about the godly woman, the perfect woman. He is the one who gave us that prophetic utterance inspired by the Holy Spirit.

First, it is important to understand that the literary style of Proverbs is poetry in couplet form. Normally there are two lines to each verse. Sometimes a couple of verses will go together to make one thought. These two lines go together in some kind of straight forward, almost pithy, way. They get to the point, they say it quickly in a few words. They are very sharp in the way these words of truth are written.

Second, it is important to understand that the proverbs are normally general rules. In a general way they are true, but sometimes there are exceptions to the general rules. When one knows there are exceptions to the general rules, do not let the general rules drive you off the truth of the general rules. Consider this example: “*Train a child in the way he should go,*

and when he is old he will not depart from it” (Proverbs 22:6). Some will interpret this verse to mean if one does a perfect job as a parent then that child has no way of wandering away from the LORD at all in his later life. Everyone has free will choice so that interpretation does not work. There can be good parenting and yet the child can walk away from that parenting because he is allured by Satan and the world. The general rule is if there is good parenting the child will turn out well, but that is only a general rule and there are exceptions to that rule.

Third, Psalms and Proverbs are dominated by a literary device called parallelism. This nomenclature and description was developed by a man named Robert Lowth. He was a bishop of the Church of England and he was a professor of poetry at Oxford University in England. This nomenclature has been very helpful in understanding the approach that the writers of Psalms and Proverbs took. There is parallelism found in other places in the Old and New Testaments, but it is primarily used in these two books.

There are three kinds of parallelism that seem to be prevalent in Proverbs:

- **Synonymous parallelism** — The first line says one thing and the second line repeats the thought of the first line in different words. In Proverbs 11:25 the proverbialist said,

*“A generous man will prosper;
he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed.”*

In the first line, the “*generous man*” is related to one “*who refreshes others*” in the second line. “*Prosper*” is related to the fact that he himself will be “*refreshed*” in the second line. There is a connection between the first line and the second line.

- **Antithetic parallelism** — The proverbialist will say something in the first line and then introduce the second line with the word “*but*” as if to say this is so, “*but*” this is also so. The first line is the opposite of the second line. Look in Proverbs 12: 3, 7:

*A man cannot be established through wickedness,
but the righteous cannot be uprooted.*

*Wicked men are overthrown and are no more,
but the house of the righteous stands firm.*

The proverbialist used this parallelism over and over to say this is true in the first line, but the opposite is also true in the second line.

- **Synthetic parallelism** — The first line of the statement would be made and then that statement would be developed in the second line and sometimes in subsequent lines. Proverbs 3:9–10 says:

*Honor the LORD with your wealth,
with the firstfruits of all your crops;
then your barns will be filled to overflowing,
and your vats will brim over with new wine.*

In the first line the proverbialist makes the statement “*Honor the LORD with your wealth*” and then he expands that first line saying, “*with the firstfruits of all your crops.*” He is not repeating the first line, he is developing the first line a little bit further. Reading Proverbs 3:9–10 together there is the description and then the continuation of the thought as it is developed in subsequent lines.

Normally a proverb is one verse standing alone as a single unit. Through most of the Book of Proverbs there is not a cluster of verses together to talk about a particular topic.

Proverbs 1:20–33 is not quite a narrative, but it is a dialogue, a discussion, of one particular topic. Forming an outline for the Book of Proverbs chapters 1–9 could be considered a unit which presents the theme and setting. That leaves chapters 10–31 which have many truths presented in various forms. There may be one truth about fear and then another about parenting and then even another truth about something else. There are not topical presentations through out chapters 10–31 with an occasional exception such as the godly woman in Proverbs 31.

Another literary feature of this book is that the proverbs are didactic in their nature. They are not a narrative or descriptive in their style. They are teachings about morals as if to say this is right and this is wrong. They are very hortatory in their context. Solomon was exhorting his son. He was not just pointing out the kind of truths that the recipient should receive. He was saying you must do it this way. These are not just truths that the son needed to hear. They were truths that he needed to follow. Being able to understand Solomon and all the mistakes that he made in his own life and all of the false philosophies he wrote about, some he had experienced himself, in the Book of Ecclesiastes enables us to understand the intensity in which the Book of Proverbs was written talking to his own children.

Solomon seems to put exhorting his children at the forefront in chapter 1 of this book. He was talking to his son, to his children, trying to save their lives. Maybe he was trying to save them from the mistakes he had made. There is a lot of intensity in these proverbs as he says, “Listen, my son, to your father’s instruction” — this is the truth and this is error and you need to know the difference. Discernment is important here, he is urging them to make the decision to do what is right. Sometimes his statements are very sharp, very direct, and they are to the point. They have to be heard and they have to be taken in a very exhorting way.

Another literary device to consider in the Book of Proverbs is knowing that it is an extremely practical book. In some ways

it is a dictionary of practical truths or a dictionary of that which is right and that which wrong. Consider it as an encyclopedia in which there are truths about riches, or what the Bible says about parenting, adultery or fornication. There are a lot of things stated in this book not just about what is right or what is wrong, but how to avoid the things which are wrong. He wants his son to know that this is the consequence of doing something, avoid certain things, and latch onto that. It is a very practical book.

The first nine chapters of this book really set up the whole book. There are topical things talked about in the first nine chapters, but there is also an analogy pointed out in those chapters. Think about the following illustrated scenarios which are much like walking down life's road:

You are walking down the midway of a carnival or a state fair with all the carnies in the booths on each side. They are calling out to you, "Hey, come over here, spend your money here." or "Come throw the ball to knock these bottles over." or "Come play this game and you can win a stuffed animal for your favorite girl." They are calling out trying to get someone to spend their money on things that most of the time you cannot win. You end up spending \$50 on something that you could have bought at the store for \$10.

Now consider a young man, a naive and simple man who does not know the ways of the world, walking along. There are two women each one on opposite sides of the street. They are calling out trying to lure the young man to come with them, to have a relationship with them, and to lead him wherever their promises might lead. One woman is named "*Wisdom*" and the other one is named "*Folly*." Consider the following verses from the Book of Proverbs as these two women talk to the young man:

Introduction to Wisdom (Narrator):

*Does not wisdom call out?
Does not understanding raise her voice?
On the heights along the way,
where the paths meet, she takes her stand;
beside the gates leading into the city,
at the entrances, she cries aloud: (Proverbs 8:1–3)*

Introduction to Folly (Narrator):

*The woman Folly is loud;
she is undisciplined and without knowledge.
She sits at the door of her house,
on a seat at the highest point of the city,
calling out to those who pass by,
who go straight on their way (Proverbs 9:13–15)*

Folly:

*“I have fellowship offerings at home;
today I fulfilled my vows.
So I came out to meet you;
I looked for you and have found you!”
(Proverbs 7:14–15)*

Introduction to Wisdom (Narrator):

*Wisdom calls aloud in the street,
she raises her voice in the public squares;
at the head of the noisy streets she cries out,
in the gateways of the city she makes her speech:
(Proverbs 1:20–21).*

Wisdom:

*“To you, O men, I call out;
I raise my voice to all mankind.
You who are simple, gain prudence;
you who are foolish, gain understanding.
Listen, for I have worthy things to say;
I open my lips to speak what is right.
My mouth speaks what is true,
for my lips detest wickedness.
All the words of my mouth are just;
none of them is crooked or perverse.
To the discerning all of them are right;
they are faultless to those who have knowledge.
Choose my instruction instead of silver,
knowledge rather than choice gold,
for wisdom is more precious than rubies,
and nothing you desire can compare with her.
I, wisdom, dwell together with prudence;
I possess knowledge and discretion” (Proverbs 8:4–12).*

Introduction to Folly (Narrator):

*“At the window of my house
I looked out through the lattice.
I saw among the simple,
I noticed among the young men,
a youth who lacked judgment.
He was going down the street near her corner,
walking along in the direction of her house
at twilight, as the day was fading,
as the dark of night set in.
Then out came a woman to meet him,
dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent”
(Proverbs 7:6–10).*

Folly:

*“I have covered my bed
with colored linens from Egypt.
I have perfumed my bed
with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon” (Proverbs 7:16–17)*

Wisdom:

*“Now then, my sons, listen to me;
blessed are those who keep my ways.
Listen to my instruction and be wise;
do not ignore it.
Blessed is the man who listens to me,
watching daily at my doors,
waiting at my doorway.
For whoever finds me finds life
and receives favor from the LORD.
But whoever fails to find me harms himself;
all who hate me love death.”
Wisdom has built her house;
she has hewn out its seven pillars (Proverbs 8:32–9:1).*

Folly:

*“Come, let’s drink deep of love till morning;
let’s enjoy ourselves with love!” (Proverbs 7:18).*

Wisdom:

*. . . “Lay hold of my words with all your heart;
keep my commands and you will live.
Get wisdom, get understanding;
do not forget my words or swerve from them.
Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you;
love her, and she will watch over you.*

*Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom.
Though it cost all you have, get understanding.
Esteem her, and she will exalt you;
embrace her, and she will honor you” (Proverbs 4:4–8).*

Folly:

*“My husband is not at home;
he has gone on a long journey.
He took his purse filled with money
and will not be home till full moon” (Proverbs 7:19–20).*

Wisdom:

*“Let all who are simple come in here!”
she says to those who lack judgment.
“Come, eat my food
and drink the wine I have mixed.
Leave your simple ways and you will live;
walk in the way of understanding.
Whoever corrects a mocker invites insult;
whoever rebukes a wicked man incurs abuse.
Do not rebuke a mocker or he will hate you;
rebuke a wise man and he will love you.
Instruct a wise man and he will be wiser still;
teach a righteous man and he will add to his learning.
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom,
and knowledge of the Holy One is understanding.
For through me your days will be many,
and years will be added to your life.
If you are wise, your wisdom will reward you;
if you are a mocker, you alone will suffer”
(Proverbs 9:4–12).*

Folly:

*“Let all who are simple come in here!”
she says to those who lack judgment.
“Stolen water is sweet;
food eaten in secret is delicious!” (Proverbs 9:16–17).*

Conclusion (Narrator):

*The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:
for attaining wisdom and discipline;
for understanding words of insight;
for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life,
doing what is right and just and fair;
for giving prudence to the simple,
knowledge and discretion to the young —
let the wise listen and add to their learning,
and let the discerning get guidance —
for understanding proverbs and parables,
the sayings and riddles of the wise.
The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge,
but fools despise wisdom and discipline
(Proverbs 1:1–7).*

Will the young man listen? Will the simpleton listen to “*Wisdom*” or to “*Folly*”? Proverbs is a good book to study with children to alert them to all the things and all the people who would try to persuade them to go down paths of destruction.

The Study of “*Wisdom*” in Proverbs

“*Wisdom*” is a very prominent word and thread through out the Book of Proverbs. The concept of “*wisdom*” within Proverbs begins in Proverbs 1:20–33:

*Wisdom calls aloud in the street,
she raises her voice in the public squares;
at the head of the noisy streets she cries out,
in the gateways of the city she makes her speech:
“How long will you simple ones love your simple ways?
How long will mockers delight in mockery and fools hate
knowledge?
If you had responded to my rebuke,
I would have poured out my heart to you
and made my thoughts known to you.
But since you rejected me when I called
and no one gave heed when I stretched out my hand,
since you ignored all my advice
and would not accept my rebuke,
I in turn will laugh at your disaster;
I will mock when calamity overtakes you —
when calamity overtakes you like a storm,
when disaster sweeps over you like a whirlwind,
when distress and trouble overwhelm you.
Then they will call to me but I will not answer;
they will look for me but will not find me.
Since they hated knowledge
and did not choose to fear the LORD,
since they would not accept my advice
and spurned my rebuke,
they will eat the fruit of their ways
and be filled with the fruit of their schemes.
For the waywardness of the simple will kill them,
and the complacency of fools will destroy them;
but whoever listens to me will live in safety
and be at ease, without fear of harm.”*

In these verses “*Wisdom*” is personified as a woman who is wooing a young man. In this passage it seems as if she is upset that the young man has already chosen a foolish way to go. She said if he was going to reject her and her principles, if

he was going to reject godly wisdom, then she was going to give him over to that way of life. She told him that she was going to *“laugh at your disaster . . . mock . . . you — when distress and trouble overwhelm you.”* The young man would know that he had made a bad choice and he would call to *“Wisdom”* but she would not answer. This passage ends with the *“waywardness of the simple”* and *“the complacency of fools.”* Those who listen to *“Wisdom . . . will live in safety.”* From the very beginning *“Wisdom”* said this was a life or death choice. Those who listened would dwell in safety with blessings. If the young man made the wrong choice he could expect *“disaster”* and *“calamity”* and all kinds of problems which would lead him down a very bad path.

The concept of *“wisdom”* continues as Solomon spoke to his son. Proverbs 2:1–15 might be called “The LORD our Protector”:

*“My son, if you accept my words
and store up my commands within you,
turning your ear to wisdom
and applying your heart to understanding,
and if you call out for insight
and cry aloud for understanding,
and if you look for it as for silver
and search for it as for hidden treasure,
then you will understand the fear of the LORD
and find the knowledge of God”* (Proverbs 2:1–5).

Solomon continued to talk about the path of *“wisdom”* and the path of righteousness which would be the desirable way to go. The key verse here says, *“. . . if you look for it as for silver and search for it as for hidden treasure.”* Going after *“wisdom”* is like mining for silver or gold. Man must search for it diligently. It does not come to a person automatically. It does not come by the process of osmosis. *“Wisdom”* will indeed lead one to the LORD and the *“fear of the LORD,”* but

you have to want it and seek to find it. It will lead you toward godly and true “wisdom” which is in contrast to the worldly wisdom which James talked about:

Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show it by his good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. Such “wisdom” does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, of the devil. For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice. But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Peacemakers who sow in peace raise a harvest of righteousness (James 3:13–18).

Proverbs 3:1–18 is also a very instructive passage of Scripture giving the definition of “wisdom” and then giving some of the benefits of following the wise way of life. First note the characteristics of a wise person:

- *My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart (vs 1).* A wise child will not forget the instructions from his parents.
- *Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart (vs 3).*
- *Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding (vs 5).* A wise son will be a trusting son.
- *Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil (vs 7).* A wise child stays away from evil. He does not see how close he can get to the fire. He does not dabble in a little bit of evil. He retains his wisdom and his righteous

standing with God so that he has protection from the things that might harm him.

- *Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops* (vs 9). A wise man is not greedy. He is not a covetous man. He is not an idolatrous man. He uses his wealth for the purposes for which God gave it to him.
- *My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline and do not resent his rebuke* (vs 11). A wise man accepts the LORD's discipline. When he begins to stray and the LORD brings him back, he accepts that discipline. He does not fight against it. He does not work against the LORD, he works with Him as that discipline works to bring him into a good relationship with the LORD.

Now consider the blessings of following the wise way of life:

- *For they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity* (vs 2). If a wise man does not make stupid choices then he does not get into areas where he can be hurt or perhaps even lose his life. "*Wisdom*" will bring prosperity not just in physical ways but in spiritual ways as well.
- *Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man* (vs 4). Jesus learned as a young man how to live a wise life: "*And Jesus grew in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and man*" (Luke 2:52).
- *In all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight* (vs 6). Wisdom will put one on a straight path with protection.
- *This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones* (vs 8).
- *Then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine* (vs 10).
- *Because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in* (vs 12).

- *Blessed is the man who finds wisdom, the man who gains understanding, for she is more profitable than silver and yields better returns than gold. She is more precious than rubies; nothing you desire can compare with her (vs13–15).*
- *Long life is in her right hand; in her left hand are riches and honor (vs 16).*
- *Her ways are pleasant ways, and all her paths are peace (vs 17).*
- *She is a tree of life to those who embrace her; those who lay hold of her will be blessed (vs 18). The “tree of life” sums up all of these benefits.*

In Proverbs 4:1–9 Solomon continued to talk about “wisdom” saying “Wisdom Is Supreme”:

*Listen, my sons, to a father’s instruction;
pay attention and gain understanding.
I give you sound learning,
so do not forsake my teaching.
When I was a boy in my father’s house,
still tender, and an only child of my mother,
he taught me and said,
“Lay hold of my words with all your heart;
keep my commands and you will live.
Get wisdom, get understanding;
do not forget my words or swerve from them.
Do not forsake wisdom, and she will protect you;
love her, and she will watch over you.
Wisdom is supreme; therefore get wisdom.
Though it cost all you have, get understanding.
Esteem her, and she will exalt you;
embrace her, and she will honor you.
She will set a garland of grace on your head
and present you with a crown of splendor.”*

Basically Solomon was saying “*wisdom*” is worth the pursuit so get it at all cost. In other words, it is so precious, so supreme, and so important that man should keep it at the top on his list of important things. He should strive to get it with all his might and it will pay off in the long run.

Proverbs 8:1–36 is usually titled “Wisdom’s Call.” “*Wisdom*” is personified as that woman in the street calling out to followers. She is trying to sell herself and her benefits. In describing “*wisdom*” Solomon basically said, “*Wisdom*” rules the world. “*Wisdom*” was there when God created the heavens and the earth. She was a part of what put this world in place. Surely the laws that govern and the way in which this world spins about was governed by a wise decision on God’s part in creation. “*Wisdom*” is from eternity — “*I was appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began*” (Proverbs 8:23).

Solomon wanted his “*sons*” to know just how important “*wisdom*” could be in their lives:

*“Now then, my sons, listen to me;
blessed are those who keep my ways.
Listen to my instruction and be wise;
do not ignore it.
Blessed is the man who listens to me,
watching daily at my doors,
waiting at my doorway.
For whoever finds me finds life
and receives favor from the LORD.
But whoever fails to find me harms himself;
all who hate me love death”* (Proverbs 8:32–36).

It is a life or death choice to find “*wisdom*.”

Solomon continued to talk about “*wisdom*” in Proverbs 13:20 when he said, “*He who walks with the wise grows wise, but a companion of fools suffers harm.*” “*Wisdom*” is gained not by just listening to one’s parents but also by making sure

the companions you are around are people of wisdom. It is important to make the right choices for evil companions corrupt good morals (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:33). This verse is the Old Testament version of that principle. Consider what Solomon had to say in Proverbs 14:14–16:

*The faithless will be fully repaid for their ways,
and the good man rewarded for his.
A simple man believes anything,
but a prudent man gives thought to his steps.
A wise man fears the LORD and shuns evil,
but a fool is hotheaded and reckless.*

The unwise man is the one who believes anything. He is a gullible man with no discernment. He is impulsive and liable to go in any direction. He is reckless and does not think ahead to consider what he might need to do to protect himself. He is hot-headed when someone tries to steer him back into the right way.

There is a very poignant statement about the importance of “wisdom” in Proverbs 16:16, “*How much better to get wisdom than gold, to choose understanding rather than silver!*” Solomon, the man with all the money and power said there is a choice between “wisdom” and riches, “Which would you take? You need to choose ‘wisdom.’”

Proverbs 24:13–14 says:

*Eat honey, my son, for it is good;
honey from the comb is sweet to your taste.
Know also that wisdom is sweet to your soul;
if you find it, there is a future hope for you,
and your hope will not be cut off.*

A wise man has hope because he will not make mistakes. He will not take the paths to destruction. There is still hope for him.

In the introduction to the Book of Proverbs and the study of “*wisdom*” it is important to appreciate this dichotomy between “*wisdom*” and “*folly*.” It is important for young or old to enter into the text of Proverbs saying, “I am that simple one. I am the one who needs instructions.” Allow Solomon to be the guide for which ways will lead to life and which may lead to destruction. It is important to know which ways will bring blessings and which will take away the benefits that God intends for His children to have in this life. Continue to study the Book of Proverbs and look for the “*wisdom*” of God. Make a decision to understand it, appreciate it, embrace it and try with all your might to follow it.

Solomon on Riches

Introduction

It is said that one out of every three to five verses in the New Testament is attributed to Jesus Himself talking about something in relation to money. Jesus thought it was that important and maybe that much of a threat to man's salvation to talk about it the way He did, over and over in His teachings and in His example. That would indicate that money is an important topic.

Solomon was also one who had a lot to say about riches. He was indeed one who had a lot of riches. His daily provisions were significant:

Solomon's daily provisions were thirty cors of fine flour and sixty cors of meal, ten head of stall-fed cattle, twenty of pasture-fed cattle and a hundred sheep and goats, as well as deer, gazelles, roebucks and choice fowl. For he ruled over all the kingdoms west of the River, from Tiphseh to Gaza, and had peace on all sides. During Solomon's lifetime Judah and Israel, from Dan to Beersheba, lived in safety, each man under his own vine and fig tree [This was an expression of prosperity and peace to an Israelite] (1 Kings 4:22–26).

The weight of the gold that Solomon received yearly was 666 talents, not including the revenues from merchants and traders and from all the Arabian kings and the governors of the land (1 Kings 10:14–15).

These chapters in 1 Kings talk about all the things Solomon did with the gold that came to him from those who paid tribute to him. With his great riches he built the temple in seven years and his palace in thirteen years. They were both elaborate and ornate. He made shields and expensive things that went into his palace and the temple. It appears that the combination of his wealth and power and even the foreign women that were a part of his kingdom led to his downfall. It is ironic and interesting that God would choose the one who had so much wealth to talk about the wisdom about wealth and how that should affect his children as they grow up.

There are four important points made about riches in the Book of Proverbs:

- The deceitfulness of riches.
- The unwise rich man who lost his wealth.
- Sharing riches with the poor.
- God is the source of all wealth.

Remember proverbs are short, pithy statements that need further explanation and application. That will be our approach, to read the text, sometimes in more than one translation. Then we can give a basic explanation to it and apply it in some ways.

The Deceitfulness of Riches

Proverbs 11:28 says, “*Whoever trusts in his riches will fall [wither], but the righteous will thrive like a green leaf.*” The rich think their money will keep them on top of life for the rest of their lives. They probably never really think about losing it or not having any. Some have been obsessive about losing it, but most of them think having it will give them protection. Those with riches are sometimes harsh and rough with their talk to others: “*A poor man pleads for mercy, but a rich man answers harshly*” (Proverbs 18:23). They think they can control

people now and they treat them any way they want to because it gives them power. Notice the antithetic parallelism here indicating that the second phrase is the opposite of the first phrase. Remember the text: “*Whoever trusts in his riches will fall [wither], but the **righteous** will thrive like a green leaf.*” Solomon pits the righteous person against the rich person. The righteous person will have wealth.

Consider what is said in Psalms 1: “*Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked . . . He is like a tree planted by streams of water . . . and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers*” (Psalm 1:1, 3). These passages are very similar. The righteous man will thrive like a green leaf because that is the opposite of the one who is rich and trusts in his wealth. The righteous person is one who is righteous in God’s eyes because of his faith. “*Righteousness*” is the word that describes a person’s relationship to God. A man either trusts in his wealth or he trusts in God:

Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil (Proverbs 3:5–7).

The “*trust*” that the righteous man has is the opposite of the rich man who trusts in his own wealth. Proverbs 18:11 continues this theme of the deceitfulness of riches, “*The wealth of the rich is their fortified city; they imagine it an unscalable wall.*” The same thought concerning the rich man is found in Proverbs 28:11, “*A rich man may be wise in his own eyes, but a poor man who has discernment sees through him.*” Pride tends to get to the rich man. First Timothy 6 echoes this same thought. There is the temptation to think that riches are man’s protection. He builds a wall around himself and believes that it is impenetrable and no one can scale it. Riches are his fortress against all those who would try to take it. The rich man thinks

nothing can touch him. He thinks he is invincible and no one can bring him down.

Think about the rich people of the twenty-first century. Think about the people in the media who project the imagery that riches are their fortress and no one can take their riches away. Consider Donald Trump who surrounds himself with his wealth and there is this image that nobody can touch him. He has power, he is on the inside, and he is in control because of his wealth. That is the temptation riches can bring.

Proverbs 14:20 says, *“The poor are shunned even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends.”* Proverbs 19:4 continues this thought, *“Wealth brings many friends, but a poor man’s friend deserts him.”* Once again this refers to the deceitfulness of riches. When man trusts in them and when he thinks they will protect him, then he thinks no one can take him down. The truth is he can be taken down. This also true because of what friends a man will bring to himself because of his wealth. *“The rich have many friends”* is really a misnomer because that kind of friend is a pseudo friend, a fake friend. The people in the media who are rich and powerful have an entourage of people around them. They might be called “groupies.” They may not be particularly loyal to that one person, but they are there to accept the crumbs and maybe some of the crumbs are big enough as they fall off the rich man’s table that they benefit these *friends*. The poor man who has no resources does not have a lot of these *friends*.

Think about the prodigal son in the pig pen in Luke 15:11–32. He had a lot of friends when he had a lot of his father’s money and he was wasting that money on riotous living. When he became poor and ended up in the pig pen no one wanted anything to do with him because he was no longer rich. Solomon talked about false friendships and the kind of friendships that riches tend to bring:

Wealth brings many friends, but a poor man’s friend deserts him. A false witness will not go unpunished,

and he who pours out lies will not go free. Many curry favor with a ruler, and everyone is the friend of a man who gives gifts (Proverbs 19:4–6).

A friendship that is built upon someone wanting to be a part of another person's life simply because he has riches is a false friendship. In contrast to the rich the poor man is shunned by people. As long as a person is prosperous he will have *friends* but they are pseudo *friends* who will turn and run when the money runs out.

Jesus talked about the “*deceitfulness of wealth*” in Mark 4:19, “*but the worries of this life, the deceitfulness of wealth and the desires for other things come in and choke the word, making it unfruitful.*” Riches are deceitful and will fly away, “*Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle*” (Proverbs 23:5). Man cannot take his riches with him when he dies. In Luke 12:13–21 Jesus told the parable about the rich fool. God talking to the rich man said, “*‘You fool! This very night your life will be demanded from you. Then who will get what you have prepared for yourself?’*” The implication of this verse is that man cannot take his wealth with him. A rich man may spend all the money on himself without thinking about anyone else, thinking that he will live forever. But all men will die as it is said in Hebrews 9:27, “*Just as man is destined to die once, and after that to face the judgment.*” All men will get to the point of death and at this point in time no one has been able to take his riches with him. Riches are deceptive.

The Unwise, Rich Man Loses his Wealth

The proverbialist says the unwise rich man loses his wealth, “*He who loves pleasure will become poor; whoever loves wine and oil will never be rich*” (Proverbs 21:17). This is the principle of laziness. He is saying laziness gains a man only

poverty. The word “*poor*” means one who is destitute, one who is in deep need. This word is used in Proverbs more than any other book in the Old Testament. The man who loves pleasure and wealth will end up wasting his living. Once again think about the prodigal son. He was wasteful, and because he was lazy in regard to his work the money he gained did not come through his own labor but came primarily from his father, he ended up in poverty. Perhaps you have heard about people who have won the lottery and they waste all their money. He who loves pleasure will become poor. The man who loves pleasure will suffer strife and want. Frivolous, wasteful living leads to the path of worthlessness. Solomon was trying to tell his children that even though he had a lot of money and they might think that he was going to pass all of his wealth to them, with the temptation of living frivolously they would waste that money and even become poor.

Proverbs 11:4 says, “*Wealth is worthless in the day of wrath, but righteousness delivers from death.*” This is an interesting passage similar to some other passages in the Old Testament. The Book of Isaiah was a warning to Judah of Babylon’s ominous coming and taking them into Babylonian captivity. Isaiah 10:3 says, “*What will you do on the day of reckoning, when disaster comes from afar? To whom will you run for help? Where will you leave your riches?*” The “*day of reckoning*” was when Babylon was going to come and take them away; it was the day when the enemy would come. Proverbs 11:4 was saying their “*wealth*” would not be able to buy off the enemy in the day of God’s wrath. Wealth will not make a difference in the final day, but neither will it make a difference in those judgment times that came in the Old Testament when the LORD would let the enemies come upon the Israelites. The LORD was saying that Israel would not be able to stave off those who were coming to get their wealth because they were rich. This same theme is repeated in Zephaniah 1:18, “*Neither their silver nor their gold will save them on the day of the LORD’s wrath . . .*” It is true that in that

day, they will not be able to win against an enemy by saying, “Here take all my money.” The invaders would take all their money and still destroy them. They know they will take all the money anyway. They could not buy off the invaders. The invaders in the Old Testament were any nation that came upon Israel because of their sins.

How is it that “. . . *righteousness delivers from death*” in the second part of Proverbs 11:4? “*Righteousness*” does not necessarily deliver one from an invader. An invader does not come in and make the decision not to kill those who are righteous and kill those who are rich. An invader makes no such discernment or discrimination. The proverbialist did say, “*Righteousness exalts a nation . . .*” (Proverbs 14:34). When the invaders come and a righteous person experiences loss he does not lose his relationship to God. He does not lose his righteousness even if he is killed; he is transferred to the home base to be with the LORD. Some times physical deliverance is given to the righteous person when difficult times are coming. Most of the time a righteous person is with the LORD whether he lives or dies. When Jesus was talking to the saints in the New Testament about the destruction of Jerusalem, He said:

“When you see Jerusalem being surrounded by armies, you will know that its desolation is near. Then let those who are in Judea flee to the mountains, let those in the city get out, and let those in the country not enter the city” (Luke 21:20–21).

History records that a lot of Christians got out of the city of Jerusalem before Titus destroyed it in 70 A.D. In that case they were granted deliverance in a physical way. Proverbs 11:4 is probably talking about a deliverance that is eternal.

Proverbs 22:1 says, “*A good name is more desirable than great riches; to be esteemed is better than silver or gold.*” A good name and character, the kind of fiber that is godly inside, will sustain a person when riches will not. Think about Job’s

situation, his character and his righteousness sustained him through the difficult times even when all of his wealth in terms of what he lost was gone and even when his children were gone.

Proverbs 11:24–26 says:

One man gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous man will prosper; he who refreshes others will himself be refreshed. People curse the man who hoards grain, but blessing crowns him who is willing to sell.

Solomon was emphasizing that man can have money but he has a general responsibility with it. He needs to be one who is a good steward of what he has, blessing others instead of using it all for himself and squandering it on riotous living. One who is liberal will be enriched by God even when he has a lot. God gives blessings and monies to be used for others. This same principle can be seen in 2 Corinthians 9:8, “*And God is able to make all grace abound to you, so that in all things at all times, having all that you need, you will abound in every good work.*” Under a different covenant relationship God carries on the principle of giving His children monies in order to bless the lives of others particularly those in need. God will continue to bless Christians so they can bless the lives of other people.

Proverbs 13:11 says, “*Dishonest money dwindles away, but he who gathers money little by little makes it grow.*” What a paradox. The one who earns money quickly, and perhaps not through hard work, loses it quickly. The one who earns his money a little at a time, perhaps through hard work and honestly getting gain, he is the one who will be able to hold onto his money and it will grow into something significant.

Proverbs 28:22 says, “*A stingy man is eager to get rich and is unaware that poverty awaits him.*” The American Standard Version reads, “*He that hath an evil eye hasteth after*

riches, And knoweth not that want shall come upon him.” An eager eye is one that is eager to get rich. He is covetous and thinking about the next way to get his hands on some more money. The apostle Paul urged Timothy to pass this on to the Ephesian Christians:

People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many griefs (1 Timothy 6:9–10).

If getting rich is the driving force in someone’s life he can expect to fall into all kinds of troubles. There are lots of consequences when a person chooses to chase after money. In Proverbs 6:10–11 the proverbialist wrote, *“A little sleep, a little slumber, a little folding of the hands to rest — and poverty will come on you like a bandit and scarcity like an armed man.”* This thought is repeated in Proverbs 24:33–34. This concept can be seen in many verses in Proverbs and else where.

The person who gets his money quickly, or perhaps he gets it in ways that he should not, will have it dwindle away. The person who gets his through hard work with effort and honesty will be able to hold onto his money. When someone gets his money the wrong way the LORD is going to take it away quickly. Remember that these are general rules. They do not happen in every case. Look at wicked people in the world today who got their money in the wrong way and some of them have been able to hang onto what they have. These are general rules in the way God views it. Justice involves allowing God to work out the details as Job was encouraged to do.

Proverbs 14:23 says, *“All hard work brings a profit, but mere talk leads only to poverty.”* Hard work does not always lead to riches. Once again these verses are only a general rule.

Hard work can lead to that which is profitable and laziness leads to that which is poverty. Proverbs 21:5 repeats this idea, *“The plans of the diligent lead to profit as surely as haste leads to poverty.”* Plans, hard work, and effort lead to profit. Haste and impulsiveness lead to poverty.

Share with the Poor

Christians need to share with the poor. That is the emphasis from God through Solomon in the Book of Proverbs in regard to money. There are several Scriptures that bring this out in the Book of Proverbs. Proverbs 11:26 says, *“People curse the man who hoards grain, but blessing crowns him who is willing to sell.”* Remember what the inspired, minor prophet Amos said concerning the responsibility the Israelites had for taking care of the poor. Amos was very upset with the Israelites for not taking care of the poor. He talked about the merchants who were so intent on being rich they would set up shop and take advantage of the poor by selling to them in ways that were not honest:

Hear this, you who trample the needy and do away with the poor of the land, “When will the New Moon be over that we may sell grain, and the Sabbath be ended that we may market wheat?”—skimping the measure, boosting the price and cheating with dishonest scales, buying the poor with silver and the needy for a pair of sandals, selling even the sweepings with the wheat (Amos 8:4–6).

They also got upset when they could not sell on the Sabbath or a feast day. They wanted to make money, but they were not willing to share with the poor:

He who oppresses the poor to increase his wealth and he who gives gifts to the rich — both come to poverty

... Do not exploit the poor because they are poor and do not crush the needy in court, for the LORD will take up their case and will plunder those who plunder them (Proverbs 22:16, 22–23).

The rich were oppressing the poor so they could increase their wealth. These verses echo what the prophet Amos had to say. The LORD got very upset when the Israelites who were rich took advantage of the Israelites who were poor. A lot of the time the Israelites who were rich became rich because they took advantage of the poor. Many times this oppression happened when the rich took the poor to court and took away what was rightly theirs instead of blessing the poor. They were doing exactly what God had told them not to do. Psalm 12:5 talks about this very thing:

“Because of the oppression of the weak and the groaning of the needy, I will now arise,” says the LORD. “I will protect them from those who malign them.”

God is the One who takes care of the poor. He is the Champion of the poor and the oppressed of the Old Testament. Proverbs 22:9 says, *“A generous man will himself be blessed, for he shares his food with the poor.”* One who has a bountiful eye, *“a generous man”* versus the one who has an *“evil eye,”* (cf. Proverbs 28:22) is the one who will be blessed.

“A generous man” is one who looks around to see who might need what he has. He looks at his possessions as a stewardship with which he can bless the lives of others. That is what God holds the rich responsible for. First John 3:17 says, *“If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him?”* God’s love can not abide in one who shuts up his goods from his brother. First Timothy 6:17–19 says:

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is truly life.

The Christian is urged to make sure he shares what God has blessed him with. God holds us responsible for what we have. This is all in the spirit of the Macedonians as in Second Corinthians 8:1–5 where it says:

And now, brothers, we want you to know about the grace that God has given the Macedonian churches. Out of the most severe trial, their overflowing joy and their extreme poverty welled up in rich generosity. For I testify that they gave as much as they were able, and even beyond their ability. Entirely on their own, they urgently pleaded with us for the privilege of sharing in this service to the saints. And they did not do as we expected, but they gave themselves first to the Lord and then to us in keeping with God's will.

“*They gave themselves first to the Lord*” and whatever little they had. It was out of their poverty that they gave to the Judean Saints. Paul had not even called upon them to participate in that contribution, but because they had given themselves first to God, they wanted to give what they had to take care of those who were poor. That is the proverb statement — Share with the poor.

God Is the Source of Wealth

There are a few scriptures which talk about God being the source of wealth. Since God is the source of wealth and He gives it to certain Israelites, He expects wealth to be a stewardship like anything else He gives to mankind. Proverbs 22:2 says, *“Rich and poor have this in common: The LORD is the Maker of them all.”* The LORD allows the rich to have money making wealth a stewardship. God made the rich and the poor. He did that so the rich could help the poor. God could have given everybody all the same thing, but it does not work out that way. That is not the way this world works. So what does God expect of the rich person to whom He has given the money? He expects a rich person to assume that his wealth is a gift from God, that it is not his to do only what he wants to do with it to bless his own life and to enjoy life to the fullest. The rich person is to look around with a bountiful eye saying this is what God gave me to bless other people.

In Proverbs 23:4 Solomon said, *“Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint.”* The point is to cease from letting the world convince you to use your wisdom to gain wealth only. Let God do the giving and the taking and you work honestly and then whatever the LORD gives you, you in turn can bless others. In other words God is in control. Jesus told His disciples:

“Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also” (Matthew 6:19–21).

Proverbs 13:7 talks about a person who wants to be wealthy: *“One man pretends to be rich, yet has nothing;*

another pretends to be poor, yet has great wealth.” Maybe the man who pretends to be rich plays the game of “I am a rich person,” but he needs to understand that pride goes with that game and he is not trusting God. It is not wrong to be rich, but it is wrong to be proud about it. It is wrong to dismiss that God is the source of a man’s wealth in the first place. There is one who makes himself poor in terms of living a sacrificial life. Some people who have money live a very simple lifestyle and they do not appear to be rich. They do not appear to be rich because they understand that God is the source of richness and they do not need to live an extravagant, lavish lifestyle to show off.

Proverbs 30:7–9 contains a very poignant statement:

“Two things I ask of you, O LORD; do not refuse me before I die: Keep falsehood and lies far from me; give me neither poverty nor riches, but give me only my daily bread. Otherwise, I may have too much and disown you and say, ‘Who is the LORD?’ Or I may become poor and steal, and so dishonor the name of my God.”

The writer of this proverb, “Agur son of Jakeh,” was asking God to help him to be honest. He did not want to be too rich or too poor. When a man is too poor he is always thinking about where his next meal is coming from and how am I going to get by today. There is this anxiety and worry that goes with being poor. Jesus addressed this in Matthew 6 when He said not to worry about where your food, clothing, or shelter were going to come from. God will take care of His children (cf. Matthew 6:25–34). So the one who is in abject poverty, if he can be spared that worry to some degree so he is not always thinking about how he is going to get by today, must trust God to care for him. Being overly rich is also a trust issue. When a person has all this money he may think he does not need anyone. He may think he is invincible, with armor and a fortress, and he

does not need God or anyone else. It is interesting that the writer here says he would be better off if he was not at one of these extremes, extreme poverty or extremely wealthy. He was asking the LORD to help him to be somewhere in the middle. He thought it would be easier to trust God if he was somewhere in the middle and he could proceed with a life of wisdom.

These instructions from Solomon, who had lots of wealth, contain the right way to approach life. He was talking to people who might have some wealth and to some who might be living in poverty. The Book of Proverbs contains the instructions on the right way to be honest, the right way to trust God fully, the right way to be a person of faith, the right way to be a hard worker, and the right way to look at those around you and realize they need to take care of those who are not so blessed.

Solomon on the Tongue

Introduction

The Book of Proverbs has a great deal to say about the tongue or the right kind of speech as does the Book of James in the New Testament. First consider what James 3:1–12 has to say about how difficult it is to control the tongue:

Likewise the tongue is a small part of the body, but it makes great boasts. Consider what a great forest is set on fire by a small spark. The tongue also is a fire, a world of evil among the parts of the body. It corrupts the whole person, sets the whole course of his life on fire, and is itself set on fire by hell (James 3:5–6).

A commentary on the Book of James entitled the above passage of Scripture “Caution Tongues Working.” The picture given would be like a sign warning people of the street construction ahead, “Caution Men Working.” Any time the tongue starts to move about or to say things there is always the temptation that there will be mistakes made, things may be said that are not right or are way out of line. James started his text in this chapter by saying, “*Not many of you should presume to be teachers, my brothers, because you know that we who teach will be judged more strictly.*” He goes on to talk about the tongue and how important it is. Those who teach use a lot of words. When a person uses a lot of words the temptation is for more problems to get in the way of his righteousness and the things one is trying to do for God.

General Texts from Proverbs

Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life. Put away perversity from your mouth; keep corrupt talk far from your lips. Let your eyes look straight ahead, fix your gaze directly before you. Make level paths for your feet and take only ways that are firm. Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil (Proverbs 4:23–27).

This passage describes a number of things about a person. It talks about the feet, the eyes, his speech, and his heart as if to say, “Make sure you get your whole being in line with God’s wisdom.” Remember the woman personified as Wisdom calling out for the young man to accept her kind of wisdom. Those verses are all summed up at the end of Proverbs 4 saying his whole being has to be on board with this approach to godly wisdom. Every thing is involved — the heart, the eyes, the feet, and the tongue.

The tongue of the righteous is choice silver, but the heart of the wicked is of little value. The lips of the righteous nourish many, but fools die for lack of judgment (Proverbs 10:20–21).

The tongue is a very valuable thing. When good words come out of the mouth, they come from a heart that is pure. In Matthew 12:34–37 and Matthew 15:8–11 our Lord Jesus talked about what comes out of the mouth is a reflection of the heart. If there are bad things coming out of a man’s mouth it is sure that it is coming from a bad heart, but if good things are coming out of his mouth consistently then that means there is a pure heart. When good things come out of the mouth they are precious things like precious metals of gold and silver.

Proverbs 19:1 says, *“Better a poor man whose walk is blameless than a fool whose lips are perverse.”* If you are the poor man it is okay if your steps are righteous. If you are a rich man and out of your mouth come all these things that *“are perverse”* because they come from a bad heart then you are in bad shape. Whether a man is rich or poor his tongue must be saying godly things of the Almighty.

Proverbs 21:6 says, *“A fortune made by a lying tongue is a fleeting vapor and a deadly snare.”* If a man is rich and he got there with deceitfulness and playing people and manipulating them with his words and his ploys, then he is putting himself into a deadly snare. A lying tongue that obtains riches is indeed a dangerous thing.

These are just some general passages that talk about the importance of controlling the tongue. James and Solomon have the same thing to say about the tongue. It is said that a man says 8,000–10,000 words a day. That may not be true for every man. It is said a woman says 15,000 words a day. Either way whether man or woman a lot of words come out of your mouth on a consistent and daily basis. We need to be able to communicate and our words are the communicating medium. That puts each one of us in significant danger if our tongue is not under control.

Three Areas of Concern in the Use of the Tongue

There are three different uses in regard to the tongue. There is **listening** which is no words, there is **lying** which is the misuse of words, and there is **answering** which is the proper use of words in regard to one another. Beginning with listening, it can keep a man out of trouble. When one is always talking he is more liable to get into more trouble.

Listening

Proverbs 10:19 says, *“When words are many, sin is not absent, but he who holds his tongue is wise.”* That is an interesting statement, *“When words are many, sin is not absent.”* Basically, Solomon was saying the more you talk the more it is likely that you will make mistakes and you will sin. He was saying we need to restrain our conversation and talk. There are certain things that need to be said to one another, but then there are times when we need to stop talking. We need to stop talking and saying things because the more we talk there is the temptation that leads us to say things that are not godly and righteous and that do not build relationships between people.

Proverbs 21:23 says, *“He who guards his mouth and his tongue keeps himself from calamity.”* Once again Solomon was trying to say that it keeps a man out of trouble if he is a good listener. There is an interesting imagery as if you put a guard on your mouth and that guard is the only thing that lets things out of the gate if the mouth has a gate. The guard determines what comes out of the mouth. It would be good if everyone could be as James 1:19 says, *“... Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry.”* The guard says, *“Will I say this? Will I not say this? Will it benefit others? Will it glorify God? If it will not then I should keep it to myself because it will only bring trouble.”*

Proverbs 17:27–28 says, *“A man of knowledge uses words with restraint, and a man of understanding is even-tempered. Even a fool is thought wise if he keeps silent, and discerning if he holds his tongue.”* This is an interesting combination — one with a few words does not have a lot of heat, no anger. When man is angry lots of words tend to come out of his mouth that are not beneficial to others and not glorifying to God. The person who says less seems to get himself in less trouble. A person might be a fool in his heart and his actions but to those who are surrounding him he does not show his foolhardiness if he keeps his comments to himself. He does not reveal the

things that are in his heart that are filled with the wisdom of Satan. Keeping ones thoughts to ourselves, speaking carefully, and listening more than we speak will keep us out of trouble. One who talks less avoids the problem of being proud. There is pride involved in talking too much. Proverbs 18:2 says, *“A fool finds no pleasure in understanding but delights in airing his own opinions.”* Some people like to talk and they like to hear themselves talk. They like to spout their opinions and they are not very good listeners. They do not really care what someone else has to say, they are not really taking in what another person has to say to put together with what they think about it, because they have their own thoughts and they want to air them because they are very proud of their own opinions. They want to express their opinions thinking it will build them up in your eyes. Christians need to be careful what they say.

Proverbs 20:9 says, *“Who can say, ‘I have kept my heart pure; I am clean and without sin?’”* Basically, Solomon was saying that a man should not proclaim his own forgiveness. Man is not the one who can say, “I’m clean. I’m forgiven. I’m a God-person” in a proud way. That does not mean that Christians cannot claim the privileges that God has given and bestowed on us. We can know that we are saved. We can know that we are righteous, but we are not supposed to go around proclaiming that we are forgiven and everything is fine. We should not proclaim that we are on top of the world just because I say it is so and I have proclaimed it to be so.

Proverbs 20:22 says, *“Do not say, ‘I’ll pay you back for this wrong!’ Wait for the LORD, and he will deliver you.”* In this case there is pride in talking and it has to do with retribution. Apparently, somebody has done something to the one who would say this. Solomon was saying man should not proclaim vengeance. Romans 12: 17–21:

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everybody. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with

everyone. Do not take revenge, my friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

So on the contrary of proclaiming, "I will be the one to get you back" for what someone has done to you, restrain yourself from that kind of retribution type talking and leave the vengeance to God because He will take care of that in His due time and in the way which He prescribes.

Proverbs 20:25 continues this thought of pride in talking. Solomon said, *"It is a trap for a man to dedicate something rashly and only later to consider his vows."* In the Old Testament under the Law of Moses when someone made a vow he said something that was really before God. He was making a promise, whether it was to God or to somebody else, that he would do something. Maybe the word promise is not quite as strong to us in this day and time as the word "vow" would have been to them. A "vow" during the Old Testament times was as if you were saying to God, "LORD, if I do not fulfill my promise, if I do not follow through on this, then may Your curses come down on me." It was almost the idea of an oath, "LORD, before You, if I do not fulfill my promise, if I do not carry out what I have said, You can bring curses down on me." Solomon was saying to make sure that you think before you make a promise.

Think about the vow, consider the cost, and make sure you will keep the promise. Remember that Peter said, "I will never deny you" and Jesus said, "Yes, you will. Yes, you will" (cf. Luke 22:33–34, 54–62). Do not allow rash promises to come out of your mouth because it puts you in a situation where you may sin because you cannot keep that oath or promise or that vow.

Proverbs 27:2 says, *“Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips.”* A person may be doing a good job, or doing wonderful things in the Kingdom, but he should not be like a little banty rooster going around touting himself saying I have done this and I have done that. A good test might be to ask yourself how many times do you use the word “I” around people? How many times is the conversation directed toward me and what I have done? The humility that is in a Christian’s heart should be deflecting attention from ourselves. That does not mean that the Christian cannot accept thanks for what God has done through us. It is okay to be encouraged by others when they see the good things that we do. This verse is talking about pride in talking about ourselves. As listeners we usually perceive thinking that person is really stuck on themselves as they talk about all the wonderful things they have done. The proverbialist was saying do not blow your own horn. Do not take the chief seats, allow yourself to be invited up. In humility proceed, not only with your actions, but also with your words.

Continuing in the category of listening there is wisdom to be gained in listening. This is especially true when one is young. Proverbs 12:15 says, *“The way of a fool seems right to him, but a wise man listens to advice.”* If a person is talking all the time he is not learning. If he is listening more than he is talking then sometimes he will hear that which is wise and sometimes he will hear that which is foolish. The person will be able to work it out to be able to discern what is right and what is wrong. If a person is talking all the time then he will not gain wisdom. If the person who is talking all the time is a young person who is talking about himself or other things and he is not listening to preaching and teaching and not listening to the Word of God then he cannot expect to be a wise person as he grows up. For those who are older, there is nothing much worse than to see an older person who is a fool because he has not gained the wisdom he needed through his life. They are like a kid who is sixty to seventy years old and still living foolishly.

Proverbs 19:20 says, *“Listen to advice and accept instruction, and in the end you will be wise.”* There is not a lot new in this verse, but Solomon is really talking about wisdom for the future. As he talked to his children he might have said, “You know I have been blessed by God to have wisdom. When I asked Him for wisdom in those early days of my kingship I asked Him for wisdom to be able to be a good ruler.” There were things that God gave Solomon that were supernatural, but his children did not get that wisdom. They were going to have to listen, to discern the right, and to be careful how they proceeded through life. There is a lot of wisdom to gain if we will but listen. The LORD built His system of the Old and New Testaments so that the younger are to listen to the older. It is important to have older people to listen to besides one’s parents. It is important to have someone to go to for advice who has wisdom laid up after years and years of time. A good source of wisdom comes from listening.

Proverbs 22:17–18 says, *“Pay attention and listen to the sayings of the wise; apply your heart to what I teach, or it is pleasing when you keep them in your heart and have all of them ready on your lips.”* Solomon was advising men to store up wisdom from others. For Christians today perhaps much of the wisdom comes from God’s Word. How much time do you spend in God’s Word? How much time do you spend listening to the wisdom of God’s Word? Is it all about activity in your life? Are you listening to the wrong kind of music or television or movies? How does all of that work for you? Are you listening to the wisdom of God? If you store His wisdom in your heart it will allow you to discern situations that come up in your life. You will be able to discern foolishness from wisdom. You will be able to make those wise choices that will protect you from destruction and put you on the right path to blessings.

Proverbs 21:28 says, *“A false witness will perish, and whoever listens to him will be destroyed forever.”* A false witness has to do with honesty. Listening involves not talking,

but it also involves being honest when you do talk. It is always safe to be honest. Your parents probably told you to always be honest even when you made mistakes. Honesty is always the best policy. Telling the truth is always safe. When it is the word of truth that is presented people can deal with it. Any time a person lies, when people are not honest, when they are a false witness and tell things that are not true, all kinds of difficulties come up to get them in all kinds of trouble. There are many stories in Scripture beginning with Adam and Eve all the way to Ananias and Sapphira in the New Testament (cf. Acts 5:1–11) that tell about the consequences of being dishonest. Good listening and storing up wisdom by listening to people who are older are important for Christians. Listening to the Word of God, having a conversation and talking to one who has a wise heart, enables one to store up much wisdom.

Lying

The topic of lying has to do with the misuse of the tongue. Solomon was talking about the misuse of the tongue and the importance of telling the truth. Think about some of the television shows that you may have seen recently. One did some research on children. The parents were watching outside as their children were presented with different possibilities in which they had to choose this or that and say this or say that. Parents were surprised at how often the children were tempted to and actually did say things that were not true. Lying can be a problem for all Christians in a lot of different cultures. Liars will not enter the Kingdom of God. Revelations 21:8 says:

But the cowardly, the unbelieving, the vile, the murderers, the sexually immoral, those who practice magic arts, the idolaters and all liars — their place will be in the fiery lake of burning sulfur. This is the second death.

Think back in history about what the Japanese Emperor told the Japanese people during World War II about what was actually happening. He was deliberately misleading them. Think about other rulers and situations in countries in the past and even in this present day. Rulers do not tell their people the truth. Perhaps in America with free speech and the media we get a better picture than in other cultures but we might not be hearing the total truth. I have been in cultures where truth is not a high priority. The truth is misused to manipulate people to get what they want.

In that context the proverbialist says, *“The mouth of the righteous is a fountain of life, but violence overwhelms the mouth of the wicked (Proverbs 10:11).* Christians want gifts of life coming out of their mouths like water flowing out of their mouth that gives water, a drink to those who are in the desert. We want them to be blessed by our lives. When a person lies that does not happen. Proverbs 10:18 says, *“He who conceals his hatred has lying lips, and whoever spreads slander is a fool.”* Slander and gossip tear up a relationship and causes all kinds of problems for everyone who is involved. Proverbs 11:13 says, *“A gossip betrays a confidence, but a trustworthy man keeps a secret.”* Relationships like a marriage must be based on truthfulness with each other. When a person is not honest in a relationship that makes the other person have insecurities about that relationship. When he gossips or does not tell the truth with another person it creates feelings of dishonesty and the suspension that he is not telling the truth. The other person wonders if he is not really saying what he wanted to say because he is trying to manipulate the other person. Lying, gossip, and slander cannot be part of any Christian relationships.

Proverbs 16:27–29 says:

A scoundrel plots evil, and his speech is like a scorching fire. A perverse man stirs up dissension, and a gossip separates close friends. A violent man

entices his neighbor and leads him down a path that is not good.

This passage of Scripture hits on the same theme of gossip and slander as they are connected with what the wicked person is trying to do. He is trying to get what he wants by manipulating others and perhaps even trying to hurt other people. It is all for his own benefit perhaps to build himself up in some way or maybe it is for riches or reputation or power. It is in connection to what comes out of his mouth. It is that which manipulates people or hurts others. Think about what Jezebel told Ahab to do in regard to Naboth. They sent word to the people of the city of Jezreel and manipulated the Jezreelites to lie about Naboth so that he was stoned so that Ahab could have the vineyard Ahab wanted. It was all about gossip and slander (cf. 1 Kings 21:1–29).

Probably you and I in our own lives have had those instances where, hopefully we have not participated in them, we have unfortunately been taken advantage of by those who are not telling the truth. That does not feel good at all. The affect of something like that can be devastating. Proverbs 18:8 says, *“The words of a gossip are like choice morsels; they go down to a man’s inmost parts.”* It is important to understand the powerful meaning of this passage of Scripture — when gossip leaves a person’s mouth it is hard to get it back. It is hard to understand the hold gossip can have on people. Do we enjoy gossip? People seem to like to know the dirt on others. Maybe it is just the culture we live in or it might just be human nature. When someone hears little tidbits about another person it goes deep inside and in some ways it affects the relationship with that person. When someone throws hurtful information out there about another person, especially gossip when talking to others, that affects that person’s relationship with not just those two people, it also affects relationships with other people. Those relationships may not be redeemable in the future. Proverbs 26:2 says, *“Like a fluttering sparrow or a darting*

swallow, an undeserved curse does not come to rest.” Once someone has put out the “*undeserved curse*” or any kind of information it goes everywhere. Consider an email or a letter that gets circulated everywhere only to find out it was not even true. That information has been all over and people have been influenced by those words. Once it has been sent, you can never undo the wrong and the damage that has been done.

Proverbs 12:17–19 says:

A truthful witness gives honest testimony, but a false witness tells lies. Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing. Truthful lips endure forever, but a lying tongue lasts only a moment.

Proverbs 16:13 says, “*Kings take pleasure in honest lips; they value a man who speaks the truth.*” If a person tells the truth, if he is right on target, then he is safe with God. In most cases that person will be right with everyone else because he can be trusted to be a man of his word.

Answering

Using one’s tongue is not just about spouting things in regard to what he is initiating but also in how one responds to others who are talking to him. Proverbs 15:1 says, “*A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger.*” A soft word works better than a rough word. Proverbs 12:18 says, “*Reckless words pierce like a sword, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*” A person can answer softly, or as a sword thrust, or as something that will help and benefit the other person. Proverbs 18:13, 17 says: “*He who answers before listening — that is his folly and his shame . . . The first to present his case seems right, till another comes forward and questions him.*” It is important for a person to think through, process, and validate what he has heard. If a person fires back a response to something he really did not understand his answer

may not be on target and perhaps be even hurtful because he misunderstood something. It is important to make sure what a person hears and what he understands in his brain is exactly what that person is meaning. That takes good communication.

Whoever says to the guilty, “You are innocent” — peoples will curse him and nations denounce him. But it will go well with those who convict the guilty, and rich blessing will come upon them. An honest answer is like a kiss on the lips (Proverbs 24:24).

When a rebuke is necessary be willing to give that. Some people do not like to rebuke anyone because they do not like to create tension between people. Proverbs says when it is necessary it is necessary and one must make sure there is not flattery in the rebuke. Proverbs 28:23 says, *“He who rebukes a man will in the end gain more favor than he who has a flattering tongue.”*

Proverbs 26:4–5 says: *“Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself. Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.”* Do not rebuke or answer as a fool would. There is one time when a person should answer a fool and another time when he should not. It is important to know the difference. It is important to know the outcome and make a wise judgment in that regard.

Christians need to be the ones to answer others in a godly way. We need to be the one who will use your tongue in a righteous way to build relationships, to benefit others, and ultimately to glorify God.

General Passages About the Tongue

- *“Pleasant words are a honeycomb, sweet to the soul and healing to the bones” (Proverbs 16:24).*
- *“The tongue has the power of life and death, and those who love it will eat its fruit” (Proverbs 18:21).*

- *“A word aptly spoken is like apples of gold in settings of silver. Like an earring of gold or an ornament of fine gold is a wise man’s rebuke to a listening ear”* (Proverbs 25:11–12).
- *“Where there is no revelation, the people cast off restraint; but blessed is he who keeps the law”* (Proverbs 29:18).

There are blessings which can come out of a person’s mouth. There is also life and death in what a man says. That is very powerful. Gold and silver can be the ornaments of blessings that come from our mouths.

The Law of God that a Christian holds in his heart can help him to be a teacher, a prophet, or the one who reveals the Word of God to others so they can know what God is thinking, what is God’s desire, what God commands and requires. What a blessing. To those who are in teaching positions, or maybe parents who are teaching their own children, or maybe those who are teaching friends, you have tremendous power in what you share with your tongue. Use it wisely to God’s glory and for building up relationships.

Solomon on Fornication

Introduction

The opening lesson in this study of Wisdom Literature was about two women — Wisdom and Folly — as they were vying for the attention of a young man. They presented the scenario in which a young man or anybody who is really naive might face as they walked down the street of life trying to choose which way they should go. Folly was saying come this way and be a foolish person. Wisdom was saying come this way to be a godly person. Folly is the loose seductress woman who represents the seduction of any and all kinds of foolishness which pulls at man on a daily basis. This might be the lure of riches, malicious speech, evil companions, use of time, and other topics that the proverbialist talked about. In a metaphorical way Folly represents the ways in which man is lured into all kinds of foolishness. She represents all of those but on a literal level in the analogy itself she represents another seductress way of getting man off track into fornication itself. This is not a word that is used very much. It is not a word that modern society uses.

Fornication is accepted, encouraged, and even glorified by people today in the movies and media of all kinds. It is on television and even talked about openly in real life. It seems as if everyone is okay with it. Solomon took quite a different view of this particular subject. As one who had 700 wives and 300 concubines at this point in his writing and in his life he appears to be warning his children against falling prey to the deadly trap of fornication. I will be straightforward and sensitive at the same time in this matter. This is a sensitive matter in a

Christian's life. It is intended by God to be a very private part of marriage and intended for marriage only. Present day culture has brought sex out into the open in an ungodly and ugly way.

Wisdom Offers Protection

It is important to go back to Scripture to see what God says about this particular topic looking at the nature of seduction and trying to be alert to the ways in which Folly tries to tempt and draw a person into this very dangerous sin. Beginning in Proverbs 2 Solomon had already been talking about the benefits of "*wisdom*" and how it could save one from all kinds of difficulties. Proverbs 2:12 says, "*Wisdom will save you from the ways of wicked men, from men whose words are perverse.*" Solomon continued to say:

It will save you also from the adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words, who has left the partner of her youth and ignored the covenant she made before God. For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead. None who go to her return or attain the paths of life (Proverbs 2:16–19).

Consider the different parts of these verses. Wisdom says, "I will protect you from the adulteress." It is important for a young man to pay attention to the way God looks at things, to the way God views adultery. Society, foolishness, and folly want a young man to look at this topic from their point of view. Wisdom's point of view will protect one from that which can be very dangerous to his health, life, and to his eternal destiny. Wisdom and Folly are crying out to the young man in two different ways, both saying come this way. The "*adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words*" could be all kinds of women in the Israelite culture. She could be the cult prostitutes that were often times at the Tabernacle and the

temple. She could be street women who are a part of all cultures. She could be as the text says, “*the wayward wife*,” who has broken her covenant and has decided not to be committed to her marriage anymore. This seductress may come from all locales.

The young man walking down the street could be aware of those who are normally in this trade, but is he also aware of the vulnerability from sources that he would not expect? In other words, temptation might even come from another man’s wife. Temptation may not always come from the obvious source. One may think there will be no involvement with people who are the wives of other men or who are the men married to other women. That just could not happen, but we all know it does happen. I have a good friend from many years ago who was a preacher. He got involved with several women who were married to his friends. They were all church people. They were all Christians. How did something like that happen? How did he allow himself to be put into the situation to be tempted by that kind of thing?

Notice some of the things Wisdom said to this young man about the “*adulteress*.” She “. . . *has left the partner of her youth . . .*” (Proverbs 2:17). She has left or forsaken the partner with whom she committed to in marriage. Consider what Malachi talked about in Malachi 2:14–17:

You ask, “Why?” It is because the LORD is acting as the witness between you and the wife of your youth, because you have broken faith with her, though she is your partner, the wife of your marriage covenant. Has not [the LORD] made them one? In flesh and spirit they are his. And why one? Because he was seeking godly offspring. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith with the wife of your youth. “I hate divorce,” says the LORD God of Israel, “and I hate a man’s covering himself with violence as well as with

his garment,” says the LORD Almighty. So guard yourself in your spirit, and do not break faith.

Many years after Solomon wrote the Book of Proverbs the Israelites were having problems with the very same thing. Israelite men wanted to put away the women with whom they had arranged marriages and from whom they were expecting to bring Israelite children who would be faithful to God. Before God the Israelite couple was to bring forth the fruit of that marriage which was offspring who would be faithful to the covenant they had brought these children into.

The woman in Proverbs 2 had forsaken the covenant, she had forsaken the person to whom she made those vows. Along with breaking her marriage vows she was also jeopardizing the children being born into that marriage who would continue the covenant relationship that Israel had with God for a long time. This “*adulteress*” ignored the covenant she had with her mate. She ignored the covenant she had with God since He was their witness that this marriage was for a particular purpose in His sight. She ignored the biblical standard of marriage which said, “*You shall not commit adultery*” (Exodus 20:14). The same things could be said of many people today.

Proverbs 2:18 makes a very strong, dramatic statement about fornication: “*For her house leads down to death and her paths to the spirits of the dead.*” Solomon repeated this statement at least three times in subsequent chapters:

- “*Her feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave*” (Proverbs 5:5).
- “*Her house is a highway to the grave, leading down to the chambers of death*” (Proverbs 7:27).
- “*But little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave*” (Proverbs 9:18).

Solomon and the LORD speak clearly on the matter of fornication. It is not trite or something men can play with. It is

not something that man can dabble in. He can not participate in this without facing the consequences. Solomon said people who go down this path lose their lives spiritually speaking and maybe even physically. When the husband comes home and he is unhappy, he is going to dole out punishment to those who have spent time with his wife when they were not supposed to.

There are very few people who go down this path who repent. Adulterers that I have known in a spiritual context within the Church often times do not come back. They get so tied up in that relationship that they do not come back. They have done so much damage to the trust factor between their mate and themselves that it is almost impossible to repair the union between them. The sexual union is intended by God to be just that, a uniting, bonding experience. One who has tasted that bond with someone else becomes bonded to that person and has difficulty breaking that bond and returning to the relationship they should have.

There are things about the “*adulteress*” that a man does not want to get anywhere near. It is important to understand in this context the things that one is vulnerable to. She is the one who will use “*seductive words*.” Know the things about this person that can tempt one whether it is man to woman or woman to man. Each one is vulnerable to different things. It is important to know what those things are. In this particular context the young man who goes down this path had better understand that he is susceptible to seductive type words from this woman. What is it that we are seduced by as a man? What are the things that we are seduced by as a woman? What will save you from this death trap? In this context Wisdom says, “I will save you from this death trap.” Make sure you make the right choices. Proverbs 2:20 says, “*Thus you will walk in the ways of good men and keep to the paths of the righteous.*”

For the lips of an adulteress drip honey, and her speech is smoother than oil; but in the end she is bitter as gall, sharp as a double-edged sword. Her

feet go down to death; her steps lead straight to the grave. She gives no thought to the way of life; her paths are crooked, but she knows it not (Proverbs 5:3–6).

This passage mentions the “speech” of an “adulteress” again. It is important to understand how people flirt with one another. There are techniques that the opposite sex tends to use to get the attention of each other and to cause them to think in ways they should not and to let down their guard against what is going on in certain situations. There is the look of sweetness, but death comes in the end. It is like something that tastes good when you first have it in your mouth, but when it goes down it is as “*bitter as gall*.” Solomon used two interesting ways to describe who the “adulteress” is. She does not have any conscience about who she is — “*She gives no thought to the way of life*.” She does not care what the consequences are. She has broken the commitment, the bond, and the covenant with her husband. She is willing to do just about anything it takes, but she does not know who she is. Is she ignorant about what she is dabbling in? Does she not know what trouble she is flirting with? “*Her paths are crooked, but she knows it not.*”

Now then, my sons, listen to me; do not turn aside from what I say. Keep to a path far from her, do not go near the door of her house, lest you give your best strength to others and your years to one who is cruel, lest strangers feast on your wealth and your toil enrich another man’s house. At the end of your life you will groan, when your flesh and body are spent. You will say, “How I hated discipline! How my heart spurned correction! I would not obey my teachers or listen to my instructors. I have come to the brink of utter ruin in the midst of the whole assembly” (Proverbs 5:7–14).

It is important to be prepared for possible temptations. A Christian should not put himself in unnecessarily tempting and vulnerable situations. Keep away from any kind of precarious situations in which you might be sexually tempted. Sometimes situations happen that we do not put ourselves in on purpose. There are situations we should have the wisdom to avoid. There are situations in which I might be tempted to think or do things that are not holy. It might be a counseling session with someone of the opposite sex that I should not have. Maybe it is a work situation with someone I do not need to be alone with. I need to be aware of those kinds of situations and project ahead to see what might occur so I can make the necessary changes.

The results of falling into this kind of temptation are significant. One will lose position and possibly honor. You may lose strength and even become a slave to another. The “*end of your life*” will be very disappointing with possible physical and mental consequences. There will be a lot of regret and remorse. If you could interview people who have made these kinds of decisions later in life most would have a lot of regret for the mistakes they had made and for the decisions which took them down this particular path.

Solomon was primarily talking about the response of a young person who might say, “*How I hated discipline!*” Listening and paying attention to the wisdom of older people who know the ins and outs and the vulnerabilities that await are important. This particular young man hated self-control. He wanted to experience all the things in life that are free and happy. He was sowing his wild oats perhaps thinking that one day he would come back to the straight and narrow path. First Thessalonians 4:3–4 says, “*It is God’s will that you should be sanctified: that you should avoid sexual immorality; that each of you should learn to control his own body in a way that is holy and honorable.*” It is God’s will that His children stay on this kind of path. If we hate correction and instructions, if we

roll our eyes thinking there is no danger there and I am not vulnerable, then we are a fool indeed.

Solomon changed his approach at this point. He had been talking about prevention and staying away from the person who might seduce one. Beginning in Proverbs 5:15 he was talking to the married person who needs to work on his sexual relationship with his mate:

Drink water from your own cistern, running water from your own well. Should your springs overflow in the streets, your streams of water in the public squares? Let them be yours alone, never to be shared with strangers. May your fountain be blessed, and may you rejoice in the wife of your youth. A loving doe, a graceful deer — may her breasts satisfy you always, may you ever be captivated by her love. Why be captivated, my son, by an adulteress? Why embrace the bosom of another man's wife? (Proverbs 5:15–20).

While resisting the temptations from the world it is important to turn to the one God has given you to satisfy your sexual desires and to find sexual satisfaction in marriage. Solomon was encouraging the man to work on his sexual relationship. The statement “work on your sexual relationship” may seem foreign to the culture today because we do not think sex is something we should have to work on. We tend to think that this is something that happens normally. Our modern day culture seems to think if it does not happen naturally and if it is not an easy thing to take care of them or if something is wrong then I can just get out of it and find a more exciting way to take care of myself. In this text the “cistern” and the “well” metaphorically refer to your mate. Make sure you make every effort to satisfy the person who is in the marital relationship with you. Culture says sex is automatically and spontaneously exhilarating and satisfying. Most happily married couples find

true sexual satisfaction takes time, tenderness, effort, conversation, consultation, and maybe even advice at times. It certainly requires putting away all selfishness. The sexual relationship should grow with the rest of the marital relationship.

Years ago Charlie Shedd wrote two books called “Letters to Karen” and “Letters to Philip.” I do not recall which book he wrote this chapter in, but one of the chapters was called “Sex, the Twenty Year Warm Up.” As a young single man when I read this book I thought that was a strange chapter because our culture basically says the sexual relationship is always better at the first of the relationship and over time it goes downhill. Charlie Shedd was giving the biblical perspective saying sex in a marriage is supposed to be between two novices trying to learn how to do this together. The sexual relationship is supposed to get better over time — twenty, thirty, forty years — whatever the LORD gives. This is so opposed to what today’s culture says. It is best to listen to “*Wisdom*” and not to “*Folly*.”

Solomon said “. . . *may you ever be captivated by her love*” (Proverbs 5:20). We should be intoxicated by our partners sexuality. Their body and their looks are to be that which satisfies and that alone. That is partly an effort of will on each partners part because we are in a culture that barrages us with sexual messages. While I am making a covenant with my eyes not to look on other people’s beauty I am also making a covenant that I will find satisfaction in my mate’s sexuality and beauty (cf. Job 31:1). Hebrews 13:4 says, “*Marriage should be honored by all, and the marriage bed kept pure, for God will judge the adulterer and all sexually immoral.*” Other versions say, “*Let the marriage bed be undefiled*” with thoughts of another person during our sexuality. If the mind is left free to be captivated, captured, and inflamed by any and all other persons then we allow ourselves a lot of trouble. There must be dedication to finding satisfaction in one’s own mate. That calls for me to protect myself against temptation to fantasize about

others, to call to mind all the images that are coming my way in a culture that exploits sexuality. We must protect ourselves from the images coming in every direction. In a perfect world God would say I want you to receive all of your sexual messages from one person. In today's culture men and women are barraged on all sides with sexual messages that we cannot control. On the protective side man can control those messages to some degree. On the proactive side we can find those messages coming from our mate.

Finally Solomon ended this chapter saying:

For a man's ways are in full view of the LORD, and he examines all his paths. The evil deeds of a wicked man ensnare him; the cords of his sin hold him fast. He will die for lack of discipline, led astray by his own great folly (Proverbs 5:21–23).

The LORD sees and knows about the paths a man takes. This is part of what every man will be judged by. It is important to understand that man brings this kind of self-destruction and slavery on himself. Sex is intended by God to be habit-forming in a marriage only. Because it is by nature habit-forming the habit must be started and sustained only with one person and that is the mate. Those who wander in fornication believe that they can give it up at any time but because it is habit-forming and because it forms a bond between two people it becomes very difficult to give it up. It becomes an addiction. Solomon emphasized discipline and self-control so we do not fall into the kind of situations that will lead you astray.

Solomon addressed the topic of fornication again in Proverbs 6:20–35. Part of these instructions come from God, but it also comes from parents. He urged the young people to listen to their parents:

My son, keep your father's commands and do not forsake your mother's teaching. Bind them upon your

heart forever; fasten them around your neck. When you walk, they will guide you; when you sleep, they will watch over you; when you awake, they will speak to you (Proverbs 6:20–22).

Do not lust in your heart after her beauty or let her captivate you with her eyes, for the prostitute reduces you to a loaf of bread, and the adulteress preys upon your very life. Can a man scoop fire into his lap without his clothes being burned? Can a man walk on hot coals without his feet being scorched? So is he who sleeps with another man's wife; no one who touches her will go unpunished. Men do not despise a thief if he steals to satisfy his hunger when he is starving. Yet if he is caught, he must pay sevenfold, though it costs him all the wealth of his house. But a man who commits adultery lacks judgment; whoever does so destroys himself. Blows and disgrace are his lot, and his shame will never be wiped away; for jealousy arouses a husband's fury, and he will show no mercy when he takes revenge. He will not accept any compensation; he will refuse the bribe, however great it is (Proverbs 6:25–35).

The key to avoiding the immoral woman is preparation. It is so important for parents to give good spiritual and moral instructions to their children about how to avoid immorality. It is important for the child to listen and accept these instructions. Remember the conversations parents are supposed to have with their children about the birds and the bees? This is part of that curriculum — talk to them not just about the mechanics of a relationship between a man and a woman, but also how to avoid falling into bad relationships and how to save themselves for the right relationship.

Solomon mentioned “*the smooth tongue*” again which is something that men and women are both susceptible to

especially if they are not prepared and do not know the signs. Men are most susceptible to conversations that build up their ego and have a sexual connotation to it in their minds. Women are most susceptible to tenderness and conversations that show concern. A woman uses her speech, her beauty, and her eyes as tools of seduction. Do not look where you should not be looking. Looking deep into the eyes of a beautiful woman may get you in trouble. A man needs to make a covenant with his eyes that he will not look lustfully at a girl (cf. Job 31:1). He needs to be careful where he allows his eyes to look. A woman needs to be careful of the kind of clothing she wears. We are in a culture where there is a lot of tight clothing and a lot of skin shown. That makes it harder to keep the covenant with our eyes when our eyes accidentally fall upon that kind of temptation. Men and women need to work together on these issues. A husband and wife need to protect each other from getting in those situations as is their right.

Solomon made it plain that the “*prostitute*” and the “*adulteress*” see their partner as a thing, “*a loaf of bread*,” rather than an object of love. Falling into this seduction can reduce one to poverty and cause you to lose everything of value. If you fall into this sin you will pay a huge price. Adultery will have far-reaching effects and all of them are bad.

First Corinthians 6:18 puts fornication in a category all by itself: “*Flee from sexual immorality. All other sins a man commits are outside his body, but he who sins sexually sins against his own body.*” It seems to have an extra consequence that maybe other sins do not have. It is important to understand how dangerous this sin is.

Beginning in Proverbs 7 Solomon used the same kind of introduction as he has before. He urged his children to pay attention to your parents because their words will keep you from the “. . . *adulteress, from the wayward wife with her seductive words*” (Proverbs 7:1–5). Then listen to a different picture:

At the window of my house I looked out through the lattice. I saw among the simple, I noticed among the young men, a youth who lacked judgment. He was going down the street near her corner, walking along in the direction of her house at twilight, as the day was fading, as the dark of night set in (Proverbs 7:6–9).

Consider the main mistake the “youth who lacked judgment” made. He was where he should not have been. He was going down the wrong street at the wrong time of day to a place where he should not have been. He put himself in a compromising situation. He should have never been where he was.

Look at some of the ways in which the “woman” seduced this young man in Proverbs 7:10–21:

- *Then out came a woman to meet him, dressed like a prostitute and with crafty intent* — She wore tight clothing and exposed her skin.
- *She is loud and defiant* — There was a party atmosphere.
- *Her feet never stay at home; now in the street, now in the squares, at every corner she lurks* — She was available.
- *She took hold of him* — She touched him.
- *She . . . kissed him and with a brazen face she said* — She invaded his privacy making a step toward sexuality.
- *“I have fellowship offerings at home; today I fulfilled my vows* — She had no guilt.
- *So I came out to meet you; I looked for you and have found you!* — She appealed to his pride.
- *I have covered my bed with colored linens from Egypt. I have perfumed my bed with myrrh, aloes and cinnamon* — She is romantic. There is a beautiful setting. The love making room is ready.

- *Come, let's drink deep of love till morning; let's enjoy ourselves with love!* — She equated sex with love in this circumstance. That is a lie.
- *My husband is not at home; he has gone on a long journey. He took his purse filled with money and will not be home till full moon*” — She was secretive. There is no risk. No body will know. It is the forbidden fruit.
- *With persuasive words she led him astray; she seduced him with her smooth talk*— She used words of seduction.

When these ways are used destruction can be the result and many have gone down that path:

All at once he followed her like an ox going to the slaughter, like a deer stepping into a noose till an arrow pierces his liver, like a bird darting into a snare, little knowing it will cost him his life. Now then, my sons, listen to me; pay attention to what I say. Do not let your heart turn to her ways or stray into her paths. Many are the victims she has brought down; her slain are a mighty throng (Proverbs 7:22–26).

Solomon described the seductress woman again in Proverbs 9:13–18:

The woman Folly is loud; she is undisciplined and without knowledge. She sits at the door of her house, on a seat at the highest point of the city, calling out to those who pass by, who go straight on their way. “Let all who are simple come in here!” she says to those who lack judgment. “Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!” But little do they know that the dead are there, that her guests are in the depths of the grave.

This woman was proud and loud. She was on the prowl and there was no shame in her. Perhaps the most stunning statement in this passage is when the woman said, “*Stolen water is sweet; food eaten in secret is delicious!*” The forbidden fruit, that which we are not allowed to have, is what we are often tempted by sometimes. It is important to know what we are most susceptible to. Getting and wanting that which someone has said you cannot have may be what we are most susceptible to. Perhaps even when it is the LORD who has said No!

There are some really strong statements about fornication in the first nine chapters of Proverbs. Christians must take this to heart and be serious about it. This was not just a problem in Solomon’s day. It is a problem in every culture that has existed. This is a difficult topic that is hard to discuss. It is important to heed the warnings of Solomon. Folly is calling to people from all realms to cause us to fall into these temptations. Parents need to prepare their children for what is ahead. Christians need to protect themselves especially as a single person who is barraged with sexual messages. Married couples need to help each other protect each other from sexually nervous situations that we should not put ourselves in. We need to work on the relationship God has given us to make it beautiful and wonderful and satisfying. That will protect us to some degree against all the attempts Satan is making to destroy us.

Solomon on Purposeful Parenting

Introduction

When people think about a Scripture in terms of rearing children we usually look at Ephesians 6:1–4:

Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. “Honor your father and mother” — which is the first commandment with a promise — that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth. Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

In a nutshell this passage really capitalizes what the Lord’s teaching is about good parenting. The world today has been plagued by a philosophy which has been around for a long time. This philosophy has urged restraint upon discipline of children. Children are supposed to be allowed to be creative, full of self-expression. Discipline supposedly squashes their inner self. That philosophy has failed miserably in our society. We are paying a high price for that approach to child rearing. This becomes significant when we attempt to determine as parents how children are to respond to Christian parental discipline while surrounded in the world by another kind of philosophy.

How many social ills can be traced back to poor parenting or absentee parenting? How many people are in prisons because they did not benefit from good parenting? The influence of a

good, natural mother and father in the home cannot be underestimated. How many young people in the Church leave the Lord primarily because they did not have devoted parents who knew how to parent? Maybe parents did not know how to parent or maybe they neglected to do what they knew to do.

Proverbs will give some general rules to parent by. The book and these texts on parenting are not a complete, fleshed-out instruction manual, but they are a good beginning point. The principles Solomon presented are trans-cultural and withstand time.

Parents' Responsibility to Children

Proverbs 22:6 is a very familiar passage especially for those who have been members of the Church. There are at least two interpretations of this verse. Both interpretations given here fit the traditional interpretation. Solomon said, *"Train up [show] a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it"* (KJV). The New International Version says, *"Train a child in the way he should go, and [even, ASV] when he is old he will not turn from it."* This is a familiar passage that has several interpretations.

The traditional interpretation for this verse is if you do a good job parenting then your child is going to follow the LORD even into his old age. It is a one to one correspondence — good parenting good child! How they turn out even in their old age is affected by the parenting they receive as children. Looking at the Book of Proverbs and reminding ourselves that these are general rules this holds true. If you do a good job parenting you can count on your children having a good life. Counting on the principles that a child has been taught, looking at good examples from the parents, listening to biblical teaching, and following Christian patterns ensures a good life.

However, children, as well as all people, have a free will choice. To say in some predetermined way that good parenting ensures good children just is not true. A child in spite of good

teaching has the right to make the choice to walk away from his parent's teachings or to walk away from the LORD's teachings. There are examples of this happening. The general rule is true — *“Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it”* — Show a child the ways of the LORD and they will probably turn out to be godly, spiritual people.

The other interpretation to consider for this verse is the idea to *“Train up a child in the way he should go . . .”* with the emphasis on *“the way he should go.”* With the emphasis on this phrase parents must look at their children knowing that there are all different kinds of children. Children have different personalities, they are different even from birth. Different things motivate different children. Since each child is different so a parenting style and the way a parent tries to accomplish the same thing in every child's life may differ in methodology and approach.

My wife and I have two children. Our daughter was born basically scared. She is shy and a little bit intimidated by society and the world. We had a son born later who basically from birth has been mad at the world. We had an angry child and an scared child. We could not approach those children in exactly the same way. We do not talk to them in the same way. We did not discipline them in the same way. The desired end result was still the same. The basic approach was still to *“. . . bring them up in the nurture and admonition of the Lord”* (Ephesians 6:4, KJV).

There is something else to consider. Not only is there personality involved in the approach parents use, but there is also the sense of the where does this child belong in the big picture of things? What talents does this child have? What is their giftedness? I had one child who was an athlete and headed toward analytical things. The other child was artistic and loved music from the very start. With that sort of naturalness about their lives how do parents help them find their place in life and in the Kingdom where they could fulfill their ministry? It is not

up to the parent to decide and plot the course for where mom and dad want that child to go no matter what their personality is and no matter what their desires are. The parent cannot say this is the profession I want you to choose. Parents need to be students of their children so they can guide them and help them to find their niche in this world to be productive citizens and godly people wherever they are. Parents must rear their children in the principles of the LORD but also guide them to where they need to be in the Kingdom.

In Clarke's Commentary Vol. III Adam Clarke has this to say concerning Proverbs 22:6:

The Hebrew of this clause, "*Train up a child in the way he should go*" is curious — "***Chanoch lannaar al pi darco***" — "*Initiate the child at the opening [the mouth] of his path.*" When he comes to the opening of the way of life, being able to walk alone, and to choose; stop at an entrance, and begin a series of instructions, how he is to conduct himself in every step he takes. Show him the duties, the dangers, and the blessings of the path; give him directions how to perform the duties, how to escape the dangers, and how to secure the blessings, which all lie before him. Fix these on his mind by daily inculcation, till their impression is become indelible; then lead him to practice by slow and almost imperceptible degrees, till each indelible impression becomes a strongly radicated habit. Beg incessantly the blessing of God on all this teaching and discipline; then you have obeyed the injunction of the wisest of men. Nor is there any likelihood that such impressions shall ever be effaced, or that such habits shall ever be destroyed.⁵

⁵. Clarke, Adam, *Clarke's Commentary Vol. III Job to Solomon's Song* (Abingdon Press: Nashville & New York), pg 763.

“Train up a child . . .” — Show them the way, teach them and exemplify, and help them get to the place where they need to be in life and certainly in the LORD’s Kingdom.

Another passage is Proverbs 29:17, *“Discipline your son, and he will give you peace; he will bring delight to your soul.”* If one does not discipline his son, if you do not give attention to him, if you just let him raise himself, then he will weary and worry you until your death. And you can be sure you will live with a lot of guilt and regret. These passages say there needs to be a plan, there needs to be a purpose, there needs to be intentionality in rearing this child. All parents-to-be need to think about how they are going to parent. Talk to other couples. Read good material on child rearing. Read the Scriptures to decide this is the way we are going to approach parenting. It is important to be flexible taking into account the different kinds of children that will come as a blessing to your marriage. Make a plan. It is hard to decide what the plan is going to be without preplanning. Some things children may get into need to be discussed ahead of time. The time and the place and the moment may pass before you have a plan to apply. You might miss a teaching moment.

The Book of Proverbs talks about three specific ways to bring about a disciplined lifestyle for your children. I use the word “discipline” in a good way. I do not just mean corrective punishment for the things they have done wrong. Remember Proverbs 1:1–7 where Solomon indicated a disciplined lifestyle that is disciplined according to the LORD and His Word and according to the Laws that govern the world so the most productiveness and fruitfulness can come from life and so the most trouble and danger can be neglected and left behind.

The first way to bring instructions and a disciplined lifestyle to children is through words. A parent must talk to his child. That is what the Book of Proverbs is — thirty-one chapters of a father talking to his children. Notice the emphasis Solomon put on Proverbs 29:15, *“The rod of correction imparts wisdom, but a child left to himself disgraces his*

mother.” “. . . a child left to himself” is going to destroy himself because he has had no instructions. He has nothing to go by. “Left to himself,” without any one to guide him, he will become undisciplined. The word “undisciplined” is used in Proverbs and other places describe animals that are left to themselves. They are not sent to obedience school.

The New English Bible translates this verse as if the child is allowed to run wild with no boundaries, no instructions, no ways to approach life, no ways to critically think out situations, no discernment, no way to solve problems. A lot of this kind of training is done through instruction. Mothers and fathers cannot be too indulgent toward their children. They must be talking to their children all the time. Consider Deuteronomy 6:4–9:

Hear, O Israel: The LORD our God, the LORD is one. Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. These commandments that I give you today are to be upon your hearts. Impress them on your children. Talk about them when you sit at home and when you walk along the road, when you lie down and when you get up. Tie them as symbols on your hands and bind them on your foreheads. Write them on the doorframes of your houses and on your gates.

Parents are instructed to pour out the Word of God, the Law, to their children as they are walking along, as they are in the home, as they are traveling and going about life. They must share the Word of God in all things looking for teaching moments. There has to be general teaching all the time and as they are teaching they are laying up the Word in the heart of their child so that one day they, like Jesus, can discern what the temptation is and they can take the right corrective action.

Remember as Jesus was tempted by different things from His inner-being He had principles He had laid up in His heart that He applied to the situations. He had been taught by His

parents and in the synagogue. He rolled those things around in His mind and it prepared Him for dealing with the temptations in life. Parents have to talk to their children all the time! Teach them the Word of God. Train them! Help them to memorize Scriptures. Help them to lay up principles in their lives. Help them to know Scripture. Talk about the importance of knowing the Bible. This is one of the reasons it is important to know the Bible. It prepares our children for life. It is not just so they can spout out a memory verse and get a star on a chart in Bible class. Knowing God's Word is about life and preventing disaster and helping them to be the most fruitful person. Talk to your kids!

Proverbs 29:19 continues this thought of using words: "*A servant cannot be corrected by mere words; though he understands, he will not respond.*" Solomon was talking about dealing with a "*servant*" in this verse, but the principle is the same. This verse says there has to be more than just "*words.*" That is so true, but it does not de-emphasize the importance of "*words.*" A child also must be instructed. Parents cannot expect a child to know what they have not been taught. Make sure in a busy life where parents can let the television raise the children, when we can send them to all kinds of situations where they are with their peers all the time, and where everybody else is talking to our children because they are too busy to save enough time in your children's lives to talk to them. Talk to them at the dinner table at night. That is a sacred place for conversation to download what has happened during the week. Use that time to process what has happened during the day. Talk to them about how a Christian should look at different events. Talk to them about how God looks at the things going on in their lives. Talk to them about what should happen the next time they encounter certain things. Do we have those times on a daily and consistent basis? Make time throughout the week for instruction from the Word of God.

The second way for parents to give instructions to their children for a disciplined lifestyle is through examples that

come along side the “word.” This example must be consistent and in harmony with what is being said and what is right with the Word of God. Proverbs 20:7 says, “*The righteous man leads a blameless life; blessed are his children after him.*” My wife used to say that hypocrisy in a parent’s life is the death knell to a child. You can tell him what you want him to know, you can teach him the Word of God, but if he does not see consistency in your life with what you are saying, a behavior that is consistent with what you are telling them is true and what you are enjoining upon him, then he will in rebellion reject what you are saying and maybe even worse than if you had not said it at all.

Hypocrisy in a parent has to be expunged completely. A child has to understand the difference between inconsistency and hypocrisy. Human beings are always inconsistent to some degree between what is right, what we know is right, and what we actually practice on a consistent basis. As we communicate with our children about inconsistency they will understand we are not perfect and we understand we are not perfect. They can deal with inconsistency, but when we say one thing and consistently do something else that does not have a good effect upon children. When a parent says this is what you are supposed to do but that is not what I am planning to do that sends the wrong message to a child. One example would be in the case of a person smoking a cigarette telling his child that he does not need to smoke because cigarettes are bad for your health and will damage your life, but that person continues to smoke. Other areas of inconsistency might be seen in our honesty or our relationship with others and the way we treat each other. All the things the LORD enjoins upon Christians to show the way a righteous person lives has to translate to children. They do pick up a lot by osmosis, they pick up a lot by spiritually watching their parents in the context of the home and seeing how we behave. Children will often follow the example that is set by their parents.

The third way which the proverbial writer encourages parents to teach their children is through discipline with a “rod.” This kind of discipline is not particularly important nor emphasized in today’s culture, but it is biblical. How will society today use these verses concerning this kind of discipline? Proverbs 13:24 says, *“He who spares the rod hates his son, but he who loves him is careful to discipline him.”* The New American Standard Version says, *“He who spares his rod hates his son, But he who loves him disciplines him diligently.”* The parent is not simply *“careful to discipline,”* he is *“diligent”* to discipline. The idea is that the parent begins to discipline his child early in the child’s life. The parent cannot wait until the child is six years old to begin this training. This discipline has to take different forms at different ages. Obviously parents have to be wise about what kind of discipline fits a certain kind of child. They must also be wise about the age that is appropriate for them to receive that kind of discipline. The point in this passage is to begin this disciplined lifestyle early in the child’s life so it will carry on through their lives. Discipline the son in the early morning of his life to give him timely chastisement to set the stage for a disciplined lifestyle. The child will be pleased and will praise you for giving him the gift of discipline.

Proverbs 10:13 says, *“Wisdom is found on the lips of the discerning, but a rod is for the back of him who lacks judgment.”* Proverbs 22:15 says, *“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.”* This is an interesting insight from the LORD about what children are born with to some degree. There is *“folly”* bound up in a child’s heart or at least there is the tendency or temptation to head toward foolishness. Remember the two women? This text says there is a tendency or the temptation to head toward *“Folly”* in all of us.

Consider the following verses from the Book of Psalms that fit with what the proverbialist was saying in regard to this temptation. These passages are sometimes interpreted to mean

that we have some sort of sin born within us. I do not think they are saying that and I think they are related to this passage in Proverbs 22:15. Psalm 51:5 says, *“Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me”* (Psalms 51:5). David was using a hyperbole basically saying I have had these tendencies, they have been bound up in my heart since I was born. I had to have discipline to get out of them initially, but now I have fallen back into it as an adult in an adulterous relationship. David was struggling with that relationship, but he was basically saying what Solomon said in Proverbs. In Psalm 58:3 David said, *“Even from birth the wicked go astray; from the womb they are wayward and speak lies”* (Psalms 58:3).

Along with what the proverbialist said the psalmist was saying people have that tendency sometime to be foolish as we grow. In the American society today and maybe in all modern societies people glamorize the daring, the cute, and the silly behavior of children. They do things that we know will no longer be cute or pretty if it continues into adulthood. Sometimes adults say “boys will be boys” and let them get away with mischievous acts and allow them to get away with foolish things. If we do not discipline those actions early on those things are going to continue past childhood and those things will not be cute in adulthood. These foolish tendencies can get a man or a woman into a lot of difficult situations. Read the text again: *“Folly is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of discipline will drive it far from him.”* Daring, silly, stupid, and mischievous things that are cute in a child dare not be repeated into adulthood.

Proverbs 19:18 says, *“Discipline your son, for in that there is hope; do not be a willing party to his death.”* This verse pits time against time. In other words, discipline your child when it is early in his life because there is still hope that you will save them from the foolishness of being an adult who is undisciplined. Otherwise if you do not discipline your child while he is young you may be a *“willing party to his death.”* This is a life and death situation. A parent might think he is just

turning loose the creative juices in his child by not restraining him, letting him run about, letting him be himself, but the proverbialist says you are a contributing factor to his death, to his foolishness and his stupidity when he becomes an adult.

It is important to understand there is quite a difference between what the biblical view versus what society is saying about parenting. Proverbs 23:13–14 says, *“Do not withhold discipline from a child; if you punish him with the rod, he will not die. Punish him with the rod and save his soul from death.”* The New King James Version says, *“For if you beat him with a rod, he will not die.”* In a society that is very sensitive about abuse Christians need to understand what the proverbial writer was saying. He was not saying that parents have a license to abuse their child. There is a big difference between discipline and abuse. There is a difference between applying a spanking in an appropriate way and when it turns into abuse. It is important to know the difference. If you do not know you need advice from those who know how to apply discipline in a godly way. The New English Bible actually says, *“take a stick to him, he will not die.”* There is an appropriate way to discipline a child in terms of using something in regard to spanking and there is an inappropriate way to discipline a child when it comes to the point of abuse. The point of this appropriate discipline or spanking in this case has to do with getting the child on the right track. Redirecting them is not trying to destroy their spirit. It is not trying to hurt them in a very hurtful way long term. It is trying to redirect them in the right way.

The model way to help children is to do it like the Father does, *“My son, do not despise the LORD’s discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in”* (Proverbs 3:11–12). Remember Ephesians 6:4, *“Fathers, do not exasperate your children; instead, bring them up in the training and instruction of the Lord.”* The father must not provoke or break the spirit of the child. In teaching the child to obey, in disciplining them in the right way, a parent is not trying to crush their spirit or abuse

them in any way. I like some of the material James Dobson and others have put together on the subject of when to spank and when not to spank. Spanking does not fit all kinds of discipline. Remember words and by example are also forms of the discipline lifestyle. There may be other approaches to discipline besides spanking such as consequences that fit the crime. There may be a built-in consequence or a consequence the parent has developed that fits the action. There may be a better and more corrective way to take care of the problem than spanking.

I like the following reasons we as parents might use to discern whether or not spanking is the right approach to discipline. There is a usefulness for spanking. There are three possible reasons to use spanking in terms of discipline. The first reason would be when they are in danger of getting hurt. Suppose a child is tempted to run into the road. They do not have any idea what it would feel like to be hit by a car. They do not understand how dangerous that is. If we cannot get their attention in some other way besides spanking because they just do not see it or they cannot conceive how it might hurt them or even destroy them, we may have to use spanking to get their attention. It is important that they understand this is a very severe form of discipline. They must understand that mom or dad must be very concerned about me to apply this particular kind of discipline.

The second reason to use spanking is if it is the only way to get the child's attention and to call his mind to it. Perhaps the parent has tried other kinds of discipline and maybe the child is obliviousness to something you are trying to get your child to learn or understand. It may not be a dangerous situation, it may be some irritating habit or idiosyncrasy that you do not want them to take into adulthood because it will not be helpful to them. Spanking used as a last resort may be the only way to say, "Son, daughter, I need you to pay attention to this."

I think the third reason to use spanking is probably the most useful reason for this kind of discipline. Spanking may be necessary when a child is rebelling against authority. Spanking

may be necessary when the child points his finger in a parent's face saying, "Mom, Dad, I am not going to do what you told me to do." There is a conflict between who is in charge and the LORD wants us as parents to be in charge. "*Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right*" (Ephesians 6:1). If a child just will not obey there comes a time when the parent has to show him who is in authority telling him he must do what he is supposed to do.

Children's Response to Parents

Proverbs does say some things about how children are to respond to parents. Proverbs 13:1 says, "*A wise son heeds his father's instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke.*" Proverbs 15:5 says, "*A fool spurns his father's discipline, but whoever heeds correction shows prudence.*" These two passages are generic, but there are specific kinds of things the Book of Proverbs speaks to. There is a particular attitude children are supposed to take toward their parents. Proverbs 15:20 says, "*A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish man despises his mother.*" As a parent when you correct your son and he shows respect for you then it does bring joy to your heart. If you are always having to fight with your child to get them to do right that does not bring joy because it is a battle. An attitude of respect may come later in life with a little more maturity, but at some point in time children are usually appreciative of what the parents have done in their lives and that brings joy to a father and mother who have tried so hard. Children need to have an attitude of respect for their parents.

Proverbs 28:24 says, "*He who robs his father or mother and says, 'It's not wrong' — he is partner to him who destroys.*" This is that flippant attitude toward a parent's instructions, to a parent's possessions, or to willfully doing whatever the child wants to do. He has no respect for his parent and even responds as one who would rob his father or mother. The idea is not just that they take things, but they take away

from the father and mother what they are trying to do in that child's life. Even in the New Testament the Lord used a very specific illustration of when the Jews at times did rob their parents:

And he said to them: "You have a fine way of setting aside the commands of God in order to observe your own traditions! For Moses said, 'Honor your father and your mother,' and, 'Anyone who curses his father or mother must be put to death.' But you say that if a man says to his father or mother: 'Whatever help you might otherwise have received from me is Corban' (that is, a gift devoted to God), then you no longer let him do anything for his father or mother. Thus you nullify the word of God by your tradition that you have handed down. And you do many things like that" (Mark 7:9–13).

This was disrespectful, the wrong attitude toward the parents, for God has said to honor your father and mother and to take care of them.

There are many passages in regard to the rewards that come when children behave themselves and respond to a mother and father's discipline and approach to life that will help them:

- Proverbs 10:1 — *"A wise son brings joy to his father, but a foolish son grief to his mother."* I think about the illustrations of people in my life who have known the greatest grief, maybe even greater than divorce, is when Christians see their children making very foolish decisions that lead them down very hurtful paths.
- Proverbs 23:15–16 — *"My son, if your heart is wise, then my heart will be glad; my inmost being will rejoice when your lips speak what is right."* When parents see their son

or daughter doing well, they are behaving and following the LORD's instructions, it gives them great joy.

- Proverbs 28:7 — *“He who keeps the law is a discerning son, but a companion of gluttons disgraces his father.”* Parents are judged somewhat by how their children behave themselves. It does reflect on parents. People judge people by how their children turn out. This is not always appropriate, it is not always a one-to-one correspondence, but on the other hand when children do very well, it does bless the parent's lives because people think the parents must have done a good job. When children do not turn out well and it is because the parents have not done a good job then it disgraces them indeed.
- Proverbs 23:22–25 — *“Listen to your father, who gave you life, and do not despise your mother when she is old. Buy the truth and do not sell it; get wisdom, discipline and understanding. The father of a righteous man has great joy; he who has a wise son delights in him. May your father and mother be glad; may she who gave you birth rejoice!”* A parent is always joyful when their child seeks truth and wisdom.

There are also Scriptures which talk about the rewards a child receives from this kind of relationship with the parent and from a good disciplined lifestyle that the parent has passed on. Solomon said if a child keeps these commands he will live a long life:

My son, do not forget my teaching, but keep my commands in your heart, for they will prolong your life many years and bring you prosperity. Let love and faithfulness never leave you; bind them around your neck, write them on the tablet of your heart. Then you will win favor and a good name in the sight of God and man. Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways

acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil. This will bring health to your body and nourishment to your bones. Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the firstfruits of all your crops; then your barns will be filled to overflowing, and your vats will brim over with new wine. My son, do not despise the LORD's discipline and do not resent his rebuke, because the LORD disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in (Proverbs 3:1–12).

Some of the parent's instructions are to be loyal and faithful in dealings with men. Look to God for wisdom. Honor the LORD with your money first.

It is important to understand that this kind of lifestyle will bring great rewards to those who are parents and to the children also when they have this kind of relationship. When children listen carefully to their parents, when parents give instructions and set the right example, and there is the right kind of corrective discipline children and parents will both be blessed. A disciplined lifestyle will see them all the way through their lives for the glory of God. I am thankful to my parents because they gave me so much of this. I did not know it came right out of Scripture until I read it later. What a blessing it can be when a person has been prevented from going down all kinds of paths of wrong doing and stupidity in this life because he has parents with the right words, the right example, and the right kind of discipline.

Introduction to the Song of Solomon

Introduction

The last book in this study of Wisdom Literature in the Old Testament is called the Song of Solomon or the Song of Songs. This book might be regarded as the least read and studied and the most diversely interpreted book in the whole biblical Canon, certainly in the Old Testament. It, along with books like Zachariah and Revelation, is seen as one of the most difficult books, and maybe the least understood because of the figurative language. Perhaps this book is the least understood because it has a lot of poetic language in it. When you think about poetic language, and usually all poetic language in the day that this was written, it was tied to the culture of that day. It was tied to the idioms of that day, tied to the understanding and the connotation of words and figures of the day. When there is literal language in a past document it is a little easier to interpret, but when there is poetic language that is connected to so much of the culture, language, and the connotations of the day in which it was written it becomes more difficult to interpret. Looking at the content of Song of Solomon, which is already considered difficult and add the poetic language on top of that, this book becomes even more difficult to interpret.

The Song of Solomon was actually quite a popular book among Christian writers and preachers in the first part of the Christian age. An ancient writer, Origen, wrote ten volumes on this book in 185 A.D. The Book of Song of Solomon consists of only eight chapters and we might find it astounding that

somebody would write that much material on this particular book. By A.D. 1200 there had been 100 commentaries written on this particular book. Bernard of Clairvaux, who lived about 1090 A.D., wrote 86 sermons on the first two chapters. That is probably due to the interpretive approach he took to the book. The hermeneutical approach he used will not be one that I will use. If it was an analogy and if it was an allegory perhaps and foreshadowing the coming of Jesus and the building of the Church then you can see perhaps how he might find a lot of symbolism to talk about in 86 sermons.

The Song of Solomon was placed in the Canon under Wisdom Literature. This is an interesting placement by the Jews of old days, but the character and make-up of this book give this placement credit. It is in the Kethubim or the writings of the Old Testament. There is a connection we may not see between the other books in Wisdom Literature like Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Perhaps we do not see this connection because we are not looking at it from God's point of view. Wisdom Literature deals with questions about life, its origin and its future, questions about suffering and worship. So why would the Song of Solomon be included in Wisdom Literature in the Canon? God sees the relationship between a husband and wife and the intimacy of that relationship as wisdom. We need to think of the Song of Solomon differently than we might usually see it. This book was read at the Passover Feast. This feast celebrated the Jews coming out of Egyptian bondage. It has been suggested that this book was read at the Passover Feast because it contrasts the love in this song to the death plague in Egypt. It might also accentuate God's love to His people as it was shown by Him bringing the people out of Egyptian bondage.

An exact date for the Song of Solomon is unknown and difficult to pin point. Solomon is mentioned in Song of Solomon 3:9, "*King Solomon made for himself the carriage; he made it of wood from Lebanon*" and that is the only time he was mentioned although the book is accredited to him as the

writer. The book itself begins Song of Solomon 1:1, “*Solomon’s Song of Songs*” which leads the reader to believe that Solomon wrote this book. That is an interesting concept since Solomon was the man who “. . . loved many foreign women . . . He had seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines . . .” (1 Kings 11:1, 3). This letter was written by someone who had not been particularly faithful to one woman. He would be an interesting person to be chosen to write such a book. Some think this book was written by Solomon to contrast what his life had shown in terms of what God wants man to focus on: one man, one woman for life. If Solomon was the writer that puts the date of the book in about 971–931 B.C. That would mean this book was written almost one thousand years before Christ.

The date and the author may not be as significant as the interpretive approach. It is important to know how to approach the Song of Solomon. It is a very poetic book. There are at least four different approaches to consider. First consider the allegorical approach. In other words the man in this book is God, the woman is Israel and that is also parallel to Christ and the Church in the New Testament scheme of things. This would mean there is not a literal man and woman in a relationship. It is about God and His people and about Christ and His Church. This was probably the most prevalent view at least until the 1800s. Normally in an allegorical book every detail has its complement in the reality of what you are talking about. In a story all the details and all the characters transfer to a new situation. Perhaps that is the way Bernard and Origen approached this book spending so much time explaining all the details and trying to acquaint each one with something in the New Testament scheme of things or applying everything to God and the Old Testament scheme of things. That seems to stretch things a bit making it very difficult to make everything work, but that was the prevalent interpretive approach in the early centuries.

A second approach is similar, but it is the typological approach. This too was a very prevalent approach used through the centuries to interpret this book. Viewing this book with this approach there would be a story of a man and a woman in the Old Testament as a typology of Christ and His Church. This sounds like the allegorical approach, but this approach would not necessarily use every detail of the story as it was recorded in Song of Solomon to be parallel to the relationship of Christ and His Church in the New Testament. The typological approach would refer to the man and the woman, the man typifying Christ and the woman typifying the Church in the New Testament. In the New Testament the Church is the Bride of Christ (cf. Revelation 18–22). Ephesians 5:25–30 equates the relationship between Christ and His Church as the relationship between a husband and a wife:

Husbands, love your wives, just as Christ loved the church and gave himself up for her to make her holy, cleansing her by the washing with water through the word, and to present her to himself as a radiant church, without stain or wrinkle or any other blemish, but holy and blameless. In this same way, husbands ought to love their wives as their own bodies. He who loves his wife loves himself. After all, no one ever hated his own body, but he feeds and cares for it, just as Christ does the church — for we are members of his body.

This relationship is used to talk about Christ and His Church but to say that the Song of Solomon necessarily falls into that interpretive category of a typological approach is hard to see. Look at Psalm 45, which is probably a psalm sung at one of Solomon's weddings to one of the women he married through the years. That psalm is quoted in the New Testament and referred to the Lord Jesus (cf. Hebrews 1:8–9). Some have thought if Psalms 45, perhaps a psalm that was sung at one of

Solomon's wedding ceremonies, is related to Christ in the New Testament then it is possible that the Song of Solomon also falls in that same category.

The third approach is the dramatic approach saying this is a real story, a drama played out between Solomon and his quest to win over one particular woman. He used a lot of flowery language and perhaps even some poetic and figurative language. It may not be a realistic situation, but it is a drama.

Closely related to the drama is the natural approach. That is the primary approach in this study. In the Old Testament the Israelites put a lot of emphasis on marriage and the production of children, especially male children. This was important to the Israelites and they were not ashamed of that. The intimate relationship between a husband and a wife produced the child which was very important. There are stories in the Old and New Testaments about the shame that went with an Israelite woman who did not have children and particularly male heirs. There was a disgrace that went with being childless and it was thought that something was wrong with the woman if she did not have any children. Many thought that if a woman did not have children then she had sinned so God did not bless her with heirs. The Israelite view of women in that situation was very important in terms of their production of children. In this context of a husband-wife relationship the Israelites would have seen dignity and purity in the human love. They would have seen that the love between a man and a woman which results in a marriage and then results in the production of children is very natural. It should not be hidden. It should not be taken out of the context of life itself. Since this intimacy was God-created and it belongs in the marriage relationship in a very holy and pure way, the Israelites would see that as something to celebrate and something to look at in a pure way rather than the way society looks at the sexual relationship. We live in an age today where the intimate relationship between a man and a woman has been portrayed in such a way that we have been deceived. The sexual relationship is seen and perverted in a

way that is just not true. As people in the 21st century we have to think about all the lies that Satan has fed people through the media, through movies or television, perhaps through things that we read, and through things that other people tell us that are not accurate and are not in God's view of this very special part of the husband-wife relationship. Think about all the messages that Satan sends in regard to the sexual relationship that are untrue.

The Song of Solomon presents the truth from God's perspective about the holiness, the beauty, the sensuality, and the intimacy of the sexual relationship in its proper context in the husband-wife relationship. The Song of Solomon is a very good book to read and to use in the church curriculum. How can we bring its usefulness into the church curriculum and into our homes and churches rather than thinking it is something we cannot talk about or thinking it is too racy to be discussed. We need to see the biblical view of this book and to put it in its rightful place in the Christian curriculum. In that way we can offset some of the lies that Satan sends in regard to this very special and God-given relationship.

The husband-wife relationship is a very private intimate relationship that must be treated with respect. It must not be treated with crudeness. It must not be treated with disrespectful humor as society does. It should not be talked about as it is on talk shows and as comedians making jokes about something that is meant to be holy and pure. The Song of Solomon is God's way of looking at the sexual relationship and that is how Christians need to look at it.

The language that was used in the Song of Solomon is very interesting. Much of it is poetic language which makes it more difficult sometimes to interpret. One commentary may say this and another commentary may say something different. There are a lot of unusual words in comparison to the rest of the Old Testament books. There are 117 verses in the eight chapters. There are 470 different Hebrew words in the whole book. Forty-seven of those Hebrew words, ten percent of the total, are

what is called HAPAXs, in other words this is the only time these 47 words are used in the Old Testament. So these words are only used in the Song of Solomon. When a person comes to those words and tries to figure out what that word means, he cannot compare that word with any other words like it. That is probably to some degree because this book is on a particular kind of subject. It is not a historical book, not an apocalyptic book, and it is not a prophetic book. So you would expect its language to be unique in some respect.

Another aspect of the language is that there is an omission of all the major religious words. Keep in mind that since the Song of Solomon is in the Canon, all the words within this book are religious. Words that would normally be in biblical books like Yahweh or Jehovah are not mentioned. Adonai and LORD are not mentioned. El and Elohim, the words for God, are not mentioned. The ark and words such as righteousness, glory, and even evil are not mentioned in this book. There are a lot of words that are not mentioned in this book that have been mentioned in most of the Old Testament books.

The Song of Solomon can be broken into several sections that are usually seen as headings that have been added by men and translators in most Bibles. Those headings are different from translation to translation. I am going to follow the break down used in the New International Version for this book. Remember these headings have been added by men and translators who are not inspired.

The Song of Solomon can be looked at using the dramatic point of view. In other words, there are acts and scenes in this book. It is important to understand that in Hebrew poetry and in Hebrew writings there were often no straight-line presentations. Even in the Book of Genesis there is a thematic presentation. It is chronological in taking the reader through a theme, but then when a new theme is started the dialogue may back up chronologically and even overlap with the other dialogue. That is because Hebrew writers were not nearly as concerned about straight-line or chronological presentations as

the technological Western world. Try to understand this as you look at some of the songs. We may go back and forth in their relationship when there are different scenes going on. There may be a married scene earlier than the betrothal scene. There may be a betrothal scene and then a sexual embrace before they are married. It does no good to try to figure out if this is the wooing of the woman before they were married or is this scene the expression of love to a man the woman has not married yet. Do not get involved in wondering if they have already been together in terms of intimacy before the wedding ceremony. They were going through the book as a love poem or maybe a collection of love poems which is sometimes call an anthology.

The Song of Solomon is broken into acts that are easy to see shifting from one scene to another realizing they are in a different place or there is a change from one setting and to another. It is hard to tell which scene comes before the other. Another function or segment of this book that we need to notice is that the New International Version puts a heading called "*Friends.*" It comes up a number of times and is a very interesting use of someone else in the scene with the man and the woman. The characters in the book are "*the man, the woman,*" and the "*friends.*" These are like the three actors in the play. Sometimes these *friends* are referred to as "*Daughters of Jerusalem.*" These people may have been people in Solomon's harem or perhaps maidens who were attending to the Queen or to the woman Solomon was wooing and in love with, perhaps his wife. These people seem to be a chorus and they say things that a narrator might say. Instead of having a narrator saying a part of the story these "*Daughters of Jerusalem*" have their say. They say something to the woman and sometimes the woman says something to them about saving yourself for marriage.

This is an interesting use of a literary technique to have these women as part of a chorus. Look at the following verses in Song of Solomon as examples of this technique:

- *Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires (SS 2:7).*
- *Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires (SS 3:5).*
- *Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires (SS 8:4).*

Some interpreters view these verses as something the woman, and sometimes the couple, would say to these maidens telling them to pay attention to how beautiful the husband-wife relationship was, how intimate they were, and how wonderful their relationship was. It was like a charge or warning to the “*Daughters of Jerusalem*” not to spoil themselves before they reached the marital relationship. They needed to save themselves. What a powerful message to our world today and especially to young people. These two people who were wonderfully married were saying it is worth it to save yourselves for the marital relationship. The *friends* were perhaps maidens looking on at the husband-wife relationship making some comments every now and then, but they were also the ones to whom the couple could address themselves as perhaps those to whom the book was really written.

There are several purposes of the Song of Solomon. There is an underlying current that cannot be avoided. That is the topological relationship between God and His people. Since the Israelites read this book at the Passover Feast that would indicate that even though there was a very explicit rich relationship between a husband and a wife it also portrays the relationship between God and His people. There are other relationships that are talked about as a husband-wife relationship that are compared to God and His people such as is seen in the Book of Hosea with Hosea and Gomer and in the Book of Jeremiah and including Christ and His Church in the

New Testament. God and His people are seen as a husband-wife relationship.

Another purpose for Song of Solomon on a natural level would be to say the intimate relationship between a husband and a wife in this book portrays a picture of what the husband-wife relationships really ought to be. The Israelites were tempted by Moabites, Ammonites, the Egyptians, and others. They intermarried with all the other nations so that their relationship with God, Elohim, was taken away. That is why God did not want them to intermarry with the women from other nations. Those women stole their hearts unto idolatry. From God's perspective that is why Malachi talked about not divorcing the women from their youth. God wanted godly offspring. In the context of the husband-wife relationship, two Israelites who believed in God would produce godly children out of their sexual relationship and those children would carry out His mission. The purpose of this book is to glorify the intimate relationship between a husband and a wife.

Remember that the style, the presentation, and the arrangement of the material in the Song of Solomon is not just a straight line. It is not chronological and the text does not always agree with what has gone before. The book needs to be studied piece by piece allowing parts of the text to stand by themselves. Prepare yourself in a godly way and do not let the world and the culture and the media around you to influence your mind. Look at the husband-wife relationship as precious and lovely. If you are not married look at this relationship in the Song of Solomon as a model for what may happen in the future. If you are married allow this book to enhance your intimate relationship with the godly partner God has blessed you with.

Solomon On Marital Sex (1)

Introduction **Song of Solomon 1:1–3:5**

The Song of Solomon is the last book in the Wisdom Literature of the Old Testament. It has a unique theme in comparison to the others. It really focuses in on the relationship between a husband and a wife, not just their relationship in general but into the intimacy of their relationship. This book is God inspired and must be treated with the respect given to any other book of the Old Testament. It also needs to be treated with the sensitivity God expects. God put this in the Canon so obviously He wanted the Israelites to understand this very special relationship.

The Song of Solomon has probably not been covered in church curriculums like the other books in the Old Testament. Where should it be? How should Christians talk about this very sensitive subject? Certainly it is a part of the Israelite way of looking at the husband-wife relationship. Why not Christian relationships? Perhaps neglecting this book is part of the reason why some relationships in the Christian community have come apart because the Church has not been attentive to this part of relationships. The top two reasons for divorce are money management and the sexual relationship. Giving some attention to those two things will be doing ourselves a favor in regard to our marital relationships.

The Song of Songs begins with “*Solomon’s Song of Songs*. Consider the Song of Solomon 1:2–4 as the “Woman” and the “Friends” speak:

[The Woman speaks] *“Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth — for your love is more delightful than wine. Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfume poured out. No wonder the maidens love you! Take me away with you — let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers.”* [The Friends or “Daughters of Jerusalem” speak] *“We rejoice and delight in you; we will praise your love more than wine. How right they are to adore you!”*

In the Song of Solomon there are several words and motifs that are connected to the sexual relationship. In the phrase “*for your love is more delightful than wine*” sex is connected to drinking wine. Sex is also connected to the garden setting where lush plants would grow. It had to do with growth and fruitfulness. In the Israelite context sex was meant to produce children as well as giving pleasure to the relationship. This scene of fruitfulness and pleasure will be seen more than once in this book.

In this opening section the Woman speaks first. Look at the language in this particular context. She begins with “*Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth.*” This shows the intimacy between the Woman and “*him . . . his mouth.*” In many cultures people kiss each other on the cheeks. Occasionally people might kiss each other on the mouth, but this is usually reserved for a very special relationship. This is talking about the husband-wife relationship, two lovers in that context. She says, “*for your love is more delightful than wine.*” The word “*love*” here and in verse 7: “*Tell me, you whom I love, where you graze your flock*” are two different words in the Hebrew text. In his commentary, The Song of Solomon, G. Lloyd Carr suggests that the word “*love*” is plural in Song of Solomon 1:2 and has the same consonants that the word “*breasts*” has in the Hebrew language. The Septuagint and Vulgate translations render this word “*your breasts,*” in other words, it is not “*love,*” it is “*breasts*” with a very sexual erotic connotation. In

Song of Solomon 1:7 the word “love” is a different word which probably talks about more than just the sexual relationship.⁶

Song of Solomon 1:3 says, “*Pleasing is the fragrance of your perfumes; your name is like perfume poured out.*” Any time the word “name” is used in the Hebrew Old Testament context it is talking about the whole person. Solomon was talking about sexual love, but it was in the context of loving the whole person. In a society where there is such a focus on the physical in terms of sexual love, love is taken out of the context of the relationship of two people. It is seen as a casual love, love that is sexual between two people who do not really even know each other. That is the culture most Christians live in today. Sex is for strangers. In this biblical context God says sex is for two people who know each other very well and they love the whole person. That is the essence of the word “name.” When the term “name” is used in reference to God it is about all that He is. That is the context of “*your name*” in this verse. The sexual relationship in a husband-wife context is about loving the whole person.

Song of Solomon 1:4a says, “*Take me away with you — let us hurry! Let the king bring me into his chambers.*” The Woman wanted to be with the man. It appears at this point in time that her love was the King Solomon (SS 3:9, 11). She wanted to be with him in an intimate context and allowed herself to fantasize about what that would be like which is right in the husband-wife relationship.

In Song of Solomon 1:4b the Friends comment, “*We rejoice and delight in you; we will praise your love more than wine. How right they are to adore you!*” The Friends are the “*Daughters of Jerusalem*” (cf. SS 1:5) who had not been mentioned until this verse. The Woman was in a monologue

¹ Carr, G. Lloyd, *The Song of Solomon* (Downers Grove, Illinois, U.S.A.: Inter-Varsity Press, Leicester, England, 1984), p. 72–73.

talking to her husband or her husband-to-be who was not there. She was fantasizing about him and then suddenly the “*Daughters*” tell her she has made a good choice. They give their approval.

Then the Beloved, the Woman, continued her monologue in Song of Solomon 1:4c–7:

How right they are to adore you! Dark am I, yet lovely, O daughters of Jerusalem, dark like the tents of Kedar, like the tent curtains of Solomon. Do not stare at me because I am dark, because I am darkened by the sun. My mother's sons were angry with me and made me take care of the vineyards; my own vineyard I have neglected. Tell me, you whom I love, where you graze your flock and where you rest your sheep at midday. Why should I be like a veiled woman beside the flocks of your friends?

The Woman made the comment, “I am a dark complected woman.” Even though she was having a dialogue with the “*Daughters of Jerusalem*,” she spoke as if she was talking to her husband. This dialogue goes back and forth. Or perhaps she was just rolling this around about who she was to her husband. She was “*dark*,” perhaps because she had been taking care of her own vineyards and she did not want anyone to stare at her. There is an insight to this woman. It is possible that she was not of noble birth. Royalty probably would not be working out in their own vineyards. A noble woman would be in the house taking care of herself. She would be having cosmetic treatments and taking care to be beautiful. This culture would have considered a white skinned person to be the most beautiful. That would not be true in every culture. She may have had a bit of a personality problem in terms of having to work out in the fields because her brothers were angry with her. She may have been sensitive about her complexion and her looks. She may have been a commoner and comparing herself to those who

would grow up in nobility and royal families. She may have been intimidated with a bit of an inferiority complex because of her background. She might have been wondering if he would love her, would he choose her because of her background? Would his love be able to break thorough all the culture barriers? Would he choose her to be his wife in spite of the fact that she came from a common background? *"My own vineyard, I have neglected"* probably referred to the fact that she had neglected her own beauty by being in the field. She had not been able to take care of herself like she could have if she were in a noble or royal family. The Woman concluded this first conversation by asking *"you whom I love"* where are you? She was in love with him and the Friends had reinforced that with their approval. Perhaps he was taking care of his flocks somewhere and she wanted to find him. The *"Daughters of Jerusalem"* responded saying, *"If you do not know, most beautiful of women, follow the tracks of the sheep and graze your young goats by the tents of the shepherds"* (Song of Solomon 1:8). They encouraged the Woman to look for him.

The first comments made by the Man, Solomon, the Lover and the King, are in Song of Solomon 1:9–11:

I liken you, my darling, to a mare harnessed to one of the chariots of Pharaoh. Your cheeks are beautiful with earrings, your neck with strings of jewels. We will make you earrings of gold, studded with silver.

I doubt that any of you men have ever compared your wife to a horse that is connected to one of the chariots of Pharaoh. In this Old Testament time that would have been quite a compliment. Think of Pharaoh's chariots and the horses out in front in their brilliant, beautiful, and powerful majesty. This was a magnificent scene and he was comparing the Woman to their beauty. At the first of this chapter she was not with the King, but now she has found him and hears him say what an incredible woman she was. Remember she might have been

struggling with inferior feelings, now Solomon made her feel secure and loved by comparing her to a horse that pulled Pharaoh's chariots. He reassured her by talking about the jewels she was decorated with and the *"earrings of gold studded with silver"* that he would make especially for her. He may have been thinking about the decorations and jewels that would have been used to decorate the Pharaoh's horses. She was going to be incredibly beautiful wearing the crown jewels.

The Woman responded in Song of Solomon 1:12–14: *"While the king was at his table, my perfume spread its fragrance. My lover is to me a sachet of myrrh resting between my breasts. My lover is to me a cluster of henna blossoms from the vineyards of En Gedi."* At this point it would appear they were in the lover's embrace. They had been apart and when the Woman found the King they expressed their love for each other in this most intimate relationship. She said her *"lover"* was like *"... a cluster of henna blossoms from the vineyards of En Gedi."* This was a place of fruitfulness. It was a place where vineyards were growing abundantly. This would be the garden motif of the husband-wife relationship expressing their love.

The King responded in Song of Solomon 1:15: *"How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes are doves."* This *"dove"* imagery is going to come up several times in the book. It is hard to know exactly what this comparison is. Doves are gentle and soft or perhaps they had a beauty about them. The Woman responded to her Lover in Song of Solomon 1:16: *"How handsome you are, my lover! Oh, how charming! And our bed is verdant."* Once again they are in a lover's embrace expressing their love to each other. Their *"bed"* was *"verdant,"* it was green and fruitful. They believed their union would produce that which would be fruitful and it would be to God's glory. The King responded in Song of Solomon 1:17, *"The beams of our house are cedars; our rafters are firs."* In other words he was saying our house is going to be solid; our marriage is going to be solid. Their house was going to be built with strength. That was a metaphor for

their relationship. The house was going to be built strongly and that was how their relationship was going to be also. Part of that would be the intimate relationship they would have with each other.

The dialogue between the Woman and the King continues in Song of Solomon 2:1–2. She said, *“I am a rose of Sharon, a lily of the valleys.”* He responded, *“Like a lily among thorns is my darling among the maidens.”* These metaphors, *“rose of Sharon”* and *“lily of the valleys”* have been put into songs in Christian church songbooks. We sing “Jesus, Rose of Sharon” and “The Lily of the Valley.” These songs have used these words from Song of Solomon 2:1 to refer, at least topologically, to refer to Jesus whether the verses refer to Him or not. Using the natural approach the Woman seemed to accept the King’s appraisal of her and she was comparing herself to exotic beautiful flowers, but actually these were fairly common flowers and she was a country girl. She may have been saying I am just a common flower. She may have been looking for some kind of reinforcement from the King about who she was to him. Relationships need this kind of reinforcement. A husband cannot just tell his wife he loves her once in twenty years and that be sufficient. There has to be this kind of reinforcement — “I think you are beautiful” and “I think you are handsome.” That kind of back and forth dialogue is what was happening between the Woman and the King in Song of Solomon 1:15–2:17 as they were experiencing the sexual relationship and complimenting each other.

Solomon sang to the Woman telling her that she was the most beautiful woman in his life. She was the woman that he loved the most. The Woman continued to talk to Solomon in Song of Solomon 2:3–7:

Like an apple tree among the trees of the forest is my lover among the young men. I delight to sit in his shade, and his fruit is sweet to my taste. He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is

love. Strengthen me with raisins, refresh me with apples, for I am faint with love. His left arm is under my head, and his right arm embraces me. Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.

Many may recognize the imagery in these verses that have also been put into a song referring to Jesus, “*He has taken me to the banquet hall, and his banner over me is love.*” She pictured a banquet table using the fruitful imagery. There was also the protection of his arms and the strength and refreshment given with “*raisins*” and “*apples.*” This was the very intimate embrace with one another in a sexual relationship. They were talking about how much they appreciated and loved each other enjoying each other. This was a very special time in their relationship.

Once again the Woman commented to the “*Daughters of Jerusalem.*” It appears here that she was charging them to look at the very special relationship she had with her husband. She had a wonderful, beautiful, lovely, erotic, and fruitful relationship. She wanted these women to wait until the right person came along for them. She was saying, “Save yourself for this kind of relationship. Do not allow yourself to go outside the bounds of protecting yourself and saving yourself for the marital relationship.”

The Woman’s dialogue continues in chapter 2:8 –13:

Listen! My lover! Look! Here he comes, leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills. My lover is like a gazelle or a young stag. Look! There he stands behind our wall, gazing through the windows, peering through the lattice. My lover spoke and said to me, “Arise, my darling, my beautiful one, and come with me. See! The winter is past; the rains are over and gone. Flowers appear on the earth; the season of

singing has come, the cooing of doves is heard in our land. The fig tree forms its early fruit; the blossoming vines spread their fragrance. Arise, come, my darling; my beautiful one, come with me."

In this section of Scripture it appears the King had been away somewhere and he came ". . . *leaping across the mountains, bounding over the hills.*" She was anticipating being with her husband again. Lovers who have been apart for a time want to get back together. In the husband-wife relationship they want to be together. She wanted them to go away together somewhere to celebrate their love.

In Song of Solomon 2:14–15 the King responded to his beloved telling her first that she was absolutely beautiful:

My dove in the clefts of the rock, in the hiding places on the mountainside, show me your face, let me hear your voice; for your voice is sweet, and your face is lovely. Catch for us the foxes, the little foxes that ruin the vineyards, our vineyards that are in bloom.

Solomon was not just interested in the sexual part of this Woman. He loved her face, her voice, and every part of her. The love between this man and this woman was the total package. Their sexual embraces were only a part of their relationship. Song of Solomon 2:15 is an interesting verse about "*foxes*" ruining and creating a lot of damage in "*our vineyards.*" Solomon may have been using this illustration to say they needed to make sure to remove all the obstacles that might get in the way of their relationship. There are obstacles that can cause harm to the husband-wife relationship. Sometimes it is the pressure of time, perhaps it is sickness, sometimes it is when a couple has to be apart from each other. When there are stresses in a relationship there can be arguments which prevent the intimacy that needs to be in the relationship on a consistent basis. He was telling the Woman that she was

a magnificent person and he loved her so much, but he wanted to make sure there was not any hindrances that might get in the way of their relationship. The Woman responded in Song of Solomon 2:16–17: *“My lover is mine and I am his; he browses among the lilies. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, turn, my lover, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the rugged hills.”* She was inviting him back to be with her. She was accepting the compliments he had given and she was ready for them to be together again. They were together, they were separated, and they were together again.

In Song of Solomon 3:1–5 the King and the Woman were separated again:

All night long on my bed I looked for the one my heart loves; I looked for him but did not find him. I will get up now and go about the city, through its streets and squares; I will search for the one my heart loves. So I looked for him but did not find him. The watchmen found me as they made their rounds in the city. “Have you seen the one my heart loves?” Scarcely had I passed them when I found the one my heart loves. I held him and would not let him go till I had brought him to my mother's house, to the room of the one who conceived me. Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you by the gazelles and by the does of the field: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.

Once again the couple were separated from each other. The Woman began to search for him again. This typifies the desire of two people in love who want to be together on a consistent basis. King Solomon would have had all kinds of duties as the King of state that would take him away from her. She yearned to be with him. In the symbolism of these verses, she may have been dreaming about trying to find him because she wanted to be with him. She searched all through the streets and even talked to the watchman asking, *“Have you seen the one my*

heart loves?” Finally she found him and took him to the place where she had been conceived in her mother’s house. This was a place for love which was seen as a place of lovemaking, conceiving, and bringing forth godly offspring. The Israelites would have understood this context.

Once again the Woman spoke to the “*Daughters of Jerusalem*” saying, “*Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.*” She was speaking to them about the very special relationship she had with the King. She charged them to save themselves for that kind of relationship. She pictured him in all of his regalia, in all of his glory, as he would be coming to get her. It is possible that beginning in Song of Solomon 3:6 the scene may have been back before the Woman and the King were together. Listen to the imagery as she looked out and saw him coming:

Who is this coming up from the desert like a column of smoke, perfumed with myrrh and incense made from all the spices of the merchant? Look! It is Solomon’s carriage, escorted by sixty warriors, the noblest of Israel, all of them wearing the sword, all experienced in battle, each with his sword at his side, prepared for the terrors of the night. King Solomon made for himself the carriage; he made it of wood from Lebanon. Its posts he made of silver, its base of gold. Its seat was upholstered with purple, its interior lovingly inlaid by the daughters of Jerusalem. Come out, you daughters of Zion, and look at King Solomon wearing the crown, the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, the day his heart rejoiced (Song of Solomon 3:6–11).

This was perhaps a wedding song as the King was coming to take her away to be his wife. The Woman may have been referring back to a time when she had been courted by Solomon. It is possible they had made the decision to get

married and now he was coming with all his armies. They were all dressed up wearing their swords at their side. These were the people who had been with him on his adventures in terms of conquering lands. Song of Solomon 3:9 in this reading is a difficult verse to translate so the true meaning is hard to know:

King Solomon made for himself the carriage; he made it of wood from Lebanon. Its posts he made of silver, its base of gold. Its seat was upholstered with purple, its interior lovingly inlaid by the daughters of Jerusalem.

The King had his carriage and he was coming to take the Woman away to live in the Palace as his wife. She was excited and once again she charged the “*Daughters of Jerusalem*” to come “. . . *look at King Solomon wearing the crown, the crown with which his mother crowned him on the day of his wedding, the day his heart rejoiced.*” She wanted them to see how special the King was. This would have been romantic to her. She was looking forward to being with her gracious, glorious, and wonderful husband in the very special relationship that they shared.

Solomon On Marital Sex (2)

Introduction **Song of Solomon 4–8**

The Book of Song of Solomon is about the intimate relationship between a husband and wife. It does not just cover the sexual relationship between a married couple, it is also about their love for everything about each other. They were indeed in love with the whole person. The book is a dialogue between the Woman, the King, and the “*Daughters of Jerusalem*.” The Woman described Solomon in all his glory coming to get her at the beginning of their relationship. They marry, they are together, and the dialogue continues:

How beautiful you are, my darling! Oh, how beautiful! Your eyes behind your veil are doves. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Mount Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep just shorn, coming up from the washing. Each has its twin; not one of them is alone. Your lips are like a scarlet ribbon; your mouth is lovely. Your temples behind your veil are like the halves of a pomegranate. Your neck is like the tower of David, built with elegance; on it hang a thousand shields, all of them shields of warriors. Your two breasts are like two fawns, like twin fawns of a gazelle that browse among the lilies. Until the day breaks and the shadows flee, I will go to the mountain of myrrh and to the hill of incense. (Song of Solomon 4:1–6).

Some of the descriptions in the Song of Solomon are not descriptions that one would use to describe a lovely mate, but they are figures of speech that would have been used during the Old Testament times. These would have been very personal and very beautiful in their culture. The relationship between the King and the Woman is expressed in beautiful figurative language.

Solomon looked upon the Woman from head to toe and beheld her beauty. From her hair, her teeth, her neck, and all the physical features she was a very beautiful woman. As a country girl she might have been a little sensitive about her beauty in comparison to all the other maidens which Solomon would have had access to. His reaffirmation of her beauty was very important just as it is to any woman. Wives like to hear how beautiful they are. They like to hear compliments. That is part of the affection that needs to be shown as part of the communication between a husband and wife. This does not always have to take place in the embrace of the physical intimacy of the sexual relationship. It needs to be the umbrella of the whole relationship as a husband and wife compliment one another and build each other up. Then when the sexual relationship happens in that context it is even more significant to the married couple.

Solomon continued his description of the Woman in Song of Solomon 4:8–15:

All beautiful you are, my darling; there is no flaw in you. Come with me from Lebanon, my bride, come with me from Lebanon. Descend from the crest of Amana, from the top of Senir, the summit of Hermon, from the lions' dens and the mountain haunts of the leopards. You have stolen my heart, my sister, my bride; you have stolen my heart with one glance of your eyes, with one jewel of your necklace. How delightful is your love, my sister, my bride! How much more pleasing is your love than wine, and the

fragrance of your perfume than any spice! Your lips drop sweetness as the honeycomb, my bride; milk and honey are under your tongue. The fragrance of your garments is like that of Lebanon. You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain. Your plants are an orchard of pomegranates with choice fruits, with henna and nard, nard and saffron, calamus and cinnamon, with every kind of incense tree, with myrrh and aloes and all the finest spices. You are a garden fountain, a well of flowing water streaming down from Lebanon.

Some have thought that the Woman may have originally come from Lebanon where she took care of vineyards and perhaps of flocks also. That may have been where the King first encountered her as just a country girl. As his wife she would have moved from the north in Palestine to Jerusalem to be in the royal harem.

Remember the connection that “wine” has in relationship to love. Solomon encountered the Woman and fell in love with her. She stole his heart. Notice how he called her “*my sister, my bride*” two different times in this passage. This was not a incestuous relationship. He was simply saying how close he felt to the Woman. She was as close and as special to him as his own sister. Some commentators have thought that Song of Solomon 4:12 is a description of her virginity: “*You are a garden locked up, my sister, my bride; you are a spring enclosed, a sealed fountain.*” Perhaps the first part of this chapter is a description of when the King first encountered the Woman, as he saw her and thought about being with her as his wife. She would have been one who had saved herself for this specific relationship.

In Song of Solomon 4:16 the Woman responded to the King’s compliments, “*Awake, north wind, and come, south wind! Blow on my garden, that its fragrance may spread*

abroad. Let my lover come into his garden and taste its choice fruits." At this point in their relationship they have come together again in the very special relationship of a husband and wife. He had showered her with compliments and she invited him into her "garden." Once again this beautiful imagery of the sexual relationship is seen in the fruitfulness and verdant growth of plants of all kinds. Solomon responded, *"I have come into my garden, my sister, my bride; I have gathered my myrrh with my spice. I have eaten my honeycomb and my honey; I have drunk my wine and my milk . . ."* (Song of Solomon 5:1). The Woman invited the King in and he was happy about their relationship. It was sweet to his taste.

The "friends," "the Daughters of Jerusalem" had been looking on. They saw the lovely relationship between King Solomon and the Woman. They responded in Song of Solomon 5:1b, *"Eat, O friends, and drink; drink your fill, O lovers."* In this current culture the word "lover" is only used in the context of sexual love. Today lovers do not even know each other that well. In this context the "Daughters of Jerusalem" saw the true love of a woman and a man who loved everything about each other. They saw two "lovers" as a couple who loved the whole person in this relationship. *"Drink your fill"* of love is as it should be.

In Song of Solomon 5:2–8 there is another reference to the dream that the Woman had earlier (cf. Song of Solomon 3). She was missing the King and she tried to find him. This repetition of the dream does add a little bit of a twist, but it is basically the same dream:

I slept but my heart was awake. Listen! My lover is knocking: "Open to me, my sister, my darling, my dove, my flawless one. My head is drenched with dew, my hair with the dampness of the night." I have taken off my robe — must I put it on again? I have washed my feet — must I soil them again? My lover thrust his hand through the latch-opening; my heart began to

pound for him. I arose to open for my lover, and my hands dripped with myrrh, my fingers with flowing myrrh, on the handles of the lock. I opened for my lover, but my lover had left; he was gone. My heart sank at his departure. I looked for him but did not find him. I called him but he did not answer. The watchmen found me as they made their rounds in the city. They beat me, they bruised me; they took away my cloak, those watchmen of the walls! O daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you — if you find my lover, what will you tell him? Tell him I am faint with love.

Once again the Woman dreamed they had been apart and he was close as he came from some state affairs he had been involved in. He came at night when she was still asleep and he called for her to “*Open to me my sister, my darling, my flawless one.*” She anticipated being with him in the intimacy of the sexual embrace, but when she opened the door he was gone in her dream. She looked for him and did not find him. Once again the watchmen found her, but this dream added a twist — the watchmen found her, bruised her, they beat her and took her cloak. Perhaps this added element indicates the difficulty of finding her lover as she searched and searched and even the watchmen got in the way of finding him. She called out to the “*Daughters of Jerusalem*” to tell the King she was “*faint with love*” for him.

The “*Daughters of Jerusalem*” responded in Song of Solomon 5:9, “*How is your beloved better than others, most beautiful of women? How is your beloved better than others, that you charge us so?*” This is a literary technique as the Friends asked the Woman to describe her “*beloved.*” The Woman responded in Song of Solomon 5:10–16:

My lover is radiant and ruddy, outstanding among ten thousand. His head is purest gold; his hair is wavy and black as a raven. His eyes are like doves by the

water streams, washed in milk, mounted like jewels. His cheeks are like beds of spice yielding perfume. His lips are like lilies dripping with myrrh. His arms are rods of gold set with chrysolite. His body is like polished ivory decorated with sapphires. His legs are pillars of marble set on bases of pure gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as its cedars. His mouth is sweetness itself; he is altogether lovely. This is my lover, this my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.

The King was a strapping, outstanding young man. The word “*ruddy*” indicates that he was healthy. Just as Solomon described the Woman moving up and down her body, she described how beautiful and magnificent he was as she looked at him. She saw him dressed in all his regalia. He was young and powerful and handsome. Surely the “*Daughters of Jerusalem*” could see why she was pursuing him. The Woman called him “*my lover, my friend*” just as he had called her “*my sister, my bride*.” There is that intimacy of relationship that was much stronger than the physical beauty which will pass in time. This was the union of two very good friends who were magnificent to each other. They saw beyond the physical beauty to the mental, the social, the emotional, and perhaps even the spiritual beauty of one another.

After the Woman described how magnificent her “*lover*” was the Friends realized that he was indeed worth looking for so they asked, “*Where has your lover gone, most beautiful of women? Which way did your lover turn, that we may look for him with you?*” (Song of Solomon 6:1). The Woman responded: “*My lover has gone down to his garden, to the beds of spices, to browse in the gardens and to gather lilies. I am my lover’s and my lover is mine; he browses among the lilies*” (Song of Solomon 6:2–3). After searching for her “*lover*” she found him and they were together once again. This is probably a description of the two of them together in the sexual embrace.

Once again the King described the Woman much like his earlier description:

You are beautiful, my darling, as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, majestic as troops with banners. Turn your eyes from me; they overwhelm me. Your hair is like a flock of goats descending from Gilead. Your teeth are like a flock of sheep coming up from the washing. Each has its twin, not one of them is alone. Your temples behind your veil are like the halves of a pomegranate. Sixty queens there may be, and eighty concubines, and virgins beyond number; but my dove, my perfect one, is unique, the only daughter of her mother, the favorite of the one who bore her. The maidens saw her and called her blessed; the queens and concubines praised her (Song of Solomon 6:4–9).

His response while they were together again was to tell her how magnificently beautiful she was. He loved her eyes, they captivated him. She did not have to worry about all the other women who were around him because not one of them compared to his “my darling,” “my dove, my perfect one.” Even the maidens, the queens, and the concubines agreed that she was very special and unique.

The “*Daughters of Jerusalem*” responded once again in Song of Solomon 6:10, “*Who is this that appears like the dawn, fair as the moon, bright as the sun, majestic as the stars in procession?*” In Song of Solomon 6:11–12 the King responded: “*I went down to the grove of nut trees to look at the new growth in the valley, to see if the vines had budded or the pomegranates were in bloom. Before I realized it, my desire set me among the royal chariots of my people.*” It is unclear to whom he was speaking at this point, but it may have been just a description of him checking on the fruitfulness of his wife just as he would check on the groves of trees and the vineyards that were growing. Before he realized it desire came over him.

This was an intimate expression to his wife or perhaps about her. The Friends responded, *“Come back, come back, O Shulammite; come back, come back, that we may gaze on you!”* (Song of Solomon 6:13a). Some have suggested that this reference to the “Shulammite” might be a description of the Woman. In other words, she was a “Shulammite,” one who had come from Lebanon from a more common background. The vineyard imagery, the darker skin, and the fact that she was from Lebanon all put together the picture of who this woman was. Solomon loved her and had basically taken her out of her country home to be his queen in the palace. He asked the Friends, *“Why would you gaze on the Shulammite as on the dance of Mahanaim?”* (Song of Solomon 6:13b). The name “Mahanaim” is a reference to the perfect one. There may have been some sort of dance, but the meaning is unclear. Perhaps he was referring to the “Shulammite” as the perfect one.

King Solomon continued in Song of Solomon 7:1–9a describing the Woman again and how beautiful she was:

How beautiful your sandaled feet, O prince's daughter! Your graceful legs are like jewels, the work of a craftsman's hands. Your navel is a rounded goblet that never lacks blended wine. Your waist is a mound of wheat encircled by lilies. Your breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle. Your neck is like an ivory tower. Your eyes are the pools of Heshbon by the gate of Bath Rabbim. Your nose is like the tower of Lebanon looking toward Damascus. Your head crowns you like Mount Carmel. Your hair is like royal tapestry; the king is held captive by its tresses. How beautiful you are and how pleasing, O love, with your delights! Your stature is like that of the palm, and your breasts like clusters of fruit. I said, “I will climb the palm tree; I will take hold of its fruit.” May your breasts be like the clusters of the vine, the fragrance

of your breath like apples, and your mouth like the best wine . . .

Notice that once again Solomon used a reference to “wine” and the sexual embrace. He was looking at her middle section and they were probably both thinking about the sexual relationship. The King was thinking very erotically in this passage. He was looking at all of her, seeing the total beauty. He was concentrating on those things that would have affected him sexually and involved taking care of his sexual needs with her. This is a very intimate and very erotic scene. As he was describing her beauty, she responded inviting his sexual advances:

May the wine go straight to my lover, flowing gently over lips and teeth. I belong to my lover, and his desire is for me. Come, my lover, let us go to the countryside, let us spend the night in the villages. Let us go early to the vineyards to see if the vines have budded, if their blossoms have opened, and if the pomegranates are in bloom — there I will give you my love. The mandrakes send out their fragrance, and at our door is every delicacy, both new and old, that I have stored up for you, my lover (Song of Solomon 7:9b–13).

The Woman was inviting the King to consummate their relationship. She suggested they run away to the countryside. It is difficult to know whether this is figurative or literal, but either way she wanted to go away with him. She could have been thinking about going to her countryside home. Perhaps she was thinking about getting away from the palace and the affairs of state to have him all to herself. Whether this was literal or figurative she was thinking about just the two of them getting away together to enjoy their love and relationship. She

would indeed be a willing participant in their sexual relationship.

The Woman continued her dialogue with the King in Song of Solomon 8:1–4:

If only you were to me like a brother, who was nursed at my mother's breasts! Then, if I found you outside, I would kiss you, and no one would despise me. I would lead you and bring you to my mother's house — she who has taught me. I would give you spiced wine to drink, the nectar of my pomegranates. His left arm is under my head and his right arm embraces me. Daughters of Jerusalem, I charge you: Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.

This is an interesting section as the Woman said, “*If only you were to me like a brother, who was nursed at my mother's breasts!*” She was not wishing for an incestuous relationship. In the affairs of court and other public areas when the people saw the King and the Woman together if they were affectionate with each other the people would look at them in a funny way perhaps thinking their public display was not appropriate. If they had been brother and sister they could be affectionate and no one would think a thing about it. She was probably thinking about the public scenes when she was not allowed to show as much public affection to the King of the nation as she would like to. If they were brother and sister they could hug and be affectionate and get away with it. That might be why she wanted to go to the countryside to get away from the microscope of the palace and that situation. She wanted to be somewhere where they could relax and enjoy themselves in the husband and wife relationship. Apparently they were able to do that — “*His left arm is under my head and his right arm embraces me*” — and they were once again in the intimate embrace of the sexual relationship.

Once again the Woman charged the “*Daughters of Jerusalem . . . Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires.*” She was probably telling them they needed to see the relationship she had with the King. It was beautiful and magnificent and something they should desire to have. They needed to keep themselves pure and holy and to wait for that kind of relationship. The “*Daughters of Jerusalem*” responded, “*Who is this coming up from the desert leaning on her lover?*” (Song of Solomon 8:5a). The Woman said:

Under the apple tree I roused you; there your mother conceived you, there she who was in labor gave you birth. Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned (Song of Solomon 8:5b–7).

This was a very strong statement from the Woman at this point in time about how strong love is. She was not comparing love to death, she was saying that love was as strong as death. It is strong and true and definite. She was talking about how strong her loving relationship with the King was.

In the New International Version of the Bible it gives Song of Solomon 8:8–9 the subtitle of Friends. Some commentators suggest that instead of the Friends speaking here, it is the Brothers of the Woman. They may have been speaking about her when she was a younger person and Solomon may have been looking for her. It is difficult to know exactly what these verses mean:

We have a young sister, and her breasts are not yet grown. What shall we do for our sister for the day she is spoken for? If she is a wall, we will build towers of

silver on her. If she is a door, we will enclose her with panels of cedar.

If this is the Brothers talking about their sister they were also committed to taking care of her virginity. They wanted to protect her for the husband who was going to be hers some day. Basically they were saying she was too young for marriage right now, but she would be ready. If she was going to be a wall she would have the mind set to protect herself from all impurities. If she was going to be a door she would have the mind set to be inviting to any man who wanted her. The Brothers were going to build a wall around her to protect her. This is the section that talks about protecting the Woman until she was ready to be married to the right man for her husband.

Song of Solomon 8:10–12 is the Woman speaking again. Some translations say “*I was a wall*” instead of “*I am a wall*,” which would mean she was reflecting on her past and how that played into the special relationship she had with her husband:

I am a wall, and my breasts are like towers. Thus I have become in his eyes like one bringing contentment. Solomon had a vineyard in Baal Hamon; he let out his vineyard to tenants. Each was to bring for its fruit a thousand shekels of silver. But my own vineyard is mine to give; the thousand shekels are for you, O Solomon, and two hundred are for those who tend its fruit.

The Woman was determined to protect herself to be pure. She was telling Solomon she had protected and kept herself pure just for him. The King may have gone out and taken over certain vineyards with his own power, but she had protected her vineyard for him. She was totally giving herself to him.

Solomon responded in Song of Solomon 8:13, “*You who dwell in the gardens with friends in attendance, let me hear your voice!*” Solomon was asking for one last statement from

his Beloved. In Song of Solomon 8:14 imagine that she responded in a beautiful voice, *“Come away, my lover, and be like a gazelle or like a young stag on the spice-laden mountains.”* And then the final picture might be Solomon and his beautiful wife heading off into the sunset holding hands, off for another time to be together as husband and wife in the beautiful embrace they had experienced many times in their marriage.

Conclusion

The Song of Solomon presents the ways in which it is appropriate for Christians to express their love to that very special person who will be your mate in life. Solomon expressed the importance of protecting your purity to bring it into the very special marital relationship which God has prepared for you so it will blossom. There will still be times when you have to work through difficulties and hindrances and the things that get in the way. It is important to always try to get back together to keep your relationship cemented and healthy so you can bring godly offspring as the Israelites were challenged to do.

Charles Speer



Charles Speer received a Bachelor's degree in Electrical Engineering from Southern Methodist University in 1970. From there he went directly to Sunset School of Preaching in Lubbock, Texas. After graduation in 1972, Charles went to work with the Northside congregation in Dallas for five years. In 1977 Charles and Cara were married and moved to Weatherford, Oklahoma, where he preached for eight years. Their two children, Bryn and Jamin, were born in Weatherford.

In 1985 the Speer family attended six months of mission training at Sunset School of Preaching before leaving for New Zealand where they worked for three and a half years training preachers for New Zealand, New Guinea, and other points in the South Pacific at South Pacific Bible College.

Since 1989, Charles has been working full time with Sunset International Bible Institute while also serving on the ministry staff of the Sunset Church of Christ. Charles has a passion for the word of God and believes deeply that we need to have more respect and love for God's revelation. In *Wisdom Literature* he helps Bible students grasp the unique nature, value and place of the songs of poetry portions of the Old Testament.

ISBN 978-1-938335-75-4



3710 34th Street • Lubbock, TX 79410 USA
800-687-2121 • www.extensionschool.com