



## Putting the Puzzle Pieces Together

Fourth Series: "The Right Edge" Old Testament: Poetry  
Lesson 14: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon

### I. Proverbs

#### A. Introduction

1. A collection of "short pithy statements", or questions or short stories
2. About 900 proverbs, primarily written by Solomon (See I Kings 4:32). Some were only edited by him (See Ecc. 12:9). The men of Hezekiah (25:1) copied and arranged chapters 25-29. The sayings of Agur and Lemuel are the last 2 chapters of Proverbs.
3. The topics focus on wisdom ("skillful living") and deal with pride, humility, a work ethic, money management and so on.
4. It is a practical book that highlights timeless truths
5. Instructional literature like this can be found in other cultures

"The collection and canonization of instructional literature was largely the responsibility of the royal courts in Israel and elsewhere in the Near East, since the wisdom tradition was crucial to the training of young men employed in governmental service."

(A Survey of the Old Testament, p. 358)

6. The theme of the book is found in Prov. 1:7 "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, fools despise wisdom and instruction." The fear of the Lord: A worshipping, reverent submission to the God of the covenant.
  7. The book of Proverbs is quoted at least 20 times in the New Testament
- B. Solomon's proverbs were written by 931 BC (likely before Solomon's moral decline-see I Kings 11). Chapters 25-29 were collected about 230 years later.
- C. The Purpose: See Prov. 1:2-6
1. To impact moral discernment and discretion
  2. To develop mental clarity and perception
- D. Wisdom can be taught (4:1-9). It is the practice of righteous living before God. Wisdom is the skill and instruction is the discipline.
- E. An Outline
1. Title and goal (1:1-7)
  2. A father's invitation to wisdom (1:8-9:18)

3. Proverb's of Solomon (10:1-22:16)
4. The Sayings of the wise (22:17-24:34)
5. Hezekiah's collection of proverbs (25:1-29:27)
6. The sayings of Agur (30:1-33)
7. The sayings of King Lemeul (31:1-9)
8. An alphabet of woman's excellence (31:10-31)

## II. Ecclesiastes

### A. Introduction

1. The book records the search for life's meaning by someone called the Teacher or Preacher (1:1). It chronicles one man's desire to find satisfaction in life and instead all he seems to find is inconsistencies and absurdities. He concludes then that all is "meaningless" or "vanity".
2. Without God, there is a void in everyone's life. If we attempt to fill that void with pleasure, money, success, positions, or power, it ends up "meaningless". We cannot be happy apart from God.
3. It contains a number of literary genres (allegories, metaphors, proverbs etc.) and often addresses life's issues from a very distinct "bent". Some examples:
  - a. Work is meaningless (2:17)
  - b. Eat, drink and be merry (2:24, 3:13)
  - c. The circle of life is the same for men as animals (3:18-21)
  - d. Money is the answer for all things (10:19)

### B. Dating: It was probably written later in Solomon's life, c. 935BC

### C. An Outline

1. Introduction (1:1-11)
2. "All is meaningless" as discovered by experience (1:12-2:26)
3. "All is meaningless" as discovered by observation (3:1-6:12)
4. Counsel for living in a meaningless world (7:1-12:14)

## III. Song of Solomon (Song of Songs)

### A. Introduction

1. This is a love song likely written by Solomon. It is a difficult book to interpret and outline.
2. Conservative commentators see the main speakers as the Shulamite bride, the King (Solomon) and a chorus (the daughters of Jerusalem). Others see the King, the bride and a shepherd lover (other than the King himself).

3. The theme:
  - a. Fictional Drama: To highlight the joys of courtship and love
  - b. Allegory: To illustrate the love God has for his people
  - c. A historical account: A poetic record of the actual romance between Solomon and a girl from Shunem (southwest of the Sea of Galilee).
4. The purpose: The scenes in the book (some rather graphic) seem to underscore the joys of sexual activity in marriage.

“...it is reasonable that He would provide us with a guide to a pure sexual relationship between a husband and wife. In fact, the union of the two sexes was originally intended to illustrate the oneness of the Godhead (see Gen. 1:27, 2:24, I Cor. 6:16-20). Thus the Song is a bold and positive endorsement by God of marital love in all its physical and emotional beauty.”

(Walk thru the Bible, p. 178)

5. Secondary Purpose: To demonstrate God’s love for His bride (the church). See II Cor. 11:2, Rev. 19:7, 21:2 and 22:17.

#### B. An Outline

1. Beginning in love (1:1-5:1)
  - a. Falling in love (1:1-3:5)
  - b. United in love (3:6-5:1)
2. Broadening of love (5:2-8:14)
  - a. Struggling in love (5:2-7:10)
  - b. Growing in love (7:11-8:14)

### IV. So what?

The books of poetry highlight the fact that good, solid Biblical theology should affect our daily lives, not just our knowledge base.

### Discussion Questions:

1. Why do you think that the book of Proverbs so different that any other book in our Bible? Should it be studied differently? How?
2. Try to sum up the approach taken with the book of Ecclesiastes. Do you see the “tongue in cheek” effect?
3. Has the Song of Solomon been a regular part of your Bible study? Why or why not?