



THE WISDOM LITERATURE: P. E. J.

Bible Jam Session 7 – Spring



NOTE:
Spring Semester Schedule:

April 19 & 26 – Reflection Days (No Class)

Semester Completes on May 17 or 24 (TBD)

"For everything there is a season and a time for every matter
under heaven." (Eccl. 3:1)

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Old Testament

Torah: Instruction

Nevi'im: Prophets

Ketuvim: Writings

Ruth, Psalms, *Job*, *Proverbs*, *Ecclesiastes*, Song of Solomon, Lamentations, Daniel, Ester, Ezra (which includes Nehemiah) and I and II Chronicles

Wisdom Literature

There are three books of the Bible that are known as the Bible's wisdom literature—*Proverbs*, *Job*, and *Ecclesiastes*. They reveal the collected wisdom of generations of godly people and invite us to consider the complexity and simplicity of living wisely.

Solomon Reigned from c. 970-931 BCE

Predecessor: David

Successor: Rehoboam

Born: c. 990 BCE

The Book of Proverbs

An Old Testament book of “wisdom” writing found in the third section of the Jewish canon, known as the Ketuvim, or Writings. The book’s superscription, “The proverbs of Solomon. . . ,” is not to say that it was a whole or even individual proverbs should be credited to King Solomon, for scholarly examination discloses that it contains seven collections of wisdom materials (mostly short sayings) from a wide variety of periods, all after Solomon’s time.

The earliest collection (25:1–29:27), titled “proverbs of Solomon which the men of [Hezekiah](#) king of Judah copied,” came into being about 700 BCE; the latest (1:1–9:18) dates from the 4th century BCE. There also is an untitled acrostic poem about the virtuous wife (31:10–31).

[Hezekiah was the 13th successor of David)

The third collection (22:17–24:22) has attracted much attention because of its close affinity to the Egyptian “Wisdom of Amenemope,” variously dated between the 10th and 6th centuries BCE. This likeness suggests that Israel’s wisdom movement, whatever its origins, was influenced by the wisdom literature of other ancient Middle Eastern cultures.

Source: Britannica.com

Ecclesiastes was written c. 450-200 BCE

Book of Job was Written between the 7th and 4th Centuries BCE

From Chapter 15

Understanding the Old Testament by Berhard W. Anderson. Prentice Hall, NJ. 1998

A Kingdom of Priests

Cyrus of Persia Mid 6th Century BCE

“Modern history provides memorable images of people who, having been crowded into concentration camps or were subjected to military occupation, become wild with joy at the site of a liberating army.

“Similarly, Cyrus Cylinder, a firsthand historical witness to the jubilation evoked by the advance of the Persian army in the middle of the sixth century BC E. Cyrus’s benevolent policy, was a welcome relief from Babylonian tyranny, both to the Babylonians, who in high anticipation opened the doors of their cities and their hearts to him, and to the many captive peoples then under his rule. Apparently Cyrus of Persia sensed the futility of trying to lash people of diverse backgrounds and national traditions into subservient unity — a policy that had been the foundation of the empires whose lands he inherited. To be sure, Cyrus, King of Persia did not relax his political power. The Persian army had a proven and powerful fighting force, and the Persian government soon developed a swift communication system — a forerunner of the American “pony express” — that made it possible to supervise his far-flung empire, efficiently divided into satrapies (provinces). But Cyrus must’ve understood the limitations of power, or perhaps he realized that the emperor who inspires honor and loyalty from his people also enjoys an increase in power.”

* Excavated at Babylon in 1879, the Cylinder was inscribed in Babylonian cuneiform on the orders of the Persian king Cyrus the Great after he captured Babylon in 539 B.C. It marks the establishment of Persian rule and records how Cyrus restored shrines and allowed deported peoples to return home.

Cyrus' Edict of Liberation:

“Cyrus chose to abandon the “scorched-earth” tactics of the Assyrians and Babylonians, who had destroyed cities and temples, looted sacred treasures, and transported idols and people into captivity. With a political about-face, he permitted his subject people to carry on their customs, to worship their gods, and to resettle in their homelands.”

What followed:

1. Cyrus appointed a “prince of Judah, Sheshbazzar (who may have been of the lineage of King David). His role was primarily to rebuild the temple.
2. He was succeeded by Zerubbabel, a descendant of Jehoiachin I, the exiled king who many regarded as Judah’s legitimate ruler. Zerubbabel encouraged the observance of Jewish traditions, kindling the hope of the Jews that a new age had begun, and the “new dawn” of Second Isaiah was to break into the full light of day.
3. Ezra renewed the covenant.
4. Nehemiah rebuilt the walls of the Temple.

Bible Project Video: Overview: Ezra – Nehemiah

<https://youtu.be/MkETkRv9tG8>

The prophets Haggai and Zechariah, Joel and Malachi help to understand the impact of this revival of Judah following its captivity of 70 years from around 608 BCE – 538 BCE.

1. Haggai preached with nationalistic fervor. He proclaimed to the people that economic conditions in the land were precarious because they had left Yahweh’s house lying in ruins while they lived in fine paneled houses.

2. Zechariah (dated later) expresses the same hope for a restoration of the Jewish state. It is couched in cryptic language, abounds with marvelous visions of the future, and foresees the coming of a dramatic finale when Yahweh's foes will be shattered and the dominion of God will be reestablished.
3. Malachi accused the Jewish community of dishonoring Yahweh by placing polluted food on the altar and by offering sacrifices of lame, blind, and sickly animals.

“Malachi pointed out that even the Gentiles magnified Yahweh's name (Mal. 1:11) whereas Israel was profaning it by inadequate and insincere worship. The priests were not guarding the true Torah, men were divorcing their Jewish wives to marry foreign women, and social injustices abounded. To make matters worse, the people were complaining that serving God did not pay, since evildoers came out on top. “Where is the God of justice?” they asked (Mal. 2:17). *Why serve God if religion yields no tangible benefits (Mal. 3:13-15)?*

Wisdom Literature. <https://youtu.be/VeUiuSK81-0>

Proverbs
Ecclesiastes
Job

God's Hidden Purpose and Ecclesiastes

Hellenistic:

Relating to Greek history, language, and culture from the death of Alexander the Great to the defeat of Cleopatra and Mark Antony by Octavian in 31 BC. During this period Greek culture flourished, spreading through the Mediterranean and into the Near East and Asia and centering on Alexandria in Egypt and Pergamum in Turkey.

'The dominant language in the Hellenistic world, was Greek.'

Determinism:

The doctrine that all events, including human action, are ultimately determined by causes external to the will. Some philosophers have taken determinism to imply that individual human beings have no free will and cannot be held morally responsible for their actions.

Epicureanism

An ancient school of philosophy founded in Athens by Epicurus. The school rejected determinism and advocated hedonism (pleasure as the highest good), but of a restrained kind: mental pleasure was regarded more highly than physical, and the ultimate pleasure was held to be freedom from anxiety and mental pain, especially that arising from needless fear of death and of the gods.

Stoicism:

An ancient Greek school of philosophy founded at Athens by Zeno of Citium. The school taught that virtue, the highest good, is based on knowledge; the wise live in harmony with the divine Reason (also identified with Fate and Providence) that governs nature, and are indifferent to the vicissitudes of fortune and to pleasure and pain.

Introduction to Ecclesiastes...

1. Some scholars believe that Ecclesiastes author, living in the Hellenistic Period Inaugurated by Alexander the great, was influenced by Greek philosophy and by the sense of fate (Greek: Moira) that obsessed Greek culture. There is a superficial resemblance to the philosophy of Epicureanism, for the sage's advice is "seizing the day" and enjoying momentary pleasures while they last; moreover there is a kind of determinism in his outlook — a realization that whatever happens has been foreordained long ago. Qoholéth (Teacher) accepts the joys of sufferings of life with an inner serenity, undisturbed by the ebb and flow of fortune. This teaching is reminiscent of the philosophy of Stoicism; indeed some have suggested several words used by Qoholéth are taken from a Greek context. For example, the word translated "chance, accident" is said to be the philosophical equivalent of the Greek *tyche* ("chance").
2. Clearly Qoholéth was influenced to some degree by the spirit of Greek culture, whose atmosphere he breathed. He could no more escape the Hellenistic spirit than modern writer could avoid the influence of 20th century science. In spite of his "tragic sense of life," however, Qoholéth never surrenders the conviction that God is sovereign over human affairs. The tragedy of life is not that the inexhaustible power of fate governs both human beings and the gods, as in Greek culture, but the divine wisdom is so inscrutable that human beings cannot know God's ways. Qoholéth affirms that everything is "in the hand of God". Trouble is a God's sovereignty is so completely hidden that one is left in the dark about the divine plan. Therefore, to human wisdom events appear to be ultimately meaningless. "There is nothing new under the sun": the days turn in a circle, rather than moving toward the fulfillment of purpose.

3. The word “Ecclesiastes” comes to us from the Greek Septuagint by way of Jerome’s translation, the Latin Vulgate. It has its roots in “eklesia” – those gathers. It is to the eklesia that the Teacher or teacher known as *qoholéth* speaks. It is ore of a *function* than the name of somene. (Think of moderator.)
4. In the case of Ecclesiastes, the qoholéth is thought to be Solomon, and some say that had it not been Solomon – Ecclesiastes would not have made it into the canon of the bible.
5. It is a skeptical and melancholy work, even though one of its most famous passages might suggest otherwise:
6. For everything there is a season and a time for every matter under heaven:

A time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;
a time to weep, and a time laugh;
a time to embrace and a time from embracing;
a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
a time for way, and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

1. “Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to the skillful; but time and chance happen to them all.” Eccl. 9:11

⁹ You who are young, make the most of your youth.

Relish your youthful vigor.

Follow the impulses of your heart.

If something looks good to you, pursue it.

But know also that not just anything goes;

You have to answer to God for every last bit of it.

¹⁰ Live footloose and fancy-free—

You won't be young forever.

Youth lasts about as long as smoke.

12 ¹⁻² Honor and enjoy your Creator while you're still young,

Before the years take their toll and your vigor wanes,

Before your vision dims and the world blurs

And the winter years keep you close to the fire.

³⁻⁵ In old age, your body no longer serves you so well.

Muscles slacken, grip weakens, joints stiffen.

The shades are pulled down on the world.

You can't come and go at will. Things grind to a halt.

The hum of the household fades away.

You are wakened now by bird-song.

Hikes to the mountains are a thing of the past.

Even a stroll down the road has its terrors.

Your hair turns apple-blossom white,

Adorning a fragile and impotent matchstick body.

Yes, you're well on your way to eternal rest,

While your friends make plans for your funeral.

⁶⁻⁷ Life, lovely while it lasts, is soon over.

Life as we know it, precious and beautiful, ends.

The body is put back in the same ground it came from.

The spirit returns to God, who first breathed it.

⁸ It's all smoke, nothing but smoke.

The Quester says that everything's smoke.

Conclusion:

[The Two Ways of Proverbs: A reading of Israel's wisdom literature from this kind of standpoint might see the book of Proverbs as a collection of quaint sayings and admonitions whose application and practicality are no longer in effect. But a key to understanding the wisdom of the book of Proverbs is to understand the "two ways," a concept used to teach the importance of choosing wisely which path or lifestyle would be followed: the path of the wise and righteous, or the way of the foolish and wicked.¹

The Book of Ecclesiastes vigorously read repudiates to claim the traditional wisdom can discern God's purpose. The sages of the book of Proverbs had claimed confidently that wisdom, beginning with "the fear of Yahweh," could chart the Two Ways and even identify the travelers along each road. But koalas insisted that wisdom can do none of this, for the human mind cannot fathom gods wisdom. Since religious people are prone to settle comfortably in their faith, supposing that they possess the answers to life's questions, it is fortunate the rabbis finally decided to include the book of Ecclesiastes in the canon. As one of the editors of Ecclesiastes wrote, "sayings of the wise are like codes". Like the prophets, they awaken people from complacent orthodoxy and stimulate the struggle for faith that could stand all the tests of doubt and despair.

And that leads us to Job...and Next Week.

The Two Ways of Proverbs

¹ The Doctrine Of The 'Two Ways' In Proverbs -- By: Daniel P. Bricker

Journal: Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society

Volume: JETS 38:4 (Dec 1995)

Article: The Doctrine Of The 'Two Ways' In Proverbs

Author: Daniel P. Bricker