



WISDOM

The books of Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs depict how to navigate life's complexity, often called "wisdom literature."* Through these books, the Bible shows us following God is more than just acquiring biblical knowledge. It's about seeing reality the way God sees it and learning how to live within it.

PROVERBS

Author: Attributed to Solomon, Hezekiah's men, Agur, and Lemuel

When: ~ 970 BC - 322 B.C.

Summary: Proverbs provide truisms, not promises, about how to live in God's world.

The book is broken down into seven collections.

- Solomon's work makes up collections one through four (1:1-24:34)
- Hezekiah's men make up collection five (25:1-29:27)
- King Agur (an unknown non-Israelite king) makes up collection six (30)
- King Lemuel (another unknown non-Israelite king) makes up collection seven (31).

SONG OF SONGS

Author: Chapter 1, verse 1 says, "which is Solomon's" (1:1). This could either mean Solomon wrote it or it was written in his honor. If he wrote it, it's odd, considering this poem is about a husband and a wife, and Solomon had over 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:1-3). So either the author is the historic Solomon and/or someone writing in the wisdom/literary tradition of Solomon.

When: ~ 970 BC - 322 B.C.

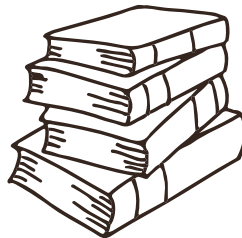
Summary: The Song of Songs is ancient love poetry. Generally, how to interpret the book falls under three main categories.

God's loving pursuit of His people, Israel.

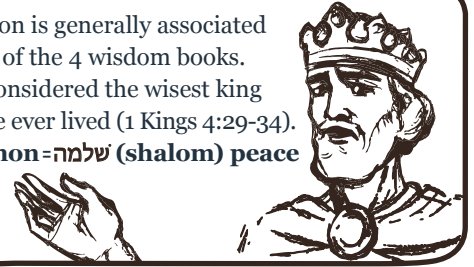
Jesus' loving pursuit of his church.

Ancient love poetry reflects the goodness of marriage and sex.

These interpretations are not at odds with one another; instead, they complement each other.



Solomon is generally associated with 3 of the 4 wisdom books. He's considered the wisest king to have ever lived (1 Kings 4:29-34).
Solomon = שלמה (shalom) peace



ECCLESIASTES

Author: Written by the *Qohelet* meaning "Teacher" (1:1, 1:12, 12:9-14). While not stated overtly, the consensus is this is either Solomon and/or someone in the wisdom/literary tradition of Solomon.

When: ~ 970 BC - 322 B.C.

Summary: Ecclesiastes shows how everything we try to find meaning in - from wealth to pleasure to status - is ultimately worthless.

These two books correct potential misunderstandings of Proverbs: life is unpredictable and filled with injustice and suffering. Nevertheless, we will face situations where we must still obey and submit to God's mysterious sovereignty.

JOB

Author: ???

When: ????

Summary: The book of Job confronts the general views concerning suffering and injustice - why do bad things happen to God's people? Why do evil people seem to prosper? Job demands an answer, and eventually, God shows up (ch. 38-41)! What's odd, though, is God doesn't give Job the answer he wants. Instead, God gives Job the answer he needs, which is that God is in control.

*Wisdom is a short-handed way modern interpreters have categorized these books, but it's worth mentioning the original Jewish audience did not have a separate category per se called "wisdom." Israel saw all of the Old Testament as "wisdom." Nevertheless, what all these books share in common is a zoomed-out view of the world and how to navigate it with God as the center. (For more, see Will Kynes' *An Obituary for "Wisdom Literature"* and Tremper Longman's *The Fear of the Lord is Wisdom.*)

OBSERVATION - WHAT DOES THIS SAY?



Is this poetry, narrative, or dialogue?

Whatever the case, read the entire portion rather than cherry-picking one or two verses so you can understand the line of thought. Generally speaking, heading breaks and chapter breaks are good indications of when a passage starts and stops.

INTERPRETATION - WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?



If prose/poetry...

- ...Is this a truism (how the world generally works)?
- ...Is this a promise or a warning (an “if/then” statement)?
- ...Is this symbolism? Is there anywhere else in the Bible that uses this same symbolism/imagery to help shed light on this passage?
- ...Is this parallelism? Parallelism is when two or more lines of poetry are back to back to either compare or contrast a concept. This is unique to Hebrew poetry.



If narrative...

- ...What, when, and where is this happening? Who are the characters?
- ...What’s the plot so far?
- ...Does the plot/action represent someone who is wise or not?

If dialogue...

- ...Who is the speaker? Based on the context, does this person represent godly wisdom or not?

“The mark of spiritual maturity is not how much you understand, but how much you use. In the spiritual realm, the opposite of ignorance is not knowledge but obedience.”
-Howard Hendricks

How does this connect to the rest of the Bible?

These books are not closed off from the rest of Scripture but pick up themes, stories, and ideas picked up elsewhere to help shed light on the passage you’re reading. BibleGateway.com is a free online resource with a built-in cross-reference tool to find other passages.

How does this connect to Jesus?

- If this is a passage to obey...how does Jesus’ obedience inform us? How does he exemplify this?
- If this is a warning passage...how might Jesus’ warning passages in the Gospels provide more insight?
- If this is a passage on suffering...how does Jesus’ suffering provide greater context?

APPLICATION - WHAT DOES THIS MEAN FOR US?



- How does this passage help me see reality the way God sees it (Prov. 1:9, Eccl. 12:13-14)?
- How is this passage specifically calling me to respond?

“Wisdom is the application of God’s will to the nitty-gritty of life.”
-Temper Longman

HOW DO THESE BOOKS...

Point to the rest of the Old Testament?*

- Wisdom sayings paint a picture of how to live in relationship with God and His world, functioning similarly to the “laws” in the Torah
- Wisdom is seen as a tree of life (Prov 3:18, c.f. Gen. 2-3)
- The garden imagery in Song of Songs points back to Adam and Eve in Eden (c.f. Gen. 1-2)
- In Job, God speaks of creation and bringing order out of chaos (Job 38-41, c.f. Gen. 1-2)
- Life apart from God only brings death (Eccl. 11:7-12:7, c.f. Gen. 3, Deut. 30:11-20)

Point forward to the New Testament?

- Jesus is wisdom embodied (Prov. 8, John 1:1-3, Col. 1:15-17)
- Jesus calls himself wiser than Solomon (Matt. 12:42)
- Jesus calls those who listen to him wise (Prov. 1-9, Matt 7:24-27)
- Jesus pursues his bride, the Church (Song of Songs, Eph. 5:22-33)
- The brevity of life ought to prompt us to live wisely (Ecclesiastes, Job 7:7, James 4:13-17)
- In the NT letters, the apostles offer practical wisdom on how to live in their particular time and place



**For more Old Testament connections within the Old Testament, check out *Old Testament Use of the Old Testament* by Gary Schnittjer

***For more New Testament connections referencing the New Testament, check out *Dictionary of the New Testament Use of the Old Testament* by G.K. Beale, D.A. Carson, Benjamin Gladd, and Andrew Naselli