

## PART I: SELECTED BIBLIOGRAPHY

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## PART II: INTRODUCTION

With our introduction to the Old Testament Poetic Books, we will examine their characteristics, some general information about them, wisdom in the Old Testament, wisdom and the Old Testament Poetic Books, and the theology of the Poetic Books.

### I. Characteristics of Poetic Books

- A. They entertain questions or reflect tensions which are directed to God in the various situations of life. This is illustrated in each book.
  - 1. In Job, Psalms, Proverbs, the speakers address God on man's behalf but in the prophets the speakers address man on God's behalf.
  - 2. Ecclesiastes is basically a human monologue.
  - 3. Song of Songs is very anthropocentric.
  - 4. Lamentations is a song mourning the fall of Jerusalem.
- B. They have a universality. This is reflected by the four following items.
  - 1. Problems of suffering
  - 2. The conscience marred by sin
  - 3. The transience of human life
  - 4. Passionate love of man and woman
- C. They reflect a courageous spirit.
- D. They often have a mood of challenge and skepticism.
- E. They focus on man's meditations on God and God's response.
- F. They are characterized as being individual and personal. This is evidence of the importance of the individual to God.

### II. General Information about the Poetic Books

#### A. Place in the Hebrew Canon

- 1. In the Hebrew OT canon, the Poetical books are found in the section called *Kethûbim*, "Writings," or as the LXX has it, *Hagiographa*, "sacred writings."

#### 2. The Book of Truth

"Job," <i>ʾîyôḇ</i>	}	"truth," <i>ʾēmet</i>
"Proverbs," <i>mišlê</i>		
"Psalms," <i>tʿhillîm</i>		

- 3. Five *Megilloth*, "scrolls"
  - Song of Solomon
  - Lamentations
  - Ecclesiastes

## B. Place in Greek Canon

Lamentations is placed with the Prophets following the Book of Jeremiah as in our canon. The other five poetic books are placed after the historical writings but before the prophets.

## C. Poetic Books as Wisdom Literature

1. Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes can be clearly characterized as wisdom literature.
2. Song of Songs and Psalms cannot be strictly classified as wisdom literature, but they do have affinities with wisdom literature.
  - a. Many psalms can be characterized as wisdom literature.
  - b. Song of Songs shares some common features with wisdom literature: it is didactic and the literary form is a song.
3. Though Lamentations is similar to wisdom literature with a poetic form, Lamentations in content cannot be classified as wisdom literature.

## III. Wisdom in the Old Testament

Our discussion at this point will focus on those books that are regarded as clear examples of wisdom, viz., Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. We will initially look at how the Hebrew term for wisdom is used for skills related to work and intellect. Then we will look at it as a literary genre. This will be followed by a presentation of the addressees of wisdom, wisdom and the scribe, wisdom and the Temple cult, and wisdom and the prophets.

### A. Wisdom as Skills and Arts

*Hokmâ*, “wisdom,” is a noun and *ḥāḳām* is an adjective. The root *ḥkm* is used approximately 300 times in the Old Testament. Its dominant appearance, approximately 200 times, is found in Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes (Zuck, “Theology,” p. 209). It was also used in reference to skills and arts. We should notice three of these types of uses.

1. Artisans, Exodus 35:30–36:1
2. Practical arts
  - a. Goldsmiths, Jeremiah 10:9
  - b. Sailors, Psalm 107:27, Ezekiel 37:8
  - c. Woman skilled in lamentation, Jeremiah 9:17
  - d. Magicians and soothsayers, Genesis 41:8, Isaiah 44:25
  - e. Military strategists and statesmen, Isaiah 10:13, 29:14, Jeremiah 49:7
3. Musical arts, 1 Kings 4:31–32

These uses demonstrate that this term relates to a skill in performing work and intellectual activities. From these, we can see how the term functions in

reference to skills for living which becomes the focus in the Old Testament for literary wisdom.

## B. Literary wisdom

There is a debate among students of the Old Testament about whether wisdom is a philosophy and theology of life or a form of literature. Wisdom is best taken as a theological perspective on life that became used as a literary genre. As Osborne has stated it: “Primarily wisdom is a theological pattern of thinking that applies the ‘wisdom’ of God to practical issues of life. This attitude results in wisdom sayings and then in larger bodies of literature that collect such sayings (such as Proverbs, Sirach) or discuss wisdom themes (such as Job, Ecclesiastes)” (*Hermeneutical*, pp. 191–92).

Not only was the literary form common in Israel but it was also found in other ancient Near Eastern cultures.

Edomites, Jeremiah 49:7, Obadiah 8

Phoenicians, Ezekiel 28, Zechariah 9:2

Egyptians, Isaiah 19:11–13

Babylonians, Isaiah 44:25, 47:10, Jeremiah 50:35, 51:57, Daniel 2:12–13

Assyrians, Isaiah 10:13

1 Kings 4:30 indicates that Solomon was a leader in this regard.

### 1. Characteristics of wisdom literature

There are four characteristics of wisdom literature that we will briefly examine.

- a. Wisdom literature has a practical orientation (Osborne, *Hermeneutical*, p. 192). This literature is especially addressed to the youths of Israel. As such, they needed to be encouraged about subjects such as acceptable speech and etiquette (Prov 29:20), domestic relationships (Prov 10:1), self-control (Prov 25:28), material possessions (Prov 10:22, 11:4), and why the righteous suffer and the wicked prosper (Eccl 7:15–18). The practical nature of wisdom literature is reflected by Kidner’s arrangement of the content of Proverbs around these eight subjects: God and man, wisdom, fools, sluggards, friends, words, the family, and life and death (*Proverbs*, pp. 31–56).
- b. Wisdom literature emphasizes that one must have a complete dependence on God. Since God is a Sovereign who with His absolute control of everything (Prov 16:1, 4, 9) permits the godly, wise person to experience suffering and difficulty (Eccl 7:1–14), God’s absolute sovereign rule should force the believer to recognize his limitations and God’s complete control of life (Eccl 7:14). Wisdom literature’s stress on one completely depending on God is demonstrated from three theological observations.

- 1) Wisdom is predicated on the Mosaic Covenant. This is demonstrated by the fact that the instruction in places such as Proverbs 3:1–12 and 4:4–5 are predicated upon a father teaching's being consistent with the Torah (cf. Prov 3:3 with Deut 6:6–8). We should also notice how genuine obedience results in blessing (cf. Deut 6:24 with Prov 3:9–10) and disobedience disgrace and judgment (Prov 10:16, 21; 19:3, 9). Since God is the One bringing the results according to His time schedule (cf. Prov 3:1–10 with vv. 11–12), one must live his life in an environment of obedience to the covenant.
  
  - 2) Wisdom literature has a tendency to personify wisdom as an attribute and extension of God. This is “seen in one sense as a ‘craftsman’ standing alongside of and aiding the God of creation (Prov 8:29–30), as a female teacher inviting students to learn from her at the gates of the city (Prov 1:20–21; 8:1–36) and as a hostess inviting people to her banquet (9:1–12). Wisdom is contrasted with the adulteress (2:16–19; 7:6–27) and with a foolish hostess (9:13–18)” (Osborne, *Hermeneutical*, p. 193). Since this type of wisdom comes from God, we must look to Him for this.
  
  - 3) Wisdom literature has a strong emphasis on fearing God. Though the fear of God is not found exclusively in wisdom literature (Deut 6:24), it is more precisely developed in wisdom material (Job 1:1; 28:28; Prov 1:7; 3:7; 8:13; 16:6; 31:30; Eccl 12:13). The Hebrew term for fear may be used in contexts, which are of a legal nature, religious, or moral (Smith, p. 6). The focus of wisdom is in the moral realm. The fear of God denotes a relationship with God resulting in a morally pleasing lifestyle. In Proverbs 2:4–5 fearing God is correlated with knowing God. A result of this is that one hates evil in 8:13. In Job 1:1 Job feared God and departed from evil. Other practical results include qualities such as confidence (Prov 14:24), humility (3:7), and contentment (15:16). We might define the fear of God as an unconditional, reverential submission to the Sovereign LORD (ibid.). Perhaps, we could correlate the OT concept of fearing God with the NT concept of believing in God.
- c. Wisdom literature has an emphasis on creation theology. This is seen in Proverbs 8 where God in His wisdom created the world (Job 38:4–7; Prov 3:19–20; Ps 104:24). In addition, God's orderly design in creation suggests to man that there is order in God's administration of divine justice. God uses His creation of the universe as well as His providential arrangement of it to teach Job that he must submit to God's moral order in administering divine justice (Job 38–42). Furthermore, God's creative work as used in wisdom material is foundational for enjoying life. Man's food, drink, work, youth, wife, and other privileges in this life are part of God's creative design for man in this life (Prov 5:18; 10:1, 28; 12:4, 20;

29:2–3; Eccl 2:24–25; 3:12–13, 22; 5:18–19; 8:15; 9:7–10; 11:8–9; 12:1; Cant 1:4; 3:11). “The righteous, though part of the finite, creaturely world, can experience joy as part of God’s design in creation” (Zuck, “Theology,” p. 219).

- d. All wisdom literature is inspired, descriptive truth but not all wisdom is normative truth. In earlier critical literature dealing with wisdom material, there was a tendency to completely deny any authority being inherent in this literature. Since this was based on tradition and experience, how could it claim the same authority as the special revelation contained in the prophetic material? Because of inerrancy, we must recognize that all the wisdom material is inspired. However, not all biblical material is normative. Satan’s lie in Genesis 3 is not normative. However, it is descriptive truth. Satan really did lie and we have an accurate representation of that lie in Genesis 3. How then do we determine what is normative and what is descriptive truth? Comparing wisdom material with other biblical material most easily does this. In examining what is often called prescriptive, or normative, truth, we must also distinguish between that which is a generalization and that which is a moral absolute. For example, Proverbs 10:30 says, “The righteous will never be uprooted, but the wicked will not remain in the land.” The point of this is that the righteous will not be removed from the land of Palestine. This is a generalization that applied at periods in Israel’s history but it did not apply to Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel. It certainly does not apply to us. This is not a proverb containing a moral absolute but a generalization. Furthermore, we will need to take into account dispensational distinctives. The Christian should not expect to permanently live in his homeland because of his righteousness. The instructional material in Proverbs 5 against adultery by maintaining a proper marital relationship does contain a moral absolute. Therefore, we must have an element of caution when we apply wisdom without regard to other biblical material (we will look at this more fully when we examine Proverbs).

## 2. Forms of wisdom literature

There are many different forms that are found in the wisdom literature of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. These have been conveniently categorized in the four genres: proverb, instruction, autobiographic, and disputation speeches (Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 313–22).

### a. Proverb

Ryken has defined a proverb as “a concise, memorable statement of truth” (*How to Read*, p. 121). This is a truth that has been learned through human experience. It is usually stated in the indicative mood. In the Old Testament human experience has been interpreted in light of the covenant (Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, pp. 313–

14; we will examine this more fully in Proverbs). There are basically two types of these.

1) Descriptive proverb—this describes a situation of life without noting how it applies or what its exceptions are (ibid.).

Proverbs 18:16—“A gift opens the way for the giver, and ushers him into the presence of the great.”

2) Prescriptive proverb—this does more than simply tell about the way life is, it seeks to characterize an attitude or an action in order to influence behavior (ibid.).

Proverbs 14:31—“He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.”

#### b. Instruction

This moves beyond the indicative mood to the imperative. This may be either a command or a prohibition. Many times these will be followed by one or more motive clauses (ibid., p. 316). There are basically three kinds.

1) Shorter instruction—this is a briefly stated imperative. It may or may not be followed by a motive clause. The former is reflected in Proverbs 16:3 and the later in 8:33 (ibid.).

Proverbs 16:3—“Commit to the LORD whatever you do, and your plans will succeed.”

Proverbs 8:33—“Hear instruction and be wise, and do not neglect it.”

2) Longer instruction—an instruction is developed in one or more paragraphs. These are especially prominent in Proverbs 1–9 (ibid.). More specifically, these units are 1:8–19; 2:1–22; 3:1–12, 13–24, 25–35; 4:1–9, 10–27; 5:1–23; 6:20–35; 7:1–27 (Murphy, *Wisdom Literature*, p. 49).

- 3) Wisdom speech—this is a subgenre of the longer instruction. In this type, wisdom as well as folly are personified as women publicly proclaiming a message. For example, the lady wisdom cries out to deliver its recipients in Proverbs 1:20–33; 8:1–36; 9:1–6 and the lady folly calls aloud to mislead in 9:13–17 (*ibid.*, p. 317).

c. Autobiographic

There are two autobiographic genres, an example story and reflection.

- 1) Example story—the narrator recounts an illustration or personal experience and how from experience he has learned a truth worth leaving to others. There are three basic parts to this genre: an opening where the narrator notes his experience, a story illustrating his point, and the moral conclusion. Proverbs 24:30–34 is an example of this. The opening is in v. 30, the example story in vv. 31–32, and the moral conclusion in vv. 33–34 (Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard, *Biblical Interpretation*, p. 317).
- 2) Reflection genre—with this type of genre the sage “reports personal musings and conclusions about a truth, often citing firsthand observations, example stories, and lengthy thought. Though loosely structured, reflections have the following formal features: (1) opening formulas like ‘I saw and considered...’ or ‘I passed by...’; (2) the quotation of proverbs, use of rhetorical questions, or citation of example stories; and (3) a concluding moral” (*ibid.*, p. 318). Though more loosely structured this is especially prominent in the book of Ecclesiastes. An example of this is Ecclesiastes 5:13–20. The opening is found in 5:13a (“I have seen a grievous evil under the sun”), this is followed by an example in vv. 13b–14 followed by a series proverbs in vv. 15–17, and the concluding moral is stated in vv. 18–20.

d. Disputation speech

The book of Job contains many different forms. It contains forms such as complaint, hymn, lawsuit, oath of innocence, and others. The primary genre used in Job is the disputation speech, though it is not precise to call the whole book of Job a disputation speech. With this type of genre the speaker attempts to persuade his listener about a certain subject. Unlike the prophetic material where only the prophet’s side is presented, the disputation speeches in Job present opposing perspectives on Job’s situation (*ibid.*, pp. 319–21).

C. The Addressees of Wisdom

The addressees of wisdom include the following.

1. The individual

- a. National interests are in the background but the corporate life of the nation is served by directing individuals in the way of the good life.
- b. History was not the major focus. History is presented in philosophical terms—how does the individual treat the past?

## 2. The young

The purpose of wisdom is how to instruct the young to attain the good life.

- a. This is primarily directed to potential leaders, upper class.
  - 1) It taught them how to live the cultured life.
  - 2) It taught them how to make responsible decisions.
- b. The common people would be affected by having properly trained leaders. However, with “the emphasis upon marriage, the home, childbearing, and domestic stability and responsibility, it is conceivable that wisdom was popularly employed in the family as a part of the home educational process” (Bullock, p. 23).

## D. Wisdom and the Scribe

- 1. In monarchial times the scribe and wise men were closely linked together and may even be identical.
- 2. In postexilic times the scribes were wisdom teachers.

## E. Wisdom and the Temple Cult

Quite often we use the term cult in a pejorative way; however, it is a neutral term. As defined by Webster, cult is “a system of religious rites and ordinances.” This is the way many books on Old Testament subjects use this term.

Wisdom literature has a supportive role for the Israelite religious institution by emphasizing obeying the Law and being faithful to God.

## F. Wisdom and the Prophets

- 1. Jeremiah 8:8–9—the prophets conflicted with wisdom teachers when the prophets superseded the Scriptures.
- 2. Yet the prophets attributed wisdom to the Lord (Isa 28:23–29) and shared common stylistic features (such as the proverb, Isa 49:24) and vocabulary.

## IV. The Poetic Books and Wisdom

We will not focus on the Old Testament wisdom literature and its corresponding form in the ancient Near East that has supplied the modern student with a rich supply of comparative literature. Similar literature is to be found in Mesopotamia, Egypt, and Canaan (see Bullock, pp. 27–38; *ANET*; and Murphy, *Wisdom Literature*, pp. 9–12, and note especially his bibliographical notes). Our focus here is on canonical wisdom literature and the poetic books.

### A. Contemplative Wisdom

This is characterized as being philosophical which does not accept things as they appear without asking why.

1. Job—What is justice? How should one respond to the seeming inequities in life?
2. Ecclesiastes—What is the solution to the enigma of life? Two truths are emphasized in Ecclesiastes.
  - a. Human life is a gift from God (this may also be taught, or at least implied, in Job).
  - b. Life should be controlled by the fear of God.

### B. Practical Wisdom

This is largely practical and pragmatic. It is also controlled by “the fear of God” motif as in Job and Ecclesiastes.

1. Proverbs
2. Some Psalms—examples or aspects of practical wisdom in the Psalms are the following:
  - a. Belief in retribution (Pss 37, 49, 73);
  - b. Belief that righteousness is rewarded (Pss 1, 112, 127, 128, 133, 144:12–15); and
  - c. Belief that the Law of the Lord is instructive for elements of life (Pss 1, 19, 119).

### C. Song of Songs

This is in the form of a song and therefore has the literary form of wisdom literature, but does not emphasize the fear of God or personal righteousness.

### D. Lamentations

Lamentations cannot be classified as wisdom literature. It is written in the form of an extended national lament.

## V. Theology in the Poetic Books

In our discussion of this section of the canon’s theology, we will examine this under two rubrics, God and man. Before developing these subjects, we will briefly examine the center of Biblical Theology.

### A. The *Mitte* of Biblical Theology

When one attempts to set forth what is the center of Biblical Theology, he is moving into a highly debated field. The reason for this is that many attempts are so general that they can apply to any religious body of material. These include suggestions such as God, God and Man. Others are too myopic such as promise, God’s covenant, and God’s sovereignty. One must have a statement that is comprehensive enough to cover the whole canon, yet precise enough that we do not lose sight of the message of our canon. I have found the

suggestions of Alva J. McClain, Kenneth Barker, and other dispensationalists to be the most satisfying. Their suggestion is essentially that in glorifying himself God is establishing on earth his sovereign kingdom over all that he has created. Barker has more fully stated it in this fashion: “God is asserting and establishing His kingdom or rule over all that He has created, thus bringing all creation, through the mediatorial work of His Son into complete submission and order under His sovereignty in order to bring glory unto Himself.”

A major emphasis in the Old Testament is the theocratic kingdom. With the exception of Lamentations, the Poetic Books assume the kingdom but do not essentially enlarge upon Israel’s history and laws. Our understanding is that the focus of the Old Testament Poetic Books is God’s sovereign rule and man’s response to the Sovereign God. In wisdom literature, the biblical authors seek to demonstrate that the Sovereign God orchestrates His moral agenda according to His wisdom and freedom. Though writing about Job, Smith’s comments are applicable to wisdom literature. “In his wisdom he is free to allow sin, suffering, and the Accuser to exist; yet still fulfill his purposes. In the midst of negative circumstances justice exists, but it is mysteriously tempered with divine wisdom and freedom. This perspective is a unique contribution that wisdom theology makes to OT theology, and it is an essential part of a wholistic understanding of God’s rule.... Without an understanding of his mysterious wisdom and freedom, God would be almost a puppet, bound to respond, automatically in predetermined ways to all behavior, never free to rule in dimensions beyond human comprehension” (p. 17). The ways in which God works in His moral order also applies to other portions of the canon as well as in all history.

## B. God

The poetic books are immensely rich in their doctrine of God. We will examine the attributes of God, His relationship to the universe, and His sovereignty.

### 1. God’s Attributes

We will divide God’s attributes into that of His greatness and His goodness.

#### a. God’s Attributes of Greatness

The attributes of God’s greatness that we will examine from Job are His spirituality, personality, life, infinity, and incomprehensibility.

##### 1) Spirituality

As Jesus asserted in John 4:24, God is spirit. By this we mean that God is a spiritual being not having a physical nature. As such, God is not bound by the limitation of a body. This is recognized in Psalm 139:7–12 and by Job in 10:4 where he asserted that God does not have eyes of flesh. Because God is spirit, He is not bound by the same limitations that one with a physical body has. The Spirit of God can

originate life as well as sustain it. Job recognized this in 27:3 and Elihu in 33:4; 34:14–15. By implication, this would mean that God is actively present in His creation and in the unfolding of its history (immanence).

## 2) Personality

God is not a force, but a personal being. He has a moral nature, intelligence, self-consciousness, will, and emotion. God's creation and providential control reflected in Job 38–41 demonstrate His personal nature. This is demonstrated in that He loves and chastens His people (Prov 3:12) and delights in those who are characterized by truth and righteousness (Prov 12:22; 15:8–9). In Ecclesiastes God's personality is also reflected in that He despises (5:2), is angered (5:6), and is pleased (2:26; 7:26).

## 3) Life

God is a living being. When God raised His first set of rhetorical questions in Job 38:4–7, the point was that Job was not alive at creation. What these reflect is that God was alive at that time and that He created everything. Since God is the Creator, no one created Him. Unlike His creation that drew its existence from God, He was not derived from any other person or thing. Since it is impossible to have anything creating itself, God could not have created Himself. Consequently, God is self-existent and eternal.

## 4) Infinite

By God's infinity, we should understand that this means He is unlimited and cannot be limited. Other attributes associated with God's infinity include His omnipresence, omniscience, wisdom, omnipotence, and freedom.

### a) Omnipresence

God is unlimited in terms of space. Finite objects are localized; however, God is not located in any space. Since God is spirit, He has no physical characteristics that can take up space. As such, God is present everywhere. This is taught in Psalm 139:7–12. To this, we should also notice that God is fully present everywhere. This is His immensity. Zophar recognized this truth in Job 11:7–9.

### b) Omniscience

God's knowledge is also unlimited, Psalm 139:1–6. This means that He is not growing or learning new items. Job recognized this truth when he maintained in 28:24 that God knew everything under the heavens.

## c) Wisdom

By wisdom we mean “that God acts in the light of all of the facts and in light of correct values” (Erickson, 1:275). Job recognized God’s wisdom in his speech on wisdom in chapter 28. By wisdom God created the heaven and earth, Proverbs 3:19–20, 8:24–31. God’s wisdom is a dominant motif in God’s first speech in Job 38:4–39:30. In wisdom God created the universe (38:4–11), manages the world (38:12–38) and the wild animals (38:39–39:30).

## d) Omnipotence

When we say God’s power is unlimited, what we mean is that God can do anything that is consistent with His person and plan. “God holds all power over His creation. No part of creation stands outside the scope of His sovereign control” (Sproul, *Essential Truths of the Christian Faith*, p. 39). God’s absolute power was demonstrated in His creation (Job 38:4–11; Pss 89:9–12; 104; Prov 3:19–20).

## e) Freedom

Ecclesiastes 7:15–18, 8:10–17, and the book of Job strongly affirm the freedom of God. God’s freedom means that God’s will is not bound by anything outside of Himself. God is only limited by His nature and will. “God’s decisions and actions are not determined by consideration of any factors outside himself. They are simply a matter of his own free choice” (Erickson, 1:278).

In Job 1–2 it might seem on the surface that the so-called “wager” between God and Satan might be a denial of God’s freedom. However, the Joban author is quite clear that God was responsible for prompting this account when He 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” (1:8). God clearly prompted this heavenly encounter. God freely chose to allow this to happen to Job even though he was so genuine in his faith. Job never was told, according to this book, that God permitted Satan to do this to him. For whatever purposes which neither Job nor we fully comprehend, we must recognize that this was part of God’s freely designed will for Job’s life.

In addition, we should notice that the defense of God’s administration of justice by Job’s friends was a basic denial of God’s freedom. His friends had maintained that there was a strict cause and effect relationship between one’s actions and consequences. Though the friends were certain that they knew the reason for Job’s suffering, Job was convinced that he could not conceive of any reason that the Almighty would have brought this

about in his life. Job was convinced that this simplistic understanding of retribution theology was incorrect. In agreement with this, God was teaching that a simplistic understanding of retribution theology was not a part of His agenda.

God “was free to enter into Satan’s test and tell none of the participants about it, to time his intervention and determine its agenda. He was free not to answer Job’s goading questions nor agree with the friends’ high-sounding doctrines. Above all, he was free to care enough to confront Job and to forgive the friends” (LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush, p. 583).

#### 5) Incomprehensibility

Man’s inability to comprehensively know the mind of God reflects the attribute of incomprehensibility. Though what we do know by special revelation is accurate, it is not a full knowledge about all the truth of God. The psalmist said in Psalm 145:3 that no one could fathom God’s greatness. In Proverbs 25:2 the author said, “It is the glory of God to conceal a matter.” This is strongly emphasized in the books of Job and Ecclesiastes. In Ecclesiastes 7:1–8:17 man cannot know how God is presently working and neither can he predict how God will work in the future, 9:1–11:6. This is the point of man not being able to fathom how God administers justice in this earthly sphere, 7:15–18; 8:10–17. Though we know more details about the heavenly encounter initiated by God between Himself and Satan in the book of Job, we do not fully comprehend why God allowed this to take place. The book of Job strongly affirms the mystery of God’s will. God’s rhetorical questions directed to Job in Job 38–42 clearly affirm this truth.

#### b. God’s Attributes of Goodness

The attributes of God’s goodness focus on His moral qualities. We will examine these under three categories: purity, integrity, and love.

##### 1) Purity

God’s moral purity, His complete freedom from anything sinful, focuses on His holiness, righteousness, and justice.

##### a) Holiness

Holiness deals with God’s separation. God’s separation is from all that has been created, His majestic transcendence, and from anything sinful, His moral purity. In Psalm 99:1–3 God is exalted over all nations. This is His majestic holiness. God’s absolute moral purity is intrinsic to Himself. He is not conforming to anyone else’s moral standards. He is holy. In Psalm 89:35 God swore by His holiness. In this context God affirms that He will fulfill His

promises to David, He will not lie. This is to say that since God is absolute in His self-affirming holiness, He cannot sin.

b) Righteousness

“Holiness creates a perfect standard of right. Righteousness is conformity to the perfectly right standard. God is righteous because His actions always conform to His holiness. Man is righteous when he conforms to God’s standard of righteousness” (McCune, “Systematic Theology I,” p. 101). Psalm 11:7 indicates that Yahweh is righteous and Psalm 145:17 that in all His ways, God is righteous.

c) Justice

Justice relates to God’s fairness in His “administration of the absolutely right standard of His holiness. Justice is an expression of God’s holiness in its judicial activity, giving everyone his just due and treating him according to his deserts” (ibid.). God’s blessing on a person for living righteously is known as remunerative justice and his judging a person for living wickedly is called retributive justice. David focuses on this issue in Psalm 73. This is also a key issue in the book of Ecclesiastes. It is the central concern of the book of Job. The thrust of this book is to explore God’s administration of justice as a part of the moral order of this world. The book of Lamentations strongly affirms that God exercised His justice in judging Judah for her sin.

2) Integrity

God’s integrity focuses on His genuineness, veracity, and faithfulness (Erickson, 1:289). By genuineness, we mean that God is real. In contrast to the false gods of the ancient Near East, God was real. In Psalm 96:5 the psalmist said, “For all the gods of the nations are idols, but the LORD made the heavens.” The idols were created by man; however, God was real for He made the heavens where many of these gods supposedly roamed. By God’s veracity is meant that God communicates accurately and without error. Though the poetic books do not deal with this subject at length, we can see in Ecclesiastes 12:9 that Solomon claimed to have been moved by God in the production this book.

By faithfulness we understand that God keeps His commitments. The fact that the book of Job has a good ending, as demonstrated by speaking to Job and graciously blessing his latter life, indicates that God proves Himself true in taking care of His own. In the royal psalms such as Psalms 2, 89 the psalmists expected that God would fulfill His promises to David. In the apex of his work (Lam 3), Jeremiah affirms how God did not completely destroy Judah. It was

because of God's faithfulness to His covenant that Jerusalem still had hope.

### 3) Love

God's love is the eternal giving of Himself. This was true of the members of the Godhead before time ever began. Love is shown in Job by God's benevolence towards His creatures. God demonstrated His concern for the welfare of them both in His creating and sustaining them (38:4–41:26). This also demonstrates God's mercy. God's loving compassion was demonstrated to Job by speaking to him and toward the friends by forgiving them. Lamentations 3:22 refers to God's compassion in sustaining His people in spite of the Babylonian destruction.

## 2. God's Relationship to the Universe

God's relationship to the universe will be related to these five areas: His plan, creation, preservation, providence, and kingdom.

### a. His Plan for the Universe

In Psalm 33:11 we see that God's counsel stands forever. In Proverbs 16:4 the author states that Yahweh has made everything for its own end, which even include the wicked for a time of disaster. In 16:9 we see that a man plans his course but Yahweh determines his course of life. This strongly affirms that Yahweh has a plan. Though the book of Job does not specifically refer to God having a foreordained plan, the nature of His creation and sustaining of it assume it. This implies a master architect. This is further reflected in 38:2 when Job is challenged by God with the question, "Who is this darkens my counsel?" This is also implied from when Job reflects in 42:2 that none of God's purposes can be thwarted. This is further suggested in 14:5 when Job indicates that man's days are determined. In 36:32 Elihu stated that lightning strikes where God directs. This world is based upon a theocentric plan.

### b. His Creation of the Universe

According to His plan, God created the universe with a systematic plan in Job 38:4–11. God also created the animals mentioned in His two speeches. Yahweh created Behemoth in 40:15, 19 and Leviathan in 41:25. In 40:15, God indicates by implication that man is also created by Him. This is also affirmed in Psalm 90:2, 104:5–23; Proverbs 3:19–20; 8:22–31.

### c. His Preservation of the Universe

Preservation involves God's protection of His creation from all harm and destruction; and provision for every need of His creation. Charles Hodges defined it as "all things out of God owe the continuance of their existence, with all their properties and powers, to the will of God"

(1:575). In Job God's sustaining of the universe, the laws and processes of nature such as storms and lightning, animals, and man are all part of God's preservation of His good world.

d. His Providence for the Universe

Providence relates to God's governing and guiding all creation to its appointed end. God's direction is seen in His managing the world in Job 38:12–38 and in His providing for wild animals in 38:39–41:26.

e. His Kingdom on Earth

In Lamentations the theocratic nation has fallen to the Babylonians. The poetic books do not contain an extensive amount of literature on the theocratic kingdom. However, the royal or messianic psalms are written with the Davidic Covenant as their basis and they do look forward to a time when the Davidic throne will be established in a universal kingdom with Jerusalem as its center. These includes Psalms 2, 45, 72, 89, 110, and others.

3. God's Sovereign Control of the Universe

God's sovereignty is not an attribute per se but a prerogative that is an outgrowth of the absolute perfection of His Superior Being. As Charles Hodges summarizes with this: "If God be a Spirit, and therefore a person, infinite, eternal, and immutable in his being and perfections, the Creator and Preserver of the universe, He is of right its absolute sovereign.... This sovereignty of God is the ground of peace and confidence to all his people. They rejoice that the Lord God omnipotent reigneth; that neither necessity, nor chance, nor the folly of man, nor the malice of Satan controls the sequence of events and all their issues. Infinite wisdom, love, and power, belong to Him, our great God and Saviour, into whose hands all power in heaven and earth has been committed" (1:440–41).

His creating the world in Job reflects Yahweh's kingship 38:4–11, by His managing the world in 38:12–38 and the animal kingdom in 38:39–41:26. Job also assumes Yahweh's kingship by questioning His rulership (40:8). This is also reflected by God when He challenges Job to put on the robes of divine royalty in 40:9–14. Furthermore, God told Job in 41:3 that everything under heaven belonged to Him. Also, God had set up Behemoth and Leviathan as underlords in his animal world (40:19–20; 41:25–26). "God's many references to creation are highly appropriate because by them He was addressing His ownership of the universe while at the same time refuting Job's accusation of deprivation. God did not actually deprive Job of anything, because He, as Creator, owns all that is in the universe. The Founder is the Owner; the Creator is the Ruler" (Zuck, "Theology" p. 225).

## C. Man

In the poetic books man is presented as being finite and sinful. It also deals briefly with man's death and immortality. It additionally stresses a number of his responsibilities.

### 1. Man's Finiteness

The finite nature of man is affirmed in Psalm 8 where the psalmist teaches that God created man a little lower than heavenly beings (cf. v. 5 with Heb 2:7). Man was created from the dust of the earth and God's breath (cf. Eccl 3:20; 12:7 with Gen 2:7; 3:19) and with limited understanding (cf. Eccl 8:7; 10:14; 11:5 with Gen 2:17). In Job 38 man's knowledge of creation is based on information outside of himself. This also reflects his finite limitations.

### 2. Man's Sinfulness

Man was originally created in a state of untested creature holiness but failed God's test in the Garden of Eden and became totally depraved (Ps 14:2–3). Consequently, man is searching after his own sinful schemes (Eccl 7:29). This is something that affects man's entire being in Ecclesiastes 9:3. As 7:20 affirms sin is a universal problem. The book of Proverbs highlights the sinful use of man's words (26:28; 6:16–17; 12:22). Some of his other manifestations of sin include greed (15:27), envy (3:31), injustice (16:8), and dishonesty (10:2).

### 3. Man's Death and Immortality

The consequence of sin is death. In the poetic books life is characterized as being brief (Eccl 2:3) and death is certain (Eccl 2:14–16). However, the Old Testament believer was confident that when he died, he would live with God. Immortality is taught in passages such as Job 16, 19, Psalms 11:7; 16:9–11; 49:14–15, 121:8; Ecclesiastes 12:7.

### 4. Man's Responsibilities

In light of the greatness and goodness of God as well as man's finite and depraved state and fallen world in which he lives, the poetic books affirm that man had a number of responsibilities (Zuck, "Theology," pp. 250–51). We will note three of these.

a. Man has a responsibility to fear God (see above). When one has this unconditional, reverential submission to the Sovereign LORD, he will seek to worship and please God. This is the issue that Job had to face. Job had to submit to God's sovereign will. Job had heard of God but when he saw God he developed a deeper commitment to him (42:5). In 42:3 Job acknowledged that he had spoken of things he did not understand. God's ways were too complicated for Job to understand. He submitted to an absolutely Sovereign Lord.

b. Man has a responsibility to be diligent in his work. In Ecclesiastes Solomon highlights the uncertainties of a veiled providence to man. In

light of this, he exhorts his audience to be wise and diligent in their work in 11:1–6. This motif is also developed in Proverbs 6:6–11 as well as many other places in this book.

- c. Man has a responsibility to enjoy life. In Ecclesiastes the refrains of the book emphasize man enjoying his food, drink, work, material blessings, and marriage. The Song of Solomon especially develops the issue of enjoying one's marriage as a gift from God.

## PART III: JOB

### I. Introduction

In our introduction to Job, we will examine issues that are normally discussed under the subject of special introduction. This will focus on areas such as the title, authorship and date, location, literary composition, message, and canonicity.

#### A. Title

MT: *ʾîyôḇ*, “Job”

LXX: *Ιωβ*, “Job”

V: *Liber Iob*, “The Book of Job”

#### B. Authorship and Date

As we examine Job’s authorship and date we should notice that precise information is not available for drawing firm conclusions. The data is generally derived from circumstantial evidence.

##### 1. Authorship

Neither the book of Job nor the other 65 books of the canon specify who the author was. So speculation on this is completely circumstantial. We can say that the author appears to have been an Israelite since some form of the divine name (Yahweh) was used in the book 25 times in the prologue, divine speeches, and epilogue. One of these is found in Job’s mouth in the prologue, 1:22. The name is found only once in the dialogue (3–37), 12:9. Since Job only uses the name twice (1:22 and 12:9), we can say that he was familiar with it; however, based on the absence of any Israelite records claiming him as a Jew (in fact it is usually the opposite), we can infer that he was not a Jew. The fact that neither the friends nor Elihu use the name may indicate that they were not Jews; however, these are not absolute conclusions. The fact that the author uses the divine name 23 times suggests that he was a Jew.

##### 2. Date

When evaluating the date of Job, we must differentiate between the date of the events and the date for the book’s composition.

###### a. Date of the events in the book fit in with the first half of the second millennium B.C.

- 1) Names fit in with the first half of the second millennium B.C. W. F. Albright has done much work to show that names such as Zophar, Bildad, and Eliphaz are in this period.
- 2) Job resembles other ANE literature from this same period.
- 3) Sabaeans and Chaldeans were marauding bands in prologue. This appears to be a time before they became a sedentary population.

- 4) Job reflects patriarchal practices. For example, Job as the head of the house offered sacrifices; Job's wealth was reckoned in livestock (1:3, 42:12) like Abraham (Gen 12:16, 13:2) and Jacob (Gen 30:43; 32:5).

b. Date of the writing for the book

There are five different views (at times these are associated with specific individuals as the case is with Moses and Solomon).

1) In patriarchal days

Some would say that Job himself wrote this book. This is usually offered on a popular/preaching level (Dr. Smith at Grace Theological Seminary talked about Job writing it but his field was not Joban studies) by conservative scholars (though some conservative scholars such as Archer talk about a pre-Mosaic writing without claiming that Job was the author). The major reason for this suggestion is to solve the transmission problem. However, we have the same issue with the primeval and patriarchal narratives in Genesis. How did Moses receive all of this information? In addition, the Book of Job is written as if Job was an ancient man and it is very interesting to observe that very few Jewish scholars have opted for this.

2) By Moses

Some early rabbis (B. Baba Bathra, 14b, 15a) held this view and some Church Fathers. Archer has also suggested this or a pre-Mosaic writing.

This has been maintained based upon items such as:

- a) Job follows the Pentateuch in Syriac version of OT.
- b) From Qumran, only Job and the Pentateuch are found in a palaeo-Hebrew script.

3) During the days of Solomon

Some early rabbis, Gregory Nazianzen (death c. A.D. 390), Martin Luther, Haevernick, Keil, Delitzsch, and Young held this view.

Support has been drawn from this:

- a) Solomon's age was a cosmopolitan era.
- b) The emphasis placed on *ḥokmâ* in Job fits in well with the wisdom literature movement during Solomon's era.

4) During the reign of Manasseh or Jeremiah's day

This period was a time of social disaster. This is seen as being parallel with Job.

5) During Babylonian exile or postexilic era

Support for this is generally drawn from these:

- a) Reflects captivity and suffering
- b) Analogy of suffering servant in *so-called* Deutero-Isaiah
- c) Satan is late.

Against this data the following should be noted:

- a) Job was not suffering because of any sin that he had committed, Israel was.
- b) Job was not a national servant (as the suffering servant was in Isaiah 40-55)
- c) If *so-called* Deutero-Isaiah is early (and it is), then the validity in the analogy with Deutero-Isaiah breaks down.
- d) Job's suffering was not redemptive in nature as was the suffering servant in Isaiah 52:13–53:12.

### C. Location

The most prevalent locations have been Hauran and Edom. Hauran is south of Damascus and Edom is located in a region southeast of the Dead Sea. OT scholars are divided on this so no firm conclusion can be drawn.

### D. Literary Composition

In looking at this subject we will examine the language of the book of Job, its authenticity, structure, and genre.

#### 1. Language of Job

Because of the complexities of the language such as the variations from classical Hebrew and the over one hundred *hapax legomena* found in Job, there have been many discussions on this subject. Is the book a translation from another language or is it some Hebrew dialect?

##### a. Translation

Is our extant Hebrew text a translation from another language? Supposedly the deviations from standard Hebrew are best explained as deriving from another Semitic language. These include:

- 1) Arabic (Guillaume)
- 2) Aramaic (Tur-Sinai)
- 3) Edomite (Pope)—Pope has justified this on the basis of the Edomite notoriety for wisdom (Pope, p. XLIV).

**PROBLEM:** If any of these are accepted, we must admit then that we do not have the language from the original preserved. In this case, we will never confidently be able to say that we have an accurate representation of the original for Job.

##### b. Genuine Hebrew

To explain the language peculiarities, some have suggested that this is a variation of Jerusalem Hebrew. It has been identified as either Ephramite or Transjordanian Hebrew.

- 1) Ephramite—this is a northern dialect; it is based on similarities between the Hebrew of Job and Phoenician and Aramaic (Freedman,

“Orthographic Peculiarities,” pp. 35–44; see also Andersen, pp. 56–61).

- 2) Transjordan—this is based on affinities with Akkadian and/or Arabic influence (Harrison, p. 1023; see also Newell [1983], p. 2).
- 3) The first two cannot absolutely be proven; however, it is best to see this as genuine Hebrew whose author and participants in the book were cosmopolitan in their perspectives. Hartley has summarized this view: “The style of the book of Job suggests that the poet probably came from a region outside of Jerusalem; therefore his Hebrew was a dialect different from Jerusalem Hebrew and may have been very close to Aramaic. Further, the poet most likely had traveled much and was multilingual. As an artist he no doubt enriched the vocabulary of his poem to capture nuances and to communicate subtle tones as he sought to grapple with the gravest human question, suffering. Since there were multiple dialects of these Northwest Semitic languages in a close geographical area, most people would know more than one dialect and thus would have little trouble understanding a presentation of this work” (*ISBE*, rev. ed., s.v. “Job,” p. 1065).

## 2. Authenticity of Job

When we are dealing with the subject of a book’s authenticity, we are using the term authenticity to denote the work’s genuineness as a product of the original Joban author. There are perhaps more complex critical problems associated with this book than any other Old Testament work (*ABD*, s.v., “Job, Book of,” by James L. Crenshaw, 3:860). These problems are associated with these: the relationship of the prologue-epilogue to the speeches, the abbreviated third cycle, the placement of chapter 28, the Elihu speeches, and the Yahweh speeches.

### a. The relationship of the prologue-epilogue to the speeches.

The prologue is found in 1:1–2:13 and the epilogue in 42:7–17. Early commentators noticed a tension between the patient nature of Job in the prologue and the defiant Job in the poetic section. Further, Job is commended in the epilogue but in the God speeches he has reasons to repent. These tensions have motivated some scholars to see an original smaller work contained in the prosaic section and a later development of this in the poetic section by a literary genius. A rather common view among critics is that Job is a hero of a *Volksbuch*, “folktale.” Either the writer of this epic substratum directly borrowed from this folk sage (so Wellhausen) or this material is taken directly from this *Volksbuch* (so Duhm; for support, see Sarna). With this type of understanding the hero goes back to the days of the patriarchs. Biblical support is drawn from Ezekiel 14:14, 20 where Job is placed alongside Noah and the Ugaritic legendary hero Daniel. Job became the hero of this folktale. Sometime during first millennium B.C., a skilled poet wrote his own version of the dialogue between Job and his three friends. This is the central section of

the extant book. The poem on wisdom (Job 28), the Elihu speeches, and Yahweh's speeches were added later either by this poet or by some later redactor.

In the twentieth century there have been some modifications of this view by leading critical scholars. Some of the more conservative variations are these:

- 1) Dhorme (pp. 1xi–cx) argues for the same writer being responsible for the prose framework and poetic dialogue. A later redactor added the Elihu speeches.
- 2) Snaith views one author writing the book in three stages. The writer's inspiration was derived from the Babylonian Job (Ludlul Bel Nemeqi).
  - a) First stage: shortened prologue and epilogue, chapters 3, 29–31, 38:1–42:6
  - b) Second stage: the friends' speeches and Job's response to them (4–27)
  - c) Third stage: chapters 28, 32–37
- 3) Gordis has the same essential view as Snaith except that he maintains that the book was written in two stages. The writer's work is derived from a legendary hero. The Elihu speeches emanate from the second stage.

b. The abbreviated third cycle

The first two cycles of speeches are arranged in a symmetrical fashion. The first two cycles of speakers with the appropriate chapters are arranged like this:

First cycle	Second cycle
1. Eliphaz, 4–5	1. Eliphaz, 15
2. Job, 6–7	2. Job, 16–17
3. Bildad, 8	3. Bildad, 18
4. Job, 9–10	4. Job, 19
5. Zophar, 11	5. Zophar, 20
6. Job, 12–14	6. Job, 21

When this is compared with the third cycle (22–27), what is significant is that Bildad's speech is only six verses in length and it lacks an introduction and conclusion. Especially more significant in this third cycle is that Zophar never speaks at all. It has been generally understood that the third cycle either has material that is out of order or that some material has been lost (Eissfeldt, p. 464). A liberal Jewish commentator with fairly conservative views on the text of Job, Robert Gordis, has been compelled by these lacunae to reassign part of Job's speech in

27:13–23 to Zophar (*Book of Job*, p. 536). Some of this data has also prompted a commentator as fairly conservative as Hartley to rearrange the text. Because of the brevity of Bildad's third speech, he expands it by adding 27:13–23. Many commentators see Job's remarks in 27:13–23 as being inappropriate for him but more appropriate for the friends (*Job*, pp. 25–26).

c. The placement of the wisdom poem in chapter 28

Because of its more abstract character as opposed to the passionate style of Job's preceding speeches, the passage does not seem to fit (Rowley, *Book of Job*, p. 179). In addition, it has been maintained that the theology of Job in chapter 28 asserting that wisdom is too high for man and can only be found with God makes the content of the God speeches unnecessary (Eissfeldt, p. 458).

d. The Elihu speeches

Many OT scholars see the Elihu speeches as a disruptive and secondary interpolation. This position has been set forth because Elihu is never addressed in the dialogue or in the epilogue (Eissfeldt, p. 457). In addition, Elihu appears to interrupt Job's request for God to respond to him in chapter 31 (Childs, *Introduction*, p. 530). Furthermore, there are significant stylistic linguistic differences between the Elihu material and the rest of Job (Driver and Gray, 1:xlii–xlv). Additionally, Elihu quotes Job verbatim and calls him by name as if he is working from a manuscript. Finally, Elihu makes no significant contribution to the book (Childs, *Introduction*, p. 530).

e. The Yahweh speeches

The authenticity of God's two speeches has also been questioned. Why is it necessary for God to speak a second time when Job capitulates at the end of God's first speech? Also does not Yahweh spoil the point of the Satan's test of Job's character by appearing to him or has the conclusions from the test already been demonstrated? Furthermore, "does Yahweh not attempt to 'bully' Job into submission just as Job had cynically predicted (i.e., Yahweh forces the issues back to the question of his power, not his justice)?" (*ABD*, s.v., "Job, Book of," by James L. Crenshaw, 3:861).

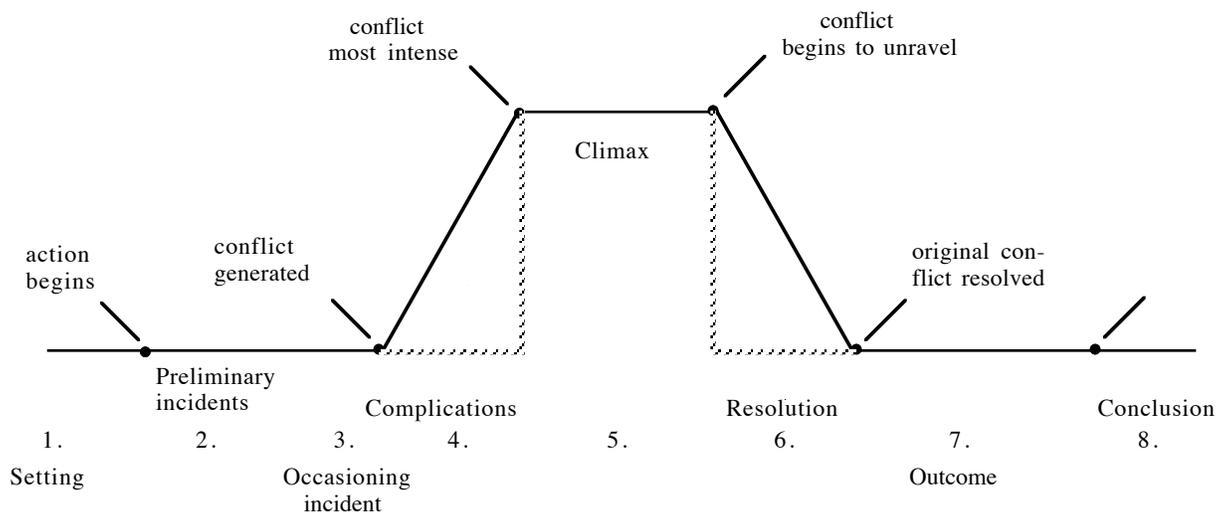
f. As far as the historicity of the book is concerned, we either have to take the book of Job as being completely true or as being a parable. The parabolic view, though held by some Jewish scholars such as Maimonides, seems unlikely in light of the reference to Job as a historical person in Ezekiel 14:14, 20. It seems to me that we do not have a middle-of-the-road position as the *Volksbuch* position would suggest since this is unparalleled in biblical literature and allows for an embellishment of historical data. Consequently, we must understand that

the book of Job reflects that there was an actual historical person named Job.

If we accept the historical integrity about Job, then it would also follow that we accept the historical integrity for the other participants in the book. This is to say there were three historical figures who came to console the suffering hero. Because of Job's curse of his day of birth and lament in chapter three, his three friends were forced to contend with Job's complaint. When the friends were unable to cogently respond to Job, they became quiet. This provided the occasion for the young, brash Elihu to speak. As Elihu was speaking God appeared in the midst of a storm and spoke to Job.

This raises another question about the book's authenticity. Do we have the actual words, *ipsissima verba*, of Job and the other participants or an accurate representation of what each participant said, *ipsissima vox*? Since it is hard to conceive of someone speaking in such a highly artistic manner as Job was when he was suffering so greatly, it would seem that we have the actual message of each speaker. This would also be true of the friends of Job and Elihu when they were in the heat of a debate. This would have some correspondence with some of the issues associated with the synoptic problem in the Gospels. This allows the Joban author to shape his work to effectively communicate his message. The literary shaping is controlled by two items: the historical material and the author's divinely given theological interpretation of this material (for more information, see my dissertation, pp. 236–39). As such, the book of Job is a historically and theologically accurate representation of this event that took place in Job's life. This chart on the book's structure will further corroborate the authenticity of this work.

### 3. The Literary Structure



(This chart has been taken from Newell [1983], p. 90; see also the use of this analysis as applied to 1 Kings 22:1–38 by Longman [*Literary Approaches*, pp. 101–111]).

#### 4. Literary Genre

Broadly speaking the genre of Job is a contemplative form of wisdom literature. As a piece of wisdom literature, it stresses man's finite, limited nature and his need to depend on God as the ultimate source of true wisdom. Osborne's definition of genre is the one that we will follow in Job. Genre is "a grouping of literary works based, theoretically, upon both outer form (specific meter or structure) and also upon inner form (attitude, tone, purpose—more crudely, subject and audience)" (Osborne, pp. 4-5). I have tried to follow Longman's distinction of labeling a whole work as genre, and subsections within this genre as form. So for example Job 3 has the form of a complaint, and Psalm 3 has the genre of lament (see Longman, "Form Criticism," p. 50).

##### a. Use of Various Forms

The Joban author predominantly used the following literary forms.

- 1) True story—this takes into account the narrative framework in 1:1–2:13; 42:7–17
- 2) Complaint—3:1–26; 14:1–22; 29:1–25; 30:1–31
- 3) Disputation speech—4:1–21; 5:1–27; 6:1–30; 8:1–22; 9:1–35; 10:1–22; 11:1–20; 15:1–35; 16:1–22; 17:1–16; 18:1–21; 20:1–29; 21:1–34; 22:1–30; 23:1–17; 24:1–25; 26:1–14; 27:1–23; 33:1–33; 34:1–37; 35:1–16; 36:1–21
- 4) Hymn—12:1–25; 25:1–6; 36:22–37:24
- 5) Lament—7:1–21
- 6) Lawsuit—13:1–27
- 7) Oath of innocence—31:1–40
- 8) Apology—32:6–22
- 9) Challenge to rival—38:1–40:2; 40:6–41:26

This brief overview represents the various literary forms used in the various pericopes of this work. The Joban author uses various literary forms in each of these pericopes. For example, with Job's complaint in chapter three, two different forms are used: curse in vv. 3–10 and lament in vv. 11–26. Eliphaz's first speech can be broadly categorized as a disputation speech; however, this disputation speech contains wisdom saying in 4:3–11, 5:3–7, 17–27; hymnic material in 5:8–13; and a vision report in 4:12–16 (for more information on this, see Hartley, pp. 37–43, Murphy, pp. 14–45, and Westermann's *The Structure of the Book of Job*).

##### b. Joban Genre

- 1) Lawsuit (Gemser, Scholnick, Habel [1985, pp. 54–57])—this is supposedly a lawsuit initiated by Job against God. This understanding has come about because of the legal terminology. The problem is that it does not do justice to the work as a whole.
- 2) Epic History—Andersen has labeled Job as epic history. Now an epic is “a long narrative poem in a dignified style about the deeds of a traditional or historical hero or heroes” (Webster); for example, poems like the *Iliad* or the *Odyssey* are considered classical epics (they have certain formal elements); an example of a literary epic is Milton’s *Paradise Lost* (it has structural characteristics like an epic); an example of a national epic is *Beowulf* (it expresses ideals and traditions of a people). Andersen has likened this to the stories of Moses, David, and Ruth. These would be parallel to our national epics. There are four elements with this: (a) the facts are related tersely; (b) the characters’ actions are described objectively; (c) the author refrains from making moral judgments; (d) the author focuses upon speeches which reflect the problems and faith of the participants in the story (pp. 36–37). The major difference between Job and these other biblical stories is that Job is longer and more intense. However, I think Andersen’s genre does have some merit.
- 3) Joban genre—many have concluded with Pope that the book of Job has a unique genre, *sui generis*. Though a large part of Job is made up of the disputation form, the book as a whole contains elements of a drama which involves a plot and conflict carried out through dialogue between two or more participants; however, in the Old Testament we do not have a drama strictly speaking because a drama is generally designed to be performed in a public enactment. However, it does have many of those type of elements; perhaps we might say that this was carried out in the real life arena. As such, this is didactic in that it seeks to teach a message. This also indicates that it contains genuine history. It also has elements as we have in epics.

#### E. Message

In this section we will briefly examine the various proposals followed by a presentation of our understanding of the book’s message.

##### 1. Various suggestions

- a. Theodicy (Andersen, Bullock)—A theodicy is “a vindication of the justice of God in permitting evil to exist”; this is generally used to explain why God permits good people to suffer evil (s.v. “Theodicy” in *The Evangelical Dictionary of Theology*, by Feinberg).
- b. Polemic challenging the dogma of divine retribution (Driver, Dhorme, Pope)
- c. Righteous men need suffering to grow (Harrison)
- d. The presence of God given to righteous men in good and bad times (Rowley, pp. 19–21).

- e. Proper conduct for a man who is suffering—devotion to God (Fohrer, in *EJ*, 10:123).
- f. Proper relationship between God and man is grace (Parsons)
- g. Man can bear suffering if he has a reverence for the mystery and miracle of life (Gordis, *God and Man*, pp. 149–56).
- h. God’s freedom in administering justice in this world should produce in man a submissive faith.

## 2. Development of the Message of Job

Many interpreters have understood that the message of the book of Job is primarily dealing with the subject of the righteous suffering. However, this approach is myopic for the suffering Job is never told either who was immediately responsible for his suffering or the reason for his suffering. In dealing with the book’s message, it would be more precise to view Job’s suffering as a catalyst to explore the central concern of the book, viz., God’s administration of justice. This refers to God either blessing a person for living righteously, remunerative justice, or judging a person for living wickedly, retributive justice. In 1:1–5 Job is pictured as having a genuine righteousness with the consequential blessings of an ideal family, wealth, social prestige, and a good reputation. Job was living proof of God’s remunerative justice. However, in 1:6–2:10 Job’s life of blessing is quickly changed into one of severe suffering and this was for no apparent action that Job could have been held accountable (see 1:8, 2:3). This situation challenges Job’s understanding of this dogma of God’s administration of justice. Job wants another explanation of how the moral sphere of this life is governed. Even his friends also find their understanding challenged. However, they tenaciously cling to their interpretation of God’s administration of justice. We will briefly examine the various misguided applications of God’s administration of justice followed by the divine interpretation of God’s administration of justice.

- a. The Misguided Applications of God’s Administration of Justice  
Satan, Job’s friends, and Job have various interpretations of this subject. We will summarize each of these.

### 1) God’s administration of justice is inherently flawed.

This is the view of Satan. After having roamed the earth, Satan presents himself before God. God asks him in 1:8 if he had found anyone on earth as upright as Job. In response to this, Satan raises a question about God’s administration of justice. In 1:9–11 Satan reflects that if God would remove Job’s blessings, Job would curse God. This is to say, Job is righteous because God has rewarded him. The implication is that God’s system of justice does not promote genuine righteousness. Man serves God for His blessings and not for true devotion to God. With God’s permission, Satan then removes God’s blessings from Job. Job loses his ideal family (with the

exception of his wife), wealth, social prestige, and even his reputation is questioned. Satan's goal is to get Job to curse God. By doing this, Satan will demonstrate that God's moral order has an intrinsic defect.

2) God's administration of justice is mechanically applied.

Job's three friends and Elihu share a common belief that God mechanically rewards and judges people for their actions. This was an immediate cause and effect understanding of God's administration of justice. This is demonstrated by their acceptance of the corollary of retributive and remunerative justice. The corollary of the former is this: if one is suffering, he had to be living in sin; and the later: if one was prospering, he was living righteously. In each case the degree of results was directly proportional to one's behavior. Prior to Job's suffering, the friends viewed Job as living proof of the corollary of remunerative justice; however, after the extreme disasters that Job encountered, he was definitely living in extreme sin but apparently not extreme enough to have his life taken as his children's lives had been (see 4:7–9; 8:3–4; 11:4–6). The three friends and Elihu agree that Job was suffering because of sin (see 4:7–9; 8:3–4; 11:4–6; 34:11–12). They also agree that God will reverse Job's suffering if he presents his appeal to God or confesses his sin and lives righteously (5:17–27; 8:5–7; 11:13–20; 34:31–32). However, they disagree about the significance of Job's suffering.

- a) Eliphaz assumes in his first speech that Job's sin is minor and that he is basically an innocent man. In 4:3–6 he recognizes that Job is a blameless man who is suffering. This is a problem to his theology. His solution is that even one as righteous as Job will suffer deservedly at times, 4:17–19. He also assumes that Job's suffering is minimal and may be quickly removed (4:7). He further postulates in 5:17–27 that God uses suffering for correction purposes.
- b) Bildad is convinced that God has appropriately administered justice to Job and his family. He views Job as being sinful and deservedly suffering but not so sinful that God had to immediately take his life as He had to do with his children, 8:2–4.
- c) Zophar is convinced that Job is a hypocritical sinner. Since Job claims that he is clean in God's sight (11:4) and he is greatly suffering, Job must be concealing sin. For Zophar, God's retributive theology was not quid pro quo since God has mercifully overlooked a portion of Job's sins (11:5–6). If the truth had been revealed, Job was a greater sinner than any of his friends could have imagined.
- d) When the friends' argumentation against Job becomes ineffective with them becoming silent, another participant, Elihu, appears in 32:1–37:24. Like Job's three friends, Elihu is a defender of God's

justice. Because he also accepted its corollary, he assumed that Job was suffering because of sin (33:27; 34:11–12, 31–33, 37; 36:8–10). Though Eliphaz had postulated that God used suffering for purposes of correction, Elihu more thoroughly develops God instructional use of suffering in 33:19–28 and 36:8–12. For Elihu suffering was not only for retribution but also for correction.

3) God's administration of justice is capriciously interpreted.

Until he had experienced his intense suffering, Job agreed with his friends about God's moral order. However, he has changed his mind. Since he is living righteously yet suffering, he is confused and looking for other explanations as to how God administers justice. Job's initial response to his calamities is a calm acceptance of these as God's will for his life. After further prolonged reflection, he realizes that his understanding of the moral order of life has collapsed. We will summarize Job's argumentation and then note his wrong accusations against God.

a) Summary of Job's argument

In examining Job's thought, we will organize this summary around the sequential development of his speeches.

i) Job's complaint and his speeches from the first cycle

In his first speech in chapter 3 Job's complaint provides the occasioning incident for the friends to speak. Job reacts to his situation by wishing that he had never been born. Since this wish is impossible, he pleads with God to kill him in his second speech (6:8). In Job's third speech, he moves beyond his death wish and desires a declaration of innocence (9:2–3). In the heat of defending his reputation, Job accuses God of being hostile to him (9:8) and of oppressing him while smiling on the plans of the wicked (10:3). Because of God's posture toward him, Job realizes that God will never give him what he feels is his right, viz., a declaration of innocence (9:14–20). Job's thought develops further in that he feels that with an arbitrator it might be possible for him to enter into litigation with God (9:32–35). Job's desire for a court hearing with God grows stronger in his fourth speech for he requests a legal hearing with God before he dies (13:3, 16–19; 14:13–17).

ii) Job's speeches from the second cycle

In his fifth and sixth speeches, he again wishes that an impartial mediator would serve as his defense attorney before God (16:18–22; 19:25–27). Job is convinced of his innocence and is confident that God will vindicate him, even if it is not in the present earthly sphere. However, Job's conviction of his

innocence prompts him to accuse God of having wronged him (19:6). In his seventh speech he ponders God's system of justice in light of God permitting the wicked to live happy and long lives (21:7–26) and permitting them to even be buried with honor (21:27–34). Job is confused about God's moral order. However, he is still convinced that he wants no part with the counsel of the wicked since they do not recognize that God is the ultimate source of their blessing (21:16).

iii) Job's speeches from the third cycle

In his eighth speech, Job observes some enigmas in God's moral order (24:2–21). Yet Job is convinced God will rectify these enigmas (24:22–25). Job's quest for the vindication of his integrity moves him in his ninth speech to declare that God has denied him of his justice (27:2). However, he subsequently balances this out by affirming that God will judge the wicked (27:13–23).

iv) Job's final speeches

In his tenth speech, Job presents a poem on wisdom. In this poem he states that man does not have sufficient wisdom to solve some of the problems in the world, only God has this type of wisdom (28:20–28). After reviewing his earlier state of blessing (29:1–25), he then ridicules those who have attacked him (30:1–15) and affirms that God has attacked him and refuses to respond to his requests (30:16–26). Job's conviction of his innocence and of God's justice compels him to take an oath of innocence in chapter 31. Job's oath poses a problem for God's moral order. If Job is innocently suffering, divine justice appears to be in error. In Job's desire to go to court with God, he is attempting to approach God as an equal. Though Job believes that God does have a system of justice, he is in effect accusing God of using it capriciously.

b) Job's wrong accusations against God

God accuses Job of speaking out of ignorance in 38:2, of making false accusations against Him in 40:2, and of discrediting His justice in 40:8. Because of these, we should understand that Job made a number of false accusations against God.

- i) God has mistreated Job. In 10:3 Job accused God of oppressing him while smiling on the plans of the wicked, in 16:9–12 of attacking him in anger, in 19:6–11 of wronging him and counting him as his enemy, in 27:1–2 of denying his justice, and in 30:19–21 of ruthlessly mistreating him.

- ii) God was not taking care of other suffering people. This is to say, God was not doing His job as ruler since he allowed the widow, the orphan, the poor, and the needy to be oppressed by the wicked, 24:1–12.
- iii) By accusing God in this manner, though done in ignorance, and by desiring, consequently, to enter into litigation with God, Job was in effect passing judgment on God and, therefore, making himself out to be God's equal (pride). In effect, Job was maintaining that God capriciously administered justice. In response to this, there is only One who is able to speak *ex cathedra* on the administration of justice.

b. The Divine Interpretation of God's Administration of Justice

Rather than responding to Job's demand for a legal hearing, God appears in a storm. Rather than discussing Job's innocence or how He administers justice, God overwhelms Job with questions about His creation and management of the world. In both speeches the LORD challenges Job's anthropocentric view of the moral order of life and substantiates a theocentric perspective. Each speech will briefly be presented.

1) The LORD's control of the universe is beyond anyone's comprehension (38:2–40:2).

God initiates this speech with an accusation against Job in 38:2. The point of this is that Job has darkened the LORD's counsel with words spoken in ignorance. The LORD concludes this speech with the same type of accusation in 40:2 where He questions Job concerning the validity of his desire to legally contend with Him. God is reflecting with each accusation that Job does not comprehend His plan and work.

In demonstrating His accusation about Job's lack of wisdom, God raises a series of rhetorical questions. These can be broken down in a threefold manner: God's creation of the world in 38:4–11, His sustenance of the world in 38:12–38, and His management of the animal kingdom most of which were undomesticated in 38:39–39:30. The point of these is to demonstrate that Job is unable to comprehend what God is doing because he is not God's equal. God in His freedom as an all-wise and all-powerful Sovereign had created and is sustaining His creation. This is a God-centered world in contrast to the man-centered world and life view advocated by Job in his ignorance as well as his fellow wise men.

2) The LORD's administration of justice is beyond anyone's comprehension (40:7–41:34).

Like the first speech, God makes another accusation in 40:8 against Job. With this accusation Job is accused of having discredited the LORD's justice, condemning God to justify himself. As such, the LORD's last speech does relate to His administration of justice; but it is not in the manner that either Job or his friends had expected. After this accusation, the LORD challenges Job in 40:9–14 to take over God's place and to execute retributive justice on the wicked. God then returns to continue questioning Job in reference to His control of the animal kingdom. His questions focus on two of the wildest animals in Job's day, behemoth and leviathan. God uses both creatures analogously to demonstrate to Job that His administration of justice is beyond Job's comprehension.

The LORD challenges Job to look at behemoth (possibly a hippopotamus or an elephant) in 40:15–24. The point is that Job himself could not readily control behemoth. God reminds Job in the middle of the speech, v. 19, that He has behemoth completely under His control. God concludes this speech with a challenge in v. 24 reminding Job of his inability to subdue behemoth. When we compare v. 24 with v. 19, God is stressing that Job was unable to capture behemoth (v. 24), yet God has him completely under His control (v. 19). We should compare these two verses with vv. 8–14. If Job cannot govern behemoth, how could he hope to humiliate all the proud ones of this earth (vv. 11–14)? If he cannot do either, how can he question God's administration of justice (vv. 8–9)? Thus Job should forget his request for vindication and completely submit to the LORD and His control of this world.

The LORD challenges Job to subdue leviathan (crocodile) in 41:1–34. God reminds Job in v. 10 that he was not fierce enough to arouse leviathan and, therefore, how could he hope to come before God with His claim. This is developed further in v. 11 where God highlights that He owns everything. Because of this, God does not have to respond to any created beings' claim against Him. In vv. 33–34 God brings this speech to a conclusion. Using personification, God describes leviathan as a unique creature. As such leviathan had no equal on earth. Being fearless, no creature could intimidate leviathan, v. 33. God further describes leviathan in v. 34 as looking down on all other creatures. As such, he is king over all the haughty including Job since Job could not approach him with a bridle (41:5). The *a fortiori* argument is this, if leviathan is king over all the proud including Job, how much more so is his Creator, the Sovereign Lord of the universe.

If Job can neither capture nor control behemoth nor leviathan, then how could he hope to take God's place in administering justice? God never tells Job how he exercises justice. This was impossible since

God's control of the moral order of this life was beyond Job's creaturely comprehension. The LORD's administration of justice is beyond any created being's understanding. Though Job does not have the issue of justice explained, he does learn that this is too profound for him and that he must submit to the Sovereign God who administers justice in perfect conformity with His nature and plan.

c. Summation of the Message of Job

Because of God's incomprehensible wisdom and incomparable power as reflected by His creating and sustaining the world and its inhabitants, He is its sovereign who freely administers justice correctly. Because this is a theocentric world, man must fearfully submit to the LORD and His sovereign will.

F. Canonicity

"The canonicity of Job has never been seriously questioned. Its position, however, has fluctuated. In Protestant Bibles it falls after the historical works, which end with Esther, and thus heads the poetical books: Job, Psalms, and Proverbs. This tradition is attested by Cyril of Jerusalem and Epiphanius, among others. Jerome preferred this order, and the Council of Trent established it for the Vulgate. In the Hebrew Bible it appears in the third division, the writings or Kethubhim; the order is Psalms, Job, Proverbs. The oldest tradition lists the books thus: Ruth, Psalms, Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, etc. The Syriac Bible places Job after the Pentateuch in honor of the tradition that Moses was its author" (*ISBE*, rev. ed., s.v., "Job," by J. E. Hartley, 2:1064).

II. Analysis

The following outline reflects that there are three major movements in Job. The summary statement for each movement reflects how it relates to the subject being addressed in this book. The secondary divisions for each movement have been derived from the eight points on the chart reflecting the book's development of thought (see above). The tertiary subdivisions are basically derived from the Joban author's narrative introduction to each unit of material.

A. The Preliminary Conflict Generates Man's Questioning of God's Administration of Justice, 1:1–2:13.

1. The Setting, 1:1–5

This describes the temporal setting, location, and circumstances of this story. In describing Job as a genuinely godly man, this lays the foundation for the tension portrayed in this book.

2. Preliminary Incidents, 1:6–2:13

This unit of material gives an account of the testing of Job. The action moves back and forth between heaven and earth. This material is relevant for the following argument. We see that God initiates the conversation with Satan. This dialogue focuses on the genuinely righteous character of Job.

Satan in response challenges God's view of Job. In order to vindicate Himself and Job, God permits Satan to test Job.

B. The Conflicting Debate Reflects Man's Misunderstanding about God's Administration of Justice, 3:1–37:24.

1. The Occasioning Incident, 3:1–26

Job's friends came to comfort Job. They said nothing for seven days and seven nights. Job is the first to speak. In this speech Job curses the day of his birth. This reflected an incorrect attitude towards God's gift of life. Job's complaint was improper behavior for his friends and it confirmed to them that Job had to be suffering account of his sinfulness. This is what creates the tension and initiates the conflict.

2. The Complications, 4:1–27:23

The three cycles of debate between Job and his three friends magnify the conflict and make the solution to the conflict appears to be next to impossible. The friends' remarks to Job become progressively shorter and in the third cycle of speeches Zophar does not even respond. This reflects that Job's friends had been defeated. Since the wise men of Job's day could not refute him, this creates a tension. Is anyone able to answer Job?

a. The first cycle of speeches, 4:1–14:22

- 1) Eliphaz's first speech, 4:1–5:27
- 2) Job's response, 6:1–7:21
- 3) Bildad's first speech, 8:1–22
- 4) Job's response, 9:1–10:22
- 5) Zophar's first speech, 11:1–20
- 6) Job's response, 12:1–14:22

b. The second cycle of speeches, 15:1–21:34

- 1) Eliphaz's second speech, 15:1–35
- 2) Job's response, 16:1–17:16
- 3) Bildad's second speech, 18:1–21
- 4) Job's response, 19:1–29
- 5) Zophar's second speech, 20:1–29
- 6) Job's response, 21:1–34

c. The third cycle of speeches, 22:1–27:23

- 1) Eliphaz's third speech, 22:1–30
- 2) Job's response, 23:1–24:25
- 3) Bildad's third speech, 25:1–6
- 4) Job's response, 26:1–27:23

3. The Climax, 28:1–37:24

Job's discourse on wisdom indicates that only God has wisdom; yet Job challenges God to a legal conflict by giving his oath of innocence in chapter 31. This is where the conflict reaches its peak.

a. Job's discourse on wisdom, 28:1–28

b. Job's final statement about his case, 29:1–31:40

c. Elihu's four speeches, 32:1–37:24

C. The Divine Response Encourages Man's Submitting to God's Administration of Justice, 38:1–42:17.

1. The Resolution, 38:1–42:6

All the human answers have been given to solve Job's problem; however, none have provided the solution. The only one who can unravel this is God. In this section of material, God provides the resolution to the problem.

a. The LORD's first speech, 38:1–40:2

b. Job's first response, 40:3–5

c. The LORD's second speech, 40:6–41:34

d. Job's second response, 42:1–6

2. The Outcome, 42:7–9

This is the consequence of the resolution. God pronounces that Job was right in the debate and only God will accept his prayers for the friends.

3. The Conclusion, 42:10–17

The Joban author gives his concluding remarks about the account. The Joban author announces in the end that God freely blessed Job with greater blessing than his earlier years.

## PART IV: PSALMS

### I. Introduction

In our introduction to Psalms, we will look at some general information about the Psalter, the superscriptions used in the Psalms, their nature, and classification.

#### A. Title

MT: *T<sup>e</sup>hillîm*, “Praises”

LXX: Vaticanus—*Psalmoi*, “Psalms”

Alexandrinus—*Psalterion*, a reference to a stringed instrument

V: *Liber Psalmorum* “The Book of Psalms”

#### B. Authorship and Date

The Book of Psalms is different than other Old Testament books in that it is an anthology of 150 individual poems written by different authors over a span of approximately 1000 years. The evidence for the composer of each psalm is primarily drawn from the superscriptions that stand at the head of 116 psalms. The 34 psalms without a superscription are commonly referred to as “orphan psalms.” From the information contained in the superscriptions, we can infer that Moses wrote Psalm 90 which would have been composed in the fifteenth century B.C. David, ca. 1000 B.C, wrote the majority of the first 72 psalms. It is also clear that some of the psalms were written after the Babylonian exile. An example of this is Psalm 137. This would have been in the sixth or fifth century B.C. Therefore, the writing of the individual psalms occurred over a 1000-year period.

#### C. The Development of the Book of Psalms

In looking at the development of the psalms, we will need to see how the Psalter is composed of five books and how our present organization of the Psalter historically developed.

##### 1. A collection of five collections of psalms

While it is apparent that the Psalms have some type of organization such as is reflected by the psalms of Ascents (Pss 120–34), it is also clear that they are not arranged chronologically. For example, there are a few psalms in the last part of the Psalter that clearly come from the postexilic period (Pss 126, 137), but these are not the concluding psalms for the book of Psalms. To this we should also note that a psalm of David, Psalm 138, follows a postexilic psalm, Psalm 137. However, most of the Davidic psalms are found in Psalms 1–72 (Harman, *Psalms*, p. 22). Therefore, we should conclude that our book of Psalms is not strictly arranged according to chronology.

What is clearly seen in the Psalms is that the Psalms are made up of five separate collections of Psalms. It may be that this fivefold collection may

have been an imitation of the five books of Moses (Genesis through Deuteronomy). Because this same arrangement is seen in the Septuagint, the antiquity of this fivefold arrangement clearly dates prior to 200 B.C., and it is tenable that the fivefold collection as we know it today goes back to the time of Ezra. The fivefold division in the Psalms looks like this:

- Book 1 Psalms 1–41 (in Greek text, 1–40)
- Book 2 Psalms 42–72 (in Greek text, 41–71)
- Book 3 Psalms 73–89 (in Greek text, 72–88)
- Book 4 Psalms 90–106 (in Greek text, 89–105)
- Book 5 Psalms 107–150 (in Greek text, 106–150, with the addition of Ps 151)

This fivefold arrangement is clearly reflected by doxologies that complete each book. The first book ends with this doxology in Psalm 41:13: “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, From everlasting to everlasting. Amen and Amen.” The second book also ends with a similar doxology in Psalm 72:18–19: “Blessed be the LORD God, the God of Israel, Who alone works wonders. <sup>19</sup>And blessed be His glorious name forever; and may the whole earth be filled with His glory. Amen, and Amen.” Book 3 ends with this: “Blessed be the LORD forever! Amen and Amen” (89:52). And Book 4 concludes with, “Blessed be the LORD, the God of Israel, from everlasting even to everlasting. And let all the people say, ‘Amen.’ Praise the LORD!” (106:48). While Book 5 does not have a concluding verse that serves as a doxology, the whole 150th psalm is doxological and it appropriately concludes like this in v. 6: “Let everything that has breath praise the LORD. Praise the LORD!” (Harman, *Psalms*, p. 22).

## 2. The historical development of the Psalter

How did this fivefold arrangement develop? To understand its historical development, we will initially look at four facts from our canonical book of Psalms that suggest there was a gradual development in the collection of Psalms. Based upon a comparison of the Psalms with Old Testament history, we will subsequently outline three major time periods when individual psalms were written and collected on individual scrolls.

### a. Four facts reflecting the gradual development of the book of Psalms

- 1) Assuming for the moment that the preposition *l'* (“of,” “to,” “for,” “by,” etc.) as found in the superscriptions of the psalms generally reflects authorship when followed by a name, this indicates that Psalm 90 was composed by Moses, Psalm 3 and many others by David, Psalm 127 by Solomon, Psalm 42 and others by the sons of Korah. In addition, the content of Psalm 137 clearly reflects that it is exilic or postexilic. This data indicates that individual psalms were composed over an approximate range of 900 years and gathered into our extant form of Psalms.

- 2) As we look at the Psalter, we also see that there are clearly defined blocks of material found within our book of Psalms. These blocks of material suggest that these were collected before their arrangement in the fivefold arrangement found in the Psalter. The main blocks of material in the Psalms include these (Harman, *Psalms*, p. 23):

Davidic Psalms	3–41; 51–72; 108–10; 138–45
Korahite Psalms	42–49; 84–85; 87–88
Psalms using Elohim	42–83
Asaphite Psalms	73–83
Divine Kingship Psalms	93–100
Praise Psalms	103–7
Songs of Ascent	120–34
Hallelujah Psalms	111–18; 146–50

- 3) The 150 psalms contained in our canonical collection of Psalms have the earmarks of being compiled into a threefold collection before the fivefold structure. If we compare the five books of the Psalms, we notice that three of the books (Books 1, 2, and 5) are relatively close in number of psalms contained in each book and that the remaining two are identical in number (Book 3 and 4). The first group of books varies between 31 to 44 psalms: the first book (1–41) has 41 psalms, the second book (41–71) 31, and the fifth book (106–50) 44. Both books in the second group have 17 psalms (72–89 and 90–106). The brevity of Books 3 and 4 imply that each may have been separated from a larger book of psalms in order to raise the number of books from three to five. The rationale may have been to make the Psalter conform to the fivefold division of the Torah (Beckwith, p. 6). This earlier threefold collection of our 150 canonical psalms is reflected by three items: the references to God’s name or title, the repetition of a few psalms, and the reference to authorship found in the superscriptions

- a) The use of the divine name Yahweh and divine title *Elohim* reflects those different collections of psalms were merged into our current book of Psalms. Book 1, Psalms 1–41, generally uses the covenant name Yahweh, “the LORD” (according to Beckwith, Yahweh is used 275 times against 48 uses of *Elohim*). The fourth and fifth books likewise stress the divine name Yahweh (329 times as opposed to 47 for *Elohim*). Against this emphasis on the divine name, the second and third books use the name *Elohim*, “God,” 248 times as opposed to 70 uses of Yahweh (Beckwith, p. 7). This implies three collections of Psalms: Book 1, Books 2 & 3, and Books 4 & 5.

We might also note that Psalm 72 supports the argument that Books 1 and 2 are separate works. Besides the doxology that

concludes the second book, the final verse of Psalm 72 provides this additional note (v. 20): “The prayers of David the son of Jesse are ended.” While there are a few psalms of David that come later in the Psalter (see 108–10; 138–45), the first two books in Psalms (1–41 and 42–72) are predominantly Davidic psalms. However, the superscription of Psalm 72 indicates that Solomon was the author of this psalm; again assuming that preposition *l'* (“of,” “to,” “for,” “by,” etc.) when followed by a personal name denotes authorship. Because of the doxology in vv. 18–19 of Psalm 72 and its thematic similarities with some of the Davidic psalms, Psalm 72 was apparently placed at the conclusion of an earlier collection, Book 2, and it, along with previous psalms from Book 2, was later incorporated into our canonical book of Psalms (Harman, *Psalms*, p. 23).

- b) Also significant in this regard is the essential repetition of a few psalms in each collection. The repetitions break down in the following manner:

Psalm 14 in Book 1	=	Psalm 53 in Book 2
Psalm 40:13–17 in Book 1	=	Psalm 70 in Book 2
Psalm 57:7–11 in Book 2	=	Psalm 108:1–5 in Book 5
Psalm 60:5–12 in Book 2	=	Psalm 108:6–13 in Book 5

While Scripture contains other sections of extended duplicated material (cf. Isa 2:2–4 with Mic 4:1–3), duplication does not usually occur in the same work, unless the Psalter is the exception. However, this duplication of psalms, or portions of psalms, certainly seems to be a peculiarity if Books 1 and 2 were part of the same initial collection, and the same is true if Books 2 and 5 were initially grouped together. Consequently, the duplication of psalms suggests that our current Psalter is made of several smaller collections, with the use of divine names suggesting a threefold division.

- c) Observations have been made since patristic times that the superscriptions to the psalms were not penned by the original authors and dated later than a psalm’s composition. However, because of their antiquity, orthodox scholars have treated them as containing historically accurate material (Beckwith, p. 8). In the Hebrew text, 116 psalms have superscriptions with 100 of these providing information about authorship: David’s authorship is associated with 73 psalms, Asaph’s with 12, the sons of Korah’s with 10, Solomon’s with 2, Heman’s with 1, Ethan’s with 1, and Moses’ with 1. As is apparent, David is the dominant composer of psalms, with his name appearing in all five books, along with the other psalm writers. Is there any type of pattern to the variations in

psalmic authors intermixed with the Davidic compositions? Beckwith has summarized this information about David and the other psalmic authors with this: “If one divides the Psalter into three, there are 37 [Davidic psalms] in Book I, 19 in Book II-III and 17 in Book IV-V. David’s is the only name to occur in Book I, but in the other two sections, his name stands alongside others. In Book II-III, the other names are those of the Levitical singers. We know all Asaph, Heman, Ethan, and the sons of Korah in this capacity from the books of Chronicles, Ezra, and Nehemiah, and their psalms are all to be found in Book II-III. The only other psalmist to be found there is Solomon, who could properly be linked with his father David in any of the three parts. The remaining psalmists, most of whom are anonymous, stand alongside David in Book IV-V, though Moses and Solomon also feature there. In Book I there are only four anonymous psalms, and only four in Book II-III, but in Book IV-V, there are no less than 42. The Psalter appears, therefore to have a unity of plan, and to have been organized in three parts on an intelligible principle: Book I consist of psalms of David, Book II-III consists of psalms of David and the Levites, and Book IV-V consists of Psalms of David and Other Psalmists. The ‘Other Psalmists’ are mostly anonymous, but they belong to all periods from Moses (Ps. 90) to the Babylonian Exile (Ps. 137)” (pp. 9–10).

- 4) As we saw in the preceding major section, the books of Psalms reflect a fivefold structure, and this fivefold collection was concatenated no later than the closing of the Old Testament canon, approximately 400 B.C. This same fivefold structure is also reflected by the identical structuring found in the Septuagint, though it has an additional apocryphal psalms that, according to its own superscription, is outside of the number of Psalms (see Anderson [“The Division”] who translates this note: “This psalm is a personal writing of David and outside the number” [p. 228, n. 35]). Not only does the Septuagint reflect the same fivefold structure, its superscriptions appear to be translated from a Vorlage that is similar to our current form of the Hebrew text. The primary difference with the Septuagint relates to the fact that it has a superscription for 17 psalms beyond the 116 of the proto-MT. Thus, while the Hebrew text has 116 psalms with a superscription, the LXX has 133 psalms with a superscription. Another variation relates to those 18 superscriptions that provide an occasion for the psalm (see Anderson, “Division,” p. 224). In current psalmic discussions, scholars who respect the antiquity of the superscriptions understand that the Septuagint “is basically a translation from a proto-Masoretic type copy of the books of psalms” (ibid., p. 222). At the latest, the Septuagint material, as well as manuscripts from Qumran, suggest that the superscriptions can date

no later than the third century. However, the information contained in the superscriptions for the LXX as compared to the proto-MT suggest that it be dated no later than 400 B.C., and this is for three reasons.

- a) Some of the musical directions in the Hebrew superscriptions were misunderstood and incorrectly rendered by the translator of the Septuagint, who translated no later than the early part of the second century B.C., as is the case in Pss 5, 6, 8, 9, 12, etc. (Beckwith, p. 11).
- b) The expression translated from Hebrew as “for the choir director/director of music,” which occurs in 55 psalms, is consistently mistranslated in the Septuagint as “unto the end.” This suggests that the LXX translator(s) no longer knew what the Hebrew expression meant. This type of misunderstanding is also reflected by other Jewish sources and also by Aquila (*ibid.*). As such, this implies that for some reason the LXX translator is no longer fully conversant with some of the technical expressions used in the superscriptions.
- c) The information contained in the superscriptions for the proto-MT suggests that it shares common concepts with Chronicles, Ezra and Nehemiah. The same historical persons mentioned in the superscriptions are also found in these historical books (such as Asaph, Heman, etc.). The Levitical singers play their psalmic melodies to the tune of Alamoth and Sheminith. While there are similarities between the Psalms and these historical books, the information in the psalmic superscriptions appears to contain details that are more technical. The concepts shared between both types of literature seem to be mutually corroborating rather than reflecting a common source of dependence. What this information does indicate is that Psalms and Chronicles-Ezra-Nehemiah go back to a common historical period (*ibid.*, pp. 13–14).

What is most interesting is “that the meaning of the musical directions in the psalm-titles was forgotten. Since the psalms were being musically performed by the Levites in the Temple continuously, it is difficult to see how this could have happened. Yet it had already happened by the time the Septuagint translation of the psalms (with their titles) was made, *i.e.*, by the early-second century BC. It took place in Semitic circles as well as Hellenistic, for the rabbis had no traditional knowledge on the subject, as they had on many Temple matters, and Aquila is as ignorant about it as the Septuagint before him or the Midrash on Psalms after him. If the psalm-titles belonged to the period of the writing of Chronicles, about 400 BC or soon after, and reflected Temple practice of that period (that practice also reflected in Ezra and Nehemiah), then this

practice must have ceased almost immediately, in order to leave time for it to have been forgotten by the time the Septuagint translation of Psalms was made, about 200 years later” (ibid., pp. 14–15). Why should the music performed by the Levites in the Temple have ceased? This type of explanation is less than convincing since, according to Josephus and the Mishnah, the Levites musically performed until the time of the Temple’s destruction in A.D. 70 (ibid., p. 15).

However, a better explanation is to see that the musical directives were forgotten over a period of two generations when the Israelites hung up their harps in a foreign land during the Babylonian Captivity (Ps 137), and they even forgot how to speak their native language during this period. As Beckwith continues: “If the Levites forgot their music during that period, one could well understand it. But what this would mean is that the musical directions of the psalm-titles are (as indeed they profess to be) pre-exilic. It would also mean that the more general community of ideas and expressions reflected in the psalm-titles and in Chronicles, though to some extent continued in Ezra and Nehemiah, belongs essentially to the pre-exilic period—to the period of which the Chronicles speaks, rather than the period in which it was written. The obscurity of the names for different types of psalm in the psalm-titles would also be explained by a pre-exilic date, for those technicalities also could have been forgotten during the Exile” (ibid., p. 16).

At the end of the day, it is an indisputable fact the Psalter was compiled over approximately 900 to 1000 years. While much of the collection was compiled in the preexilic period, including the addition of much of the information in the superscriptions, we are convinced that our canonical book of Psalms was completed no later than 400 B.C.

b. Three major periods of concentrated work on developing collections of psalms

Critical scholars have generally dated the writing and the arrangement of the Psalms in the postexilic period (after 536 B.C.). On a general level, critical scholars have based these types of conclusions on questionable linguistic and thematic data. However, conservative scholars who are committed to the inerrancy of the autographs of Scripture have questioned the criteria of liberal scholars and have argued for earlier dates that are consistent with the entirety of Scripture’s message.

Though the canonical form of Psalms is the result of a continuous process of writing individual psalms, between the time periods of Moses and Ezra, then gathering, sorting, and arranging some of them into

collections, Old Testament history points to three major periods of activity.

1) During David's reign and Solomon's

The primary and most important period of writing and collecting psalms was during David's reign and during Solomon's, at least while he was faithful to Yahweh. David is the primary author of the Psalms, but he also appears to have been responsible for arranging the collection and use of them. David was a singer of songs and was the primary organizer of musical guilds for worship (1 Chr 15:3–28; 16:4–43; 23:1–5; 25; 2 Sam 6:5). Solomon organized singers for singing in the temple (2 Chr 5:11–14; 7:6; 9:11; Eccl 2:8).

2) During Hezekiah's reign

While limited activity went on during the reigns of Jehoshaphat (2 Chr 20:21–22) and Jehoiada (2 Chr 23:18), the more dominant activity took place during the reign of Hezekiah. He reorganized musical guilds (2 Chr 29:25–28, 30; 30:21; 31:2), and instructed the Levites to sing praises with the songs of David and Asaph (2 Chr 29:30).

3) During Ezra's lifetime

After Israel's return from the Babylonian captivity, "proper religious worship was again instituted under the leadership of the Levites (Ezra 6:18; Neh. 12:27–30, 45–47). It may well be that Ezra the scribe, who 'devoted himself to the study and observance of the Law of the LORD' (Ezra 7:10; cf. Neh. 7–10), was the person who played the major role in putting the Psalter into its present and final canonical form" (Wendland, *Analyzing the Psalms*, p. 19).

D. Editorial notes in the Psalms

In the Psalter, the editorial notes are comprised of the superscriptions and the word *Selah*. The superscriptions stand at the head of 116 psalms in our English texts. These are set apart by the smaller print just before the first verse of these psalms. Modern English translations place these in smaller print in order to make a distinction between what was part of the autographs and what was part of the subsequent editorial notations. Superscriptions contain, at the most, these seven pieces of information: psalm type (such as a hymn or song, e.g. Ps 32), persons associated with a psalm (Moses, Ps 90, which may make this the earliest psalm), historical information (Ps 3 has "when he fled from Absalom his son," connecting it with 2 Sam 15–18), musicians (Ps 4, "for the choir director"), musical indicators (Ps 4, "on stringed instruments"), melody indicators (Ps 45, "according to the Shoshannim") and liturgical indicators (Ps 92, "a Song for the Sabbath day"). The word *Selah* is also considered an editorial note. Unlike the superscriptions that begin a psalm, *Selah* is found after a verse within a psalm (for example, see Pss 3:2, 4, 8; 4:2, 4; 32:4, 5, 7; etc.). In both the NASB and the NIV, *Selah* is placed in italics and is set apart from the English verse in order to

reflect that it is considered part of the editorial activity on a psalm and not an inherent part of a psalm. While the superscriptions and *Selah* reflect the work of editors, we should be familiar with this editorial work for it does preserve accurate and helpful information for using the Psalms.

### 1. The superscriptions in the Psalms

Only 34 of the 150 Psalms in the Hebrew text (our Protestant canon reflects the same) do not have a superscription. These 34 Psalms are generally called the orphan Psalms. In the tradition of the Septuagint, 17 out of 151 Psalms do not have superscriptions. Because of the variations between the Hebrew text and the Greek as well as the difficulties reflected by some of their translations into Greek, this type of variation is one of the reasons why the superscriptions are considered the work of editors.

#### a. The reliability of the superscriptions

- 1) Critics have often contended that these are totally unreliable and late.
- 2) Some conservative scholars such as Waltke and Grisanti (p. 582) view these as inspired. However, neither Waltke nor Grisanti maintain that the superscriptions are from the hand of the original author, but from an inspired editor.
- 3) Others such as Gleason Archer and E. J. Young would view these as being accurate, but not inspired.
- 4) While the Septuagint establishes that the superscriptions arose prior to the Hellenistic period (323–21 B.C.), in my understanding they date no later than 400 B.C., with some going back to the preexilic period. However, we must clearly understand that there is a difference between what is part of the inspired text and what is a part of the editorial remarks. As we have previously noted, the superscriptions that preface 116 of the 150 psalms and the word *Selah* are considered in most cases to be the work of editors and not the work of the authors who wrote each psalm. The written text by the original authors for each psalm is what we would understand to be the inspired text. Inspiration is only applicable to the original authors who were responsible for each psalm. There are two reasons why the superscriptions and *Selah* are not considered a part of the inspired autographs for the Psalms. First, the superscriptions and *Selah* do not appear to be an inherent part of a psalm's message. They stand off from the poem. In some places where we have a psalm reduplicated, the superscription, or part thereof, is lacking. For example, Psalm 18 begins with this superscription: "**For the choir director. A Psalm of David the servant of the LORD**, who spoke to the LORD the words of this song in the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul. And he said" (emphasis added). This psalm has been taken from 2 Samuel 22 which begins this way in v. 1: "And David spoke the words of this song to the

LORD in the day that the LORD delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul.” When we compare both of these texts, we should notice that the words “for the choir director. A Psalm of David the servant of the LORD,” is absent from 2 Samuel 22:1, while the remainder of the verse is essentially the same in Psalm 18:1. We understand that if the material is an inherent part of a poet’s message, then it is part of the original author’s work and is, therefore, what we would consider the inspired text. In the case of the superscription in Psalm 18, what is part of the editor’s work is “For the choir director. A Psalm of David the servant of the LORD.” Second, the Septuagint has 133 psalms with a superscription as opposed to the 116 superscriptions in the Masoretic Text. Whatever else we may say, this reflects that superscriptions were later additions, at least for 17 additional psalms found in the Septuagint.

Though we do not see the superscriptions and *Selah* as part of the autographs of Scripture, we nevertheless see this as preserving accurate, though cryptic at points, historical information. It is hard to conceive how Jewish rabbis would have perpetuated something that was so inaccurate as a number of liberals have maintained.

b. The notations in the superscriptions

As we noted earlier, a psalmic superscription may contain seven pieces of information, though not all of this information will necessarily be found in any one superscription. Though we will not cover all this information, I want to provide a brief explanation of some of the information contained in the superscriptions so it may be used in latter studies on the Psalms.

- 1) In treating the superscription of the Psalms, the Hebrew preposition *l'* is generally translated as “of” when it is followed by a name. However, its translation as “of” is not without difficulty for, besides “of,” it may be translated in numerous ways, such as “to,” “about,” “by,” “belonging to,” etc. We can get a glimpse of the difficulty by comparing the KJV’s translation of *l'* in the superscription of Psalm 3 and Psalm 72. In Psalm 3, the KJV translated *l'* as “of” (“A Psalm **of** David”) and in Psalm 72 as “for” (“**for** Solomon”), though most modern translations rendered *l'* as “of.” We will briefly outline the translation options and provide a brief explanation of what each one means. Using David as the object the preposition *l'*, *l'* may be handled in the following ways:
  - a) “to David”—this means that the psalm is **dedicated** “to David.”
  - b) “about David”—this means that the **content** of the psalm **focused** on David.
  - c) “by David”—this means that the psalm was **written** “by David.”

- d) “of David”—this is equivalent to “belonging to David.” This is to say, a psalm **belonged to a Davidic collection** (see Tesh and Zorn, *Psalms*, 1:49–50). A psalm belonged to a Davidic collection because there was a genuine collection of psalms authored by David. However, the advantage of a broader understanding, such as “of,” is that it allows for some variation from a strict authorship view. In the Psalter, the preposition *l<sup>e</sup>*, when used in the superscriptions, is followed by a number of different names. This preposition is followed by these names: David (73 psalms), Solomon (Pss 72, 127), Asaph (12 psalms), the sons of Korah (11 psalms, in Ps 88, Heman’s name is also found), Moses (Ps 90) and Ethan (Ps 89).

Because the translation of *l<sup>e</sup>* as “of” is more general than the other three options, I prefer to translate *l<sup>e</sup>* as “of” followed by the given name, e.g., “of David.” With this understanding, I allow for the name to represent the author, as well as in a few cases to function as a shorthand expression for a collection. As such, I agree to some extent with the argument set forth by both Anderson (“Division,” p. 226) and Beckwith (pp. 11–12) that this is the *lamed of authorship*. Practically speaking, when *l<sup>e</sup>* is followed by a name, it is best to assume that the person so named wrote the psalm. In any psalm with “of David” as part of a psalm’s heading, I would understand that he was the author of all those psalms. The same thing is true for Solomon and Moses. However, if *l<sup>e</sup>* exclusively means authorship, then we will have some problems with a few superscriptions where the name Asaph follows the preposition *l<sup>e</sup>*. More precisely, there are three psalms (Psalms 74, 79, 83) where the actual content of the psalm appears to focus on the postexilic era (after 538 B.C.), yet Asaph (appointed under David in 1 Chr 15:17) carried out his work on the Psalms 400 to 500 years earlier than the postexilic period. Anderson argues that Psalms 74, 79, and 83 date to approximately 925 B.C. when Judah and Israel were invaded by Shoshenq (1 Kgs 14:25–28; 2 Chr 12:1–12). His invasion extended to Jerusalem where he looted the Temple (“Division,” p. 235). I would concede that Psalms 79 and 83 might go back to 925 B.C. However, it seems to me that the content of Psalm 74 is so precise in its description of the actual destruction of the Temple that I am forced to conclude that it is postexilic. Since the historical Asaph is from the Davidic era and since Psalm 74 (see esp. v. 5) clearly indicates that it was written in the postexilic era, I am compelled to say that Asaph did not write this latter psalm but it was added to the other psalms associated with Asaph. Thus, in the superscription to Psalm 74, “of Asaph” should be interpreted as meaning “belonging to a collection of Asaph psalms.” Or, perhaps the use of the name Asaph as used in the collection of the Asaph Psalms reflects a shorthand way of

saying “of the Asaphites” (see Ezra 2:41; 3:10). If we translate *l'* as “of,” its general nature allows us to include not only psalms that were authored by specific individuals but it also allows us to provide an explanation for those few psalms, at least Psalm 74, that were not necessarily authored by Asaph. Consequently, Psalm 74 was a psalm “of the Asaphites” (*Encyclopedia Judaica*, s.v. “Psalms, Book of,” by Avigdor Herzog, 13:1318).

What should we do with those 34 psalms that do not have a superscription? In these cases, we need to follow that hermeneutical axiom known as the analogy of Scripture, Scripture interprets Scripture. For example, can we identify the author of Psalm 1 or Psalm 2, since neither have a superscription? If all we had to go by were the superscriptions, then we would have to say we do not know their author. However, if we let Scripture interpret Scripture, the analogy of Scripture, we do have a New Testament testimony indicating that David was its author. Acts 4:25–26 and 13:33–34 indicate the David was responsible for producing Psalm 2. However, we have no information about the author of Psalm 1. So, we can say that Psalm 1 is inscripturated revelation and at the point of writing, it was an inspired document, but it was not God’s good pleasure to identify in the Scriptures its human author.

- 2) The superscriptions also contain information about a psalm’s historical background. For example, the superscription to Psalm 3 contains this additional information: “when he fled from Absalom his son.” By making cross-reference to the historical books, we can see more detailed background about this occasion. Where this type of information is available from the Psalms, we can make the following correlations with the historical books.

Psalm 3 may be correlated with 2 Samuel 15–18.

Psalm 7 may be correlated with 1 Samuel 23:24–29.

Psalm 18 is virtually identical with 2 Samuel 22.

Psalm 30 may be correlated with 1 Chronicles 21:1–22:1.

Psalm 34 may be correlated with 1 Samuel 21:10–22:2.

Psalm 51 is derived from the incident in 2 Samuel 11–12.

Psalm 52 may be correlated with 1 Samuel 22:9.

Psalm 54 may be correlated with 1 Samuel 23:15–23.

Psalm 56 may be correlated with 1 Samuel 21:10–15.

Psalm 57 is correlated with the incident at Adullam in 1 Samuel 22:1–2 or at En Gedi in 1 Samuel 24.

Psalm 59 may be correlated with 1 Samuel 19:11.

Psalm 60 is derived from 2 Samuel 8:8–13 and 1 Chronicles 18:9–12.

Psalm 63 may be correlated with 2 Samuel 15:23.

Psalm 142 is also connected with David’s being in a cave; this could be the same as in Psalm 57.

- 3) The superscriptions additionally contain a general scheme for classifying a few generic patterns in the Psalms. For example, the superscription of Psalm 3 contains a generic title: “A Psalm of David.” The word “psalm” is a generic category. The following contains a listing of these.
- a] *Mizmōr*—a “psalm”; this occurs in 57 psalms. It may denote by its descriptive Hebrew name that this was sung while being accompanied by a musical instrument.
  - b] *ʿîr*—a “song”; this is used in the title of these thirty psalms: 18, 45–46, 48, 65–68, 75–76, 83, 87–88, 92, 108, and 120–34. It apparently denotes a song not accompanied by a musical instrument.
  - c] *Maskîl*—this is used in 13 psalms, 32, 42, 44–45, 52–55, 74, 78, 88–89, and 142. This comes from a hiphil participle meaning to make prudent or wise. As such, this may denote a psalm of instruction or possibly a contemplative psalm.
  - d] *Miktām*—this title is found in the superscription of 6 psalms: 16, 56–60. The root meaning of this term is nebulous so there has been some dispute about the meaning of this term. It has been understood in later Hebrew and the Septuagint as an “inscription poem” or “a poem containing pithy sayings.” Eerdmans took it to mean a silent prayer. This title is always used of David and it is used when his life has been threatened with danger.
  - e] *T<sup>e</sup>pillâ*—a “prayer”; this is found in these 5 psalms: 17, 86, 90, 102, and 142.
  - f] *T<sup>h</sup>illâ*—“praise”; this is only found in the superscription of Psalm 145.
  - g] *Shiggāyôn*—the meaning of this term is uncertain and, consequently, is transliterated in NASB as “Shiggaion”; this is also the case in the NIV and KJV. It is only used in the superscription of Psalm 7 and the plural form is found in Habakkuk 3:1. Though we cannot be absolute what type of notation it denotes, one guess is that it reflects an ancient category of psalm.
- 4) The superscriptions may also contain information about musicians. An example of this is found in the superscription of Psalm 4: “For the choir director on stringed instruments.” The following give a sampling of musicians.
- a] “For the choir director” (*lamnaṣṣāh*)—this is found in 55 psalms. There has been much speculation about this term; it is best understood as a reference to the musician who directed the temple music.

- b] “Sons of Korah”—this expression is disputed as to whether this refers to authorship or a musical guild. If authorship is meant, then we have joint authorship in Ps 88 (the superscription of Ps 88 mentions both the sons of Korah and Heman the Ezrahite). Though this is a possibility, it is more likely that this is a reference to a group of musical performers from the family of Korah. This psalm was placed in that collection, “belonging to the collection of psalms associated with the sons of Korah.”
- c] “Jeduthun”—this is found in the superscription of Psalms 39, 62, and 77. The significance of this term has been disputed. Is this a reference to a particular person or to a guild of musicians? Probably Jeduthun is to be identified with Ethan the Ezrahite (cf. 1 Chr 15:19 with 2 Chr 5:12). If this is the case, he represented the family of Merari, as Asaph the family of Gershon, and Heman the family of Kohath. These families were the sons of Levi (see 1 Chr 6:16, 33, 39, and 43–44). Apparently, the name of Jeduthun became a designation for this family of musicians.
- 5) In addition, the superscriptions may reflect musical indicators. An example of this is found in the superscription of Psalm 4: “For the choir director.” The following give a sampling of musical indicators.
- a] *N<sup>e</sup>gînôṭ*—“on stringed instruments” (NASB), the NIV is in basic agreement with NASB, while KJV transliterates the term as “on Neginoth.” This is found in Psalms 4, 6, 54–55, 67, and 76; this term is found in the singular in Psalm 61 (*N<sup>e</sup>gînat*).
- b] *ᶜmîṇîṭ*—this occurs in Psalms 6 and 12. The NASB translates this term like this: “upon an eight-string lyre,” while the NIV transliterates this term as “according to *shemini*” as does the KJV. There are some difficulties with this term. This musical term may be a reference to an eight-stringed instrument, as NASB indicates.
- c] *Gittîṭ*—this occurs in Psalms 8, 81, and 84. Due to the interpretative difficulties, the translators of the KJV, NASB, and NIV have transliterated this as “Gittith” This could be understood as a reference to a song of the winepress since the term itself is a winepress. It could also refer to the Philistine city of Gath, and consequently would be an instrument from Gath.
- d] *N<sup>e</sup>hîlôṭ*—this term only occurs in Psalm 5. The NASB translates it as “for flute accompaniment,” and the NIV is similar, while the KJV transliterates it, “Nehiloth.” Though the exact usage of the term is disputed, it appears to be some type of wind instrument as a flute, as both NASB and NIV reflect.
- e] *‘ālāmôṭ*—this is only found in Psalm 46. The NASB transliterates this term as “set to Alamoṭh,” both KJV and NIV handle this in essentially the same manner. This is the plural form of the term

used for virgins in Isaiah 7:14. It may refer to a song that was sung by a choir of unmarried young woman. It may refer to young ladies playing tambourines as they accompanied singers in a liturgical march to the temple.

- 6) The superscriptions may also contain melody indicators. While not all the interpretive difficulties have been solved with the melody indicators, the following are tentative proposals.
- a] *‘al-šōšannîm*—this is found in the superscription to Psalm 45. The NASB translates as it as “according to the Shoshannim,” while the NIV reflects the possibility of this being a melody indicator: “to [the tune of] lilies.” This is found in Psalms 69 and 80, while a variation of it is found in Psalm 60.
  - b] *‘al-tašhet*—NASB transliterates this as “[set to] Al-tashheth”(KJV is the same) and the NIV translates as “[to the tune of] ‘Do Not Destroy.’” This is also found in Psalms 58, 59 and 75 (when either the NASB or NIV reflect an interpretive option that does not have explicit textual support, they mark it off with some sort of brackets, I am using this type of [brackets]).
  - c] *‘al ‘ayyelet haššahar*—this is found only in Psalm 22. NASB transliterates it “upon Aijelet Hashshahar” as also does KJV. The NIV provides a translation as “to [the tune of] ‘The Doe of the Morning’”
  - d] *‘al yônat ‘elem r<sup>e</sup>hōqōîm*—this is found in Psalm 56. Though reflecting a few differences, both NASB (“according to Jonath elem rehokim”) and KJV (“upon Jonathelemrechokim”) translate the preposition, *‘al*, and transliterate *yônat ‘elem r<sup>e</sup>hōqōîm*. The NIV translates this as “to [the tune of] ‘The Dove on Distant Oaks.’”
  - e] *‘almût labben* or *‘al-mût labben*—this is found only in the superscription of Psalm 9. This heading is problematic. If the first transliteration is correct (no break between *‘al* and *mût*), then this might mean something like “female voices by son(s).” This would apparently denote young boys singing with treble voices. This is the reading of the Ben Asher text; however, there are a number of manuscripts that have a break between *‘al* and *mût*. If this is adopted, this could be translated as in the NIV “to [the tune of] ‘The Death of the Son.’” Both NASB and KJV translate the preposition, *‘al*, and transliterate *mût labben*: NASB has “on Muth-labben” and KJV “upon Muthlabben.”
  - f] *‘al mähālat*—this is found in Psalm 53. While NASB, NIV, and KJV translate the preposition, *‘al*, and transliterate *mähālat*, they all essentially have “according to Mahalath.” When items such as these have a certain degree of obscurity, one way of avoiding the problem is by transliterating the expression. This is especially true

for Hebrew items that are perceived as titles. However, it could be translated as “to [the tune of] Suffering,” using capitalization to reflect its nature as a title.

- g] *‘al māhālat l’annôt*—this expression is found in Psalm 88. It is an expansion of the previous melody indicator. NASB, NIV, and KJV are essential agreement with their transliteration of this as “according to Mahalath Leannoth.” The marginal reading in the NIV reflects that this possibly is a tune entitled “The Suffering of Affliction.”
- 7) The superscriptions may finally contain liturgical notations. This is to say, the following items reflect that a few psalms were to be used on certain days or for certain types of occasions.
- a] *L’hazkîr*—this is used in Psalms 38 and 70. NASB translates as “for a memorial.” The KJV provides a literal translation: “to bring to remembrance.” The NIV reflects the context where something is brought to remembrance: a “petition.” The intention of this petition was to appeal to the LORD to act on behalf of the mourner (cf. with 1 Chr 16:4).
- b] *Leyôm haššabbāt*—this is only used in Psalm 92. Literally, this could be translated with “for the Sabbath Day,” as indicated in NASB, NIV, and KJV. This was intended to be used on the Sabbath.
- c] *L’tôdâ*—this is only found in Psalm 100. NASB translates it as “for thanksgiving” (essentially the same in NIV), and KJV has “for praise.” This may have been used to accompany a thank offering.
- d] *T’pillâ l’ânî kî ya’ătōp w’lipnê YHWH yišpōk sîhō*—this is found only in Psalm 102. The translations found in NASB, NIV, and KJV are essentially the same. NASB has “A Prayer of the Afflicted when he is faint and pours out his complaint before the LORD”; NIV translates “A prayer of an afflicted man. When he is faint and pours out his lament before the LORD”; and KJV “A Prayer of the afflicted, when he is overwhelmed, and poureth out his complaint before the LORD.”
- e] *‘îr hamma ‘ălôt*—this is found in Psalms 120–34. Both the NASB and NIV translate as “A Song of Ascents,” while the KJV has “a song of degrees.” This title reflects that Psalms 120–34 were used by Israelites as they made their annual pilgrimage to Jerusalem for the feasts prescribed in the Law.
- f] *Hănukkat habbayit*—this is used in Psalm 30, and is translated in NASB and KJV as “at the Dedication of the House.” House is a reference to the Temple. Though the Temple was not built in the Davidic era, David wrote this psalm to be used “for the Dedication of the House” (NIV). Because David had desired to build the

Temple, he had gathered much of the material for its construction; however, the LORD would not permit David to build the Temple because he was a man of war but told David that his son would build the Temple.

## 2. The use of *Selah* in the Psalms

While the word *Selah* is not found in the superscriptions, OT scholars do not see this as a part of the original written text and, consequently, regard this as part of the editorial activity on the Psalter. Unlike the superscriptions that begin a psalm, *Selah* is found after a verse within a psalm. In NASB, NIV, and KJV, *Selah* is marked off from the English verse in order to reflect that it is considered part of the editorial activity on a psalm.

*Selah* is found 71 times in the Psalter and 3 times in Habakkuk 3. When *Selah* is used in the Psalter, it is found almost exclusively in Books 1 (Pss 1–41), 2 (Pss 42–72), and 3 (Pss 73–89), and is only used four times in Book 5 (Pss 140:3, 5, 8; 143:6). Since it is often used in the Psalms with superscriptions containing musical notations, it seems to have some sort of musical significance (see Tesh and Zorn, *Psalms*, 1:52). Beyond this induction about its musical significance, there is much uncertainty about its background and meaning. To illustrate this uncertainty, we should consider a few of the suggestions about its background and possible meaning (see Snaith).

- a. *Selah* has been related to a root *slh* supposedly meaning to “bow down” (Eerdmans). As such, it could be understood as an exhortation for the audience to bow down at this point in the psalm in worship to the LORD.
- b. The Aramaic Targums apparently related *Selah* to a root *nesah*, meaning “forever.” This would be comparable to a preacher who interjects an Amen at key points in a worship service. Though we must be careful with etymology, this is especially suspect.
- c. The lexicographers, Koehler and Baumgartner, have suggested that *selah* is an acrostic signifying either a change of voice or a repetition from the beginning.
- d. Some OT scholars have related *Selah* to a root *sll*, meaning to “lift up.” It could be understood as a reference to the audience to raise their voices or for the instruments to increase their volume.

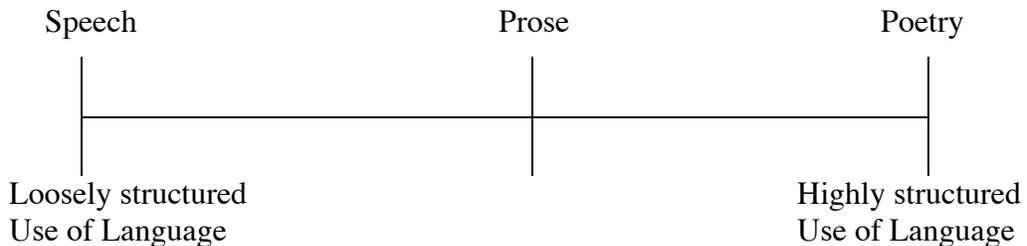
## E. The Nature of the Psalms

In looking at the nature of the psalms, we will treat the subjects of religious lyric poetry, the use in poetry of evocative language, poetic meter, parallelism, historical setting of a psalm, three-part structure of lyric poetry, and literary structures in psalms.

### 1. Religious lyric poetry

- a. Poetry is a language of images and the use of comparisons. It is more highly concentrated and its structure is more highly structured than prose (Ryken, *How to Read the Bible as Literature*, p. 89). The following chart

reflects a continuum that we see in comparing the act of communication that ranges from loosely structured oral use of language to highly structured poetic use of language (chart is adapted from Longman, *Literary Approaches*, p. 121):



- b. A lyric poem is characterized by its abbreviated nature (ibid., p. 109).
- c. Religious lyric poetry is the communication of a poet's thoughts and feelings as prompted by his understanding of God and His work. These sing of Yahweh's creation of the earth and His past deliverance. They rejoice over the Law and celebrate various aspects of worship.

## 2. Evocative language

Lyric poetry is known for its conciseness and artistic elements. This concentration of form is achieved through the use of parallelism, brevity of language, and images (such as metaphors, similes, etc.; for a thorough discussion of this subject, see Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible*). The following is a sampling of poetic figures.

### a. Simile and Metaphor

In using the simile and metaphor, a poet places his words into unnatural linguistic fields in order to picture his thoughts producing an appropriate emotive and intellectual response in his audience. By making this type of comparison, the poet is making a point of comparison between two items that are not naturally related. The simile and metaphor is expressing that **A** is in some way like **B** (Ryken, *Words of Delight*, p. 167).

- 1) Simile involves an explicit comparison by using the Hebrew equivalent of our "like" or "as" (see Bullinger, pp. 726–33). A simile declares that A is **like** B.

Psalm 1:3, "He is like a tree planted by streams of water." In this verse, the man who diligently studies the Torah is compared to a well-nourished tree. This comparison is obvious through the poet's use of "like." Trees and Bible students are not a normal comparison; the common denominator shared between them is that both are well nourished and consequently, productive. This creates in the reader a feeling of desire for this condition.

- 2) Metaphor is the most dominant type of image used in the Hebrew Old Testament. A metaphor involves an implied comparison. Two items that are not naturally similar have a common element. With this poetic

figure, the comparatives “like” or “as” are omitted. This is basically saying that A **is** B or A **represents** B (see Bullinger, pp. 735–43).

Psalm 84:10, “For the LORD God is a sun and shield.” In this verse, God is the subject who is represented by the sun and shield. The common element is that of protection and it creates a sense of security.

#### b. Other Figures of Speech

Though there are many other types of figures of speech in the Hebrew Bible, we will sample four of these (for more information on this, see Bullinger).

- 1) Personification is an assignment of human qualities to an abstract quality or non-human object.

Psalm 114:3, “The sea looked and fled; The Jordan turned back.” In light of vv. 1–2 of this psalm, it is clear that the psalmist is portraying Israel crossing the Red Sea (see Exod 14–15) and Jordan River (see Josh 3) when the LORD parted them. The subjects of this, the sea and Jordan, are being compared to a person looking and fleeing at something more powerful than them, viz., Yahweh’s presence and great power in leading His people out of Egypt and into the land of Canaan (Longman, *Psalms*, p. 113).

- 2) Hyperbole is an intentional exaggeration in order to create an emotional effect upon its recipient (Ryken, *Words of Delight*, p. 177). For example, we might say, “I have told you a million times not to do that.” The point is not to count the number of times the warning has been given but to stress that it has been given many times.

Psalm 40:12, “For evils beyond number have surrounded me; my iniquities have overtaken me, so that I am not able to see; they are more numerous than the hairs of my head, and my heart has failed me.” The point of the psalmist is that he has been troubled many times (“more numerous than the hairs of my head”) and that these troubles consume his inner man.

- 3) Metonymy is a substitution based upon association. In this case, a quality or suggestive term is substituted for what is literally meant. For example, we commonly substitute the White House for the president and his cabinet, the pen for the writer, the tongue for speech, and many others.

Psalm 5:9, “There is nothing reliable in what they say; their inward part is destruction *itself*. Their throat is an open grave; they flatter with their tongue.” To speak with flattery is to speak deceitfully. The physiological organ, “tongue,” produces flattery. By association, the “tongue” refers to flattery or deceitful speech. This is to say these wicked people use their speech organ, the tongue, to produce deceitful speech.

- 4) Synecdoche substitutes one word for another word that is generically related. In this case, a part may stand for the whole or a whole may stand for the part.

Psalm 51:8, “Make me to hear joy and gladness, let the bones which You have broken rejoice.” After David had sinned with Bathsheba and had her husband killed, he experienced the consequences from his sin. We realize from the account in 2 Samuel 11-12 that God did not literally break David’s bones. The broken bones are a part of David that represents his person as the Spirit of God had convicted it.

### 3. Meter

The fact that the Psalms are poetical denotes that there was some kind of meter and rhythm. While a number of different systems have been used to attempt an explanation for Hebrew poetic meter, none have fully explained Hebrew meter. However, our ignorance of the metric system used by the Hebrew poets is not a significant problem in interpreting the Psalms, as Longman has stated: “At this point meter plays simply no role in the exegesis of Hebrew poetry” (Longman, *Literary Approaches*, p. 134).

### 4. Parallelism

Parallelism describes how one Hebrew poetic line corresponds to another poetic line. “Parallelism is that phenomenon whereby two or more successive poetic lines strengthen, reinforce, and develop each other’s thought” (Klein et al, *Introduction to Biblical Interpretation*, p. 225).

As such, parallelism is an additional thought. The second line helps to follow-up the first line by further defining, specifying, expanding, intensifying, or contrasting the first line (ibid.). Berlin has compared parallelism with human vision. “Parallelism focuses the message on itself but its vision is binocular. Like human vision it superimposes two slightly different views of the same object and from their convergence it produces a sense of depth” (Adele Berlin, *The Dynamics of Biblical Parallelism* [New Haven: Yale University Press, 1981], p. 99). While it is beyond the scope of this course to examine all the ins-and-outs of parallelism, we will sample a few of the major types of parallelism to assist as we read the Psalms.

#### a. Synonymous parallelism

In the book of Psalms, synonymous parallelism is used often.

Synonymous parallelism is the repetition of a word or phrase by using a corresponding word or phrase that is closely related to the first word or phrase. In Psalm 2, synonymous parallelism appears more often than any other form of parallelism (Longman, *Psalms*, p. 99). Verses 1–3 read like this:

<sup>1</sup>Why are the nations in an uproar  
And the peoples devising a vain thing?

<sup>2</sup>The kings of the earth take their stand  
And the rulers take counsel together  
Against the LORD

and against His Anointed.

<sup>3</sup>“Let us tear their fetters apart  
And cast away their cords from us!”

We should notice the alternating nature of these 8 lines. In the two lines of v. 1, for example, “the peoples” parallel “the nations” and “devising a vain thing” parallels “are...in an uproar” The interrogative “why” is used explicitly in the first line but it is implied in the second line. This is an example of a common poetic device known as ellipsis. So we should understand the second line like this: “Why are the peoples devising a vain thing?” The same alternating pattern is followed in the remaining 6 lines.

b. Contrastive parallelism

This is also referred to as antithetical parallelism. This type of parallelism has often been taken as the opposite of synonymous parallelism. This is to say this has incorrectly been taken to mean that two opposite propositions are being made. However, this is not the point of contrastive parallelism, though at times both lines put together make up the proposition. With contrastive parallelism one proposition is made, but expressed from two opposite perspectives. Because the book of Proverbs is contrasting the lifestyle and rewards of the godly with the lifestyle and rewards of the wicked, contrastive parallelism is the dominant type of parallelism used in Proverbs (*ibid.*, pp. 99–100). We should notice a simple contrast in Proverbs 10:1:

A wise son makes a father glad,  
but a foolish son is a grief to his mother.

We should notice how “a wise son” is contrasted with “a foolish son,” “father” with “mother,” and “makes...glad” with “is a grief.” The point of this proverb is to stress that a wise child brings joy to parents. This is the point of the first line of this verse. To reinforce his point, he then provides a contrast. The same thought is presented from two opposing perspectives.

c. Subordination

In this case, one line is grammatically subordinated to the other line.  
Psalm 137:1

By the rivers of Babylon, there we sat down and wept,	(main clause)
when we remembered Zion.	(temporal clause)

In this verse, none of words in the second line has a synonymous or contrastive correspondence with the first line. More specifically, we can see that the second line is temporally subordinate to the first line, as the conjunction “when” clearly indicates.

d. Comparison

This has also been called emblematic parallelism. This is related to the preceding category in that the comparative clause is subordinate to the other. A comparison is made between two lines in such a way that it forms a simile. Psalm 103:13

Just as a father has compassion on *his* children, (comparative clause)

So the LORD has compassion on those who fear Him (main clause)

Like Psalm 137:1, none of words in the second line has a synonymous or contrastive correspondence with the first line. In this case, the subordinate clause, introduced by “just as,” clearly precedes the main clause.

5. The historical setting of a psalm

In evaluating the historical setting, there are two areas that need to be examined. The first area is from the superscriptions that begin a number of psalms. For example, the superscription to Psalm 3 informs us that this psalm comes from the time when David fled from Absalom. The second area would be from the other biblical data from within the psalm itself and from any other place in the Canon. For example, Psalm 2:1–3 reflects that this psalm was written during a time of turmoil in Israel and Acts 4:25 indicates that Psalm 2 was written by David. The combined effect indicates that this psalm was written during a time of turmoil during the reign of David. However, we should be careful not to become excessively precise in identifying the historical details when a psalm as well as any other portion of Scripture does not provide this information. It appears that the authors of many psalms wanted their inscripturated poetry to be used by other Israelites so they purposely communicated on a more general level. This was part of the author’s intention. Consequently, we will need to be content with a general knowledge of the historical setting. Psalm 121 has a superscription that appears to reflect that this is one of the psalms used by Israelites traveling to worship at Jerusalem. This psalm does not reflect a specific historical setting. The implied situation is that this is a time when danger was apparent in the hills as the psalmist and his companions traveled to Jerusalem. This situation moves the psalmist to turn his thoughts to the LORD who is always ready to take care of his own.

6. Three-part structure of lyric poetry

Lyric poetry has a three-part structure: subject, development of the subject, and conclusion (with some modifications, this is based on Ryken’s methodology in *Words of Delight*, pp. 197–215).

a. Subject

The subject (also called “topic”) is generally contained in the first few verses of a psalm. A psalmist may be responding to a thought, emotion, or a situation. The topic may be stated in different ways. In Psalm 1, the topic is found in the first two verses. The psalmist presents his thoughts from the Law about the blessedness of a godly man. In Psalm 23:1 David’s topic is his theological thoughts about God’s rich provisions for him (*ibid.*, p. 198). In Psalm 11:1–2 David’s topic involves a situation where his trust in the LORD helped him through an assassination attempt. In Psalm 124:1–2 the psalmist presents a situation reflecting God’s deliverance of Israel from an enemy. The controlling topics in lyric poems are found in the early verses.

b. Development of the subject

The development of the subject is the major part of the poem’s structure. The various authors of the psalms generally develop their subject in four ways. The first way is by using **contrast**. In Psalm 1, the psalmist sets up a contrast between the righteous and the wicked. This contrast emphasizes the blessedness of the godly. David’s trust in the LORD to handle his trial in Psalm 11 is contrasted with the advice to flee from Jerusalem. The second method of developing the subject is through **listing/cataloging** items that are associated with the subject. Hymns of praise generally catalog God’s characteristics and actions. Psalm 23 is the most familiar example of this. In supporting David’s subject of God’s rich provisions for him, he itemizes a number of God’s provisions such as rest, restoration, moral direction, and protection. The third manner is by the use of **relationship**. The subject in Psalm 19 is the majesty of God (v. 1). David initially shows how nature reflects God’s majesty and then moves to a related item, God’s majesty as reflected in His Word, vv. 7–14. The fourth way is through **repetition**. The topic in Psalm 133 is the blessedness of Israelites who are united in worship. The psalmist uses various images to develop his topic (*ibid.*).

c. Conclusion

A psalm is rounded off by the conclusion. This may be in the form of summation as in Psalm 1:6, “For the LORD knows the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish.” It may also be in the form of prayer as in Psalm 19:14 (“Let the words of my mouth and the meditation of my heart be acceptable in Your sight, O LORD, my rock and my Redeemer”) or an exhortation as in Psalm 32:11 (“Be glad in the LORD and rejoice, you righteous ones; and shout for joy, all you who are upright in heart”).

d. Summarizing the results from the three-fold structure

Once I have examined a psalm’s three-part structure, I force myself to write down two items: its genre and theme. At this point in our study, we are not prepared to say much about the genre, since we will develop this

in the following weeks. The theme is made up of two parts: topic/subject and the development of the topic/predicate.

Psalm 23 provides a familiar example. When I initially did a more in-depth study of Psalm 23, I wrote down that the psalm's genre was in the group of confidence psalms. Based upon v. 1, I also wrote down that the psalm's subject is God's rich provisions for David. If we wanted to theologially describe this subject, we would say that the topic of Psalm 23 is God's special providence. What did David say about God's rich provisions? David **catalogs** a number of God's provisions: rest in v. 2, restoration in v. 3a, moral direction in v. 3b, protection in vv. 4–5, a summary of God's provisions in v. 6a, and the ultimate provision for eternal worship in v. 6b. However, the **catalog** of provisions is a more complex expression of the subject. At this point, we need to go beyond the catalog to see if David expresses his motivation for listing these items. If I integrate the cataloging in Psalm 23 with an understanding that this is a psalm of confidence, I readily identify the notes of trust that are in the psalm: "I shall not want" in v. 1, "For His name's sake" in v. 3, "I fear no evil, for You are with me" in v. 4, and "goodness and lovingkindness will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the LORD forever" in v. 6. The reason for David's itemizing God's provisions is that it motivates the development of his faith. From this, I tentatively conclude that God's rich provisions cultivate David's faith in God. When I study a psalm in a serious manner, I have to write down my initial observations about the genre of a psalm and its theme. When I keep track of these in written form, I am able to do further study with greater precision. Though Psalm 23 is not a difficult psalm to analyze, I have found in studying other psalms that my initial statement of a psalm's theme will have to be revised once I have completed a full analysis of a psalm.

#### 7. Literary structures in psalms

In expanding a study of a psalm, we should consider the literary structures used by the psalmist. This expands upon the preceding section dealing with a poem's three-part structure. Once the poem's topic has been established, we want to see how this is developed. Poems are built on the guideline of topic and variation. A poet's topic/subject is developed by its variations. Having established the poem's topic, we should seek to discover how each part of the poem contributes to the topic. The variations of the topic are seen by the changing images and ideas. An extremely helpful interpretative hint is to remember that contrasts are very common in understanding how variations develop the topic. Though at times the connections between parts are miscellaneous, diligence in the study will assist in seeing the unity of thought (Ryken, *Words of Delight*, p. 209).

The type of material in a psalm also plays a key role in the poem's structural development. There are eight types of structural material in the

Psalms. First, a **descriptive** structure describes an event, a scene, or a person. Second, an **expository** structure unfolds a series of ideas or emotions. Third, a **narrative** structure presents a series of events. Fourth, a **dramatic** structure contains a speaker addressing a listener. Fifth, an **emotional** structure is found in many psalms of lament. This structure reflects abrupt changes from one subject to the next. The uneven flow of thought involves abrupt changes reflecting the emotional upheaval that the psalmist is facing. Sixth, a **repetitive** structure repeats the psalm's topic by representing it with varying images and emotions. Seventh, a **logical** structure presents a sequence of ideas that lead to a conclusion. Eighth, a **catalogue** structure lists various aspects of a subject. Many poems contain a number of these structural forms. Understanding these should help us see a psalmist's development of his topic (ibid.).

## F. The Classification of the Psalms

### 1. Form criticism

A key individual who has developed the form critical approach in the Psalms was Hermann Gunkel (*Einleitung in die Psalmen [Introduction to the Psalms]* (Fortress Press, 1967)). This method maintained that the Psalms were to be sung with ritual acts of worship. Following in Gunkel's steps were S. Mowinckel who saw an enthronement festival reflected in the psalms (*The Psalms in Israel's Worship*, 2nd ed [Abingdon, 1962]) and A. Weiser who maintained that there was a covenant renewal feast reflected in the psalms (*The Psalms* [Westminster Press, 1962]). As far as classifying psalms according to genre, this has been done by Claus Westermann (*The Praise of God in the Psalms* and Bernard W. Anderson, *Out of the Depths* [Westminster Press, 1974]).

### 2. Cautions about Form Criticism

Though there are some positive contributions of form criticism in that it forces one to look at formal elements within the psalm (this helps in handling its structure), the negative a priori must be rejected. For those who hold a high view of bibliology, our conclusions about genre must be based on the content of the psalm itself. This helps us avoid to subjectivity in form criticism.

Can we always locate a psalm's *Sitz im Leben*? As VanGemenen has stated the issue, "In my opinion the expositor is at risk when he explains the text in the context of historical referentiality, liturgy, or cultic *Sitz-im-Leben*" ("Psalms," p. 14).

What is the significance of the formal elements? Though formal elements within a psalm are helpful as literary features, it seems to me that these are not necessarily helpful in looking at the psalm's overall structure. Quite often a formal arrangement is violated by a poet for emphasis and not because there is an error.

## II. Analysis of Key Psalms According to Genre

Having looked at the introductory material, we will arrange the various psalms into literary groupings. Through the use primarily of thematic elements that are shared between psalms as well as certain literary features, we can more precisely classify the lyric poems of the Psalms. There are six basic genres in which the psalms can be placed. We will briefly examine each of these.

### A. Lament

The **lament** is the most dominant genre found in the Psalter. More than one-third of the psalms are of this nature. The dominant defining character of the lament is its mood. In this type of psalm, a psalmist will often be mourning about the attack of his enemies. At other times, a psalmist may make a complaint about himself and, at times, he expresses disappointment with God (Ps 22:1–2). In addition, all lament psalms move from mourning to expressing trust in God.

A problem often encountered in laments is that the enemy is described in vague terms. We need to avoid becoming too specific in our identification of the enemies. Some commentators have gone to extremes in identifying the enemy. Unless the context is clear, we should avoid this extreme because the psalmist generally wanted to be vague in identifying the specifics of a historical situation. As Longman has stated it: “In most cases the references are vague, and we have every reason to believe they are so intentionally. The psalms are purposefully vague in reference to historical events so that they can be used in a variety of situations” (Longman, *Psalms*, p. 27).

The lament psalm may be written from an individual or national perspective. Psalm 13 is an individual lament of David. This reflects a time in David’s life when he despaired that he might lose his life, perhaps because of an illness. His petition is made in v. 3. An element of trust concludes this psalm in vv. 5–6 (other examples include Pss 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 14 (=53), 17, 22, 25, 26, 27, 28, 31, 35, 38, 39, 41, 42, 43, 51, 52, 54, 55, 56, 57, 59, 61, 64, 69, 70 (=40:13–17), 71, 77, 86, 88, 109, 120, 130, 140, 141, 142, 143.). Psalm 12 is a national lament composed on behalf of Israel. David laments the oppression of Israel by their enemies. An expression of trust is found in v. 7 where a prayer for deliverance is offered (so also Pss 44, 58, 60, and others). The lament also includes the penitential psalms such as Psalm 51 (so also Pss 44, 58, 60, 74, 79, 80, 82, 83, 85, 90, 94, 102, 108, 115, 123, 126, 129, 137) and psalms with imprecatory elements such as Psalm 137 (so also Pss 12, 35, 58, 59, 69, 70, 109, 140).

Not only are lament psalms clear from their motifs and mood, they also have similar structural elements. There are generally five of these elements and they may occur in any order as well as more than once in a Psalm. Ryken has listed five of these elements: an introductory appeal to God, the lament, prayer

request, expression of trust in God, and a vow to praise God (*Words of Delight*, pp. 240–41).

Psalm 13—an individual lament

David prays that God would deliver him from a life-threatening situation. The structure of this is like this (VanGemeren, p. 139):

- A Expression of despair: How long?, vv. 1–2
- B Expression of prayer: Give me light!, vv. 3–4
- C Expression of trust: Let me sing!, vv. 5–6

Psalm 12—a national lament

The psalmist prays to God to deliver His nation from the deceptions of the wicked. The structure of Psalm 12 appears to be like this (VanGemeren, p. 135):

- A Prayer for deliverance, vv. 1-4
- B Promise of Yahweh, v. 5
- B<sup>1</sup> Reflection on God's promises, v. 6
- A<sup>1</sup> Prayer for deliverance, vv. 7-8

## B. Praise hymns

The **hymns of praise** are easily identifiable because of their emphasis on praise to God. With the lament, the psalmist is at the lower end of the emotional spectrum but with the hymn, he moves to the opposite end of joyful praise. God is praised for his greatness and goodness. He may be praised as Creator as in Psalms 8, 19, 29, 104, 148, as deliverer of Israel in 66, 100, 111, 114, 148, and as the Lord of history in 33, 103, 113, 117, 145, 146, 147 (Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, p. 176). Another type of hymn is the Song of Zion. In these psalms, God is extolled for having made Mount Zion the place where his presence would be uniquely manifested (Pss 46, 48, 76, 84, 87, 122).

Praise psalms generally have a threefold structure that is a specification of the three-part structure of lyric poems. The formal elements are the call to praise, the praise of God, and concluding resolution. We will examine these parts in a little more detail. First, the call to praise may contain as many as three elements: “an exhortation to sing to the Lord, to praise, to exalt; the naming of the person or group to whom the exhortation is directed; mention of the mode of praise” (Ryken, *Words of Delight*, p. 245). Second, the actual praise of God generally involves a cataloging of His praiseworthy attributes and/or actions. God’s attributes and actions “are related, with the comments about God’s character and attributes serving as a commentary on his acts” (ibid., p. 246). God’s praiseworthy acts in praise hymns focus on creation or nature and history. Third, the concluding resolution often ends with a prayer or a wish (ibid.).

### Psalm 8—a hymn of praise to the Creator

David in this psalm contemplates the glory of God in His creation of the world and man. Unlike most of general psalms of praise to God, this one does not contain a call to worship. In its place is an invocation in v. 1a. The motivation for praise is found in vv. 3-8 and this is followed by the conclusion in v. 9, which is a repetition of v. 1a. Based upon the content of this psalm VanGemenen has summarized it like this (p. 109):

- A Ascription of praise, v. 1a
  - B The glory of the great King, vv. 1b-2
    - C God's interest in man, vv. 3-4
      - C<sup>1</sup> Man's derived glory, v. 5
        - B<sup>1</sup> Man's glory as Ruler, vv. 6-8
          - A<sup>1</sup> Concluding Ascription of praise, v. 9

### Psalm 48—a song of Zion

The psalmist joyfully extols Jerusalem because it is Yahweh's holy city. In vv. 1-3 we have an invocation to praise Yahweh whose presence is manifest in Zion. The motivation for this is Yahweh's past actions and His attributes. This is developed in vv. 4-11. The psalm is brought to its conclusion in vv. 12-14 with an invitation to those who worship Yahweh to surround Zion. The content of this psalm can be structurally viewed in this manner (VanGemenen, p. 362):

- A Our God is the great king, vv. 1-3
  - B The perfections of our God, vv. 4-11
    - A<sup>1</sup> The great king is our shepherd, vv. 12-14

## C. Thanksgiving psalms

The **psalms of thanksgiving** are joyful expressions of thanksgiving. The dominant feature is an expression of gratitude to the LORD for having responded to a specific request of an individual or a group (Longman, *Psalms*, pp. 30–31). An individual psalm of thanksgiving is found in Psalm 32 (so also Pss 18, 30, 34, 40, 66, 92, 116, 118, 138). In this psalm, David thanks the LORD for forgiving him of his sin that involved his adultery with Bathsheba and responsibility for the murder of her husband. His prayer for forgiveness is found in his penitential lament in Psalm 51. A national psalm of thanksgiving is found in Psalm 124. Israel expresses gratitude to the LORD for delivering them from an impending destruction (other examples include Pss 65, 67, 75, 107, 136).

### Psalm 32—an individual thanksgiving psalm

In Psalm 51 David poetically reflects his confession of sin. Psalm 32 follows up on this. David thanks God for the joy of having his sins forgiven. This individual hymn of thanksgiving stresses God's

forgiveness and the lessons that David learned from it. We could outline this psalm in the following:

- A Forgiveness of sins results in contentment, vv. 1-5
  - 1 Blessedness of forgiven sins, vv. 1-2
  - 2 Misery with unforgiven sins, vv. 3-4
  - 3 God's forgiveness of sin results from confession of sin, v. 5
- B God's provisions when sin has been confessed, vv. 6-7
- C Exhortation for the righteous to rejoice in the LORD, vv. 8-11
  - 1 Lessons from about submitting to God's will, vv. 8-9
  - 2 Confidence in God's unfailing love, v. 10
  - 3 Exhortation to rejoice in the LORD, v. 11

Psalm 124—a national thanksgiving psalm  
Israel reflects on how Yahweh delivered them from certain disaster. This results in their thanksgiving. Structurally the psalm looks like this (VanGemeren, p. 785):

- A The presence of Yahweh, vv. 1-2a
  - B Protection from dangers, vv. 2b-5
    - C Praise of Yahweh, v. 6a
  - B<sup>1</sup> Protection from Dangers, vv. 6b-7
- A<sup>1</sup> The presence of Yahweh, v. 8

#### D. Kingship and covenant psalms

**Kingship and covenant renewal psalms** celebrate and affirm loyalty to God as King, the theocratic king, and God's covenant. This category has three subcategories. First, divine kingship psalms celebrate the LORD's sovereign rule over the universe. The psalms in this category are 24, 29, 47, 93, 95, 96, 97, 98, 99. Second, theocratic kingship psalms, generally known as "royal psalms," celebrate the Davidic dynasty and the universal kingdom. These psalms are joined by their focus on Israel's earthly king. These psalms have the Davidic Covenant in 2 Samuel 7 (also 1 Chr 17) as their foundation. These psalms may focus on the importance of the Davidic line and its relationship to God as in Psalms 2, 89, 132. Psalm 18 is a royal thanksgiving psalm. Psalm 20 makes a request God's blessing on the king. Psalm 45 focuses on a royal wedding. Therefore, the focus of these psalms is the Davidic king but it can refer to various phases of kingship. The remaining royal psalms are 21, 72, 101, 110, 144. The royal psalms are especially significant for Christians because they provide the background and find their culmination in our Lord Jesus Christ. Third, two psalms, 50 and 81, are intended to encourage Israel to renew her allegiance to God and the Mosaic Covenant (Fee and Stuart, *How to Read the Bible*, p. 176).

Psalm 47—divine kingship psalm

This psalm celebrates the victorious reign of Yahweh over all the earth. In v. 1 we have a call to praise followed by the motivation for this in vv. 2-8. The psalm is brought to a conclusion in v. 9. VanGemeren has set forth structure of this psalm like this (p. 358):

- A Praise of Yahweh's mighty acts, vv. 1-2
- B Yahweh's mighty acts, vv. 3-4
- C Yahweh's victorious kingship, vv. 5-6
- B<sup>1</sup> Yahweh is king, vv. 7-8
- A<sup>1</sup> Universal acknowledgment of Yahweh's kingship, v. 9

#### Psalm 2—theocratic kingship psalm

In this psalm, David is celebrating God's promises that had been given to him via the Davidic Covenant about his royal dynasty that would rule over the theocracy. The structure of Psalm 2 is this:

- A The nations' response to God's king, vv. 1-3
- B Yahweh's reaction to the nations' response to His king, vv. 4-6
- B<sup>1</sup> Yahweh's decree concerning the required response to God's king, vv. 7-9
- A<sup>1</sup> The conclusion from Yahweh's decree concerning the required response to God's king, vv. 10-12

#### Psalm 50—covenant renewal psalm

In this psalm, the author is dealing with the subject of true loyalty to Yahweh. We can view the structure in this way (VanGemeren, p. 373):

- A The righteous judgment of God, vv. 1-6
- B Warning to the godly, vv. 7-15
- B<sup>1</sup> Warning to the wicked, vv. 16-21
- A<sup>1</sup> The righteous judgment of God, vv. 22-23

### E. Songs of Trust

**Psalms of confidence** are dominated by their emphasis on trusting God and the security that this trust in God produces. Though enemies surround David in Psalms 11 and 23, he puts his trust in the LORD and from this he finds security. In Psalm 121 the worshippers traveling to Jerusalem were faced with danger, yet they focused their eyes of faith on the LORD. In Psalm 131, the psalmist's submissive trust in his LORD is graphically compared to a weaned child with his mother. Other psalms in this grouping are 16, 62, 63, 91, 125.

#### Psalm 23

In this psalm, David illustrates the trust that he had in God's special providence in his life.

- A Trust in Yahweh's provisions, v. 1

B Catalog of Yahweh's provision, vv. 2-6

- 1 Yahweh's provision of rest, v. 2
- 2 Yahweh's provision for restoration, v. 3a
- 3 Yahweh's provision moral righteousness, v. 3b
- 4 Yahweh's provision for protection, vv. 4-5

A<sup>1</sup> Trust in Yahweh's provisions, v. 6

F. Psalms of Wisdom

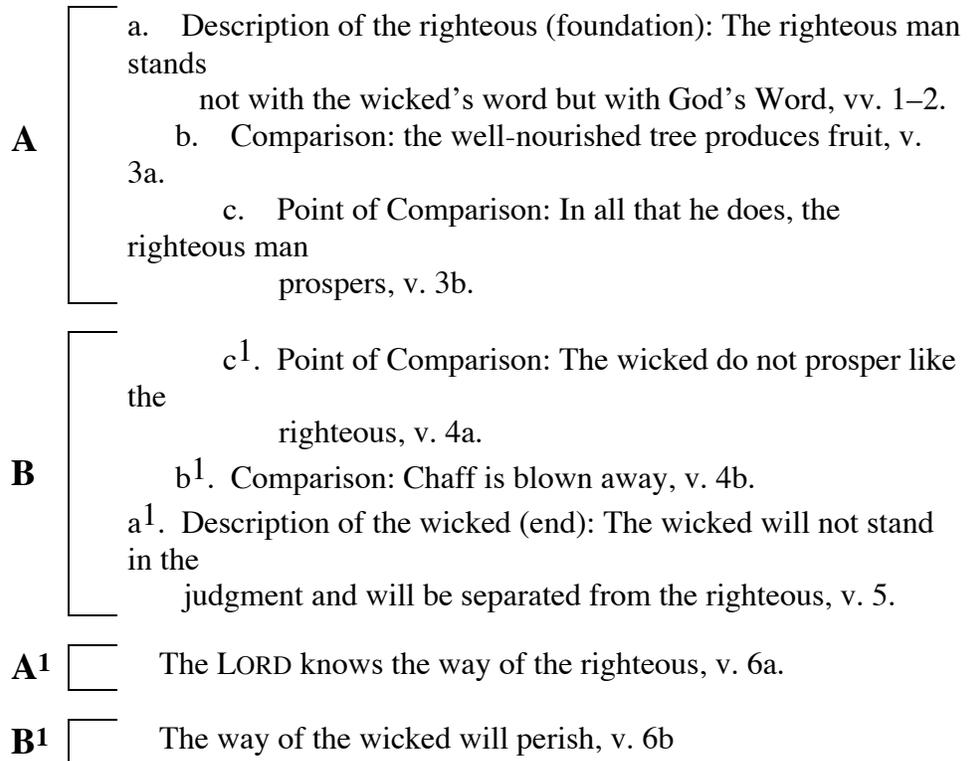
**Wisdom psalms** have a didactic nature and emphasize the Torah as fundamental for blessing. In addition, they contrast the lifestyle of the righteous with that of the wicked. Two rhetorical elements that dominate this genre are the blessing pronouncement and the use of similes. Psalms in this category are 1, 15, 36, 37, 49, 73, 112, 119, 127, 128, 133.

Psalm 1—we will use this to illustrate the steps to take in doing a poetic analysis (this methodology is a summation of Ryken's methodology in *Words of Delight*, pp. 197–215)

1. The first step in analyzing a psalm is to recognize that it is **religious lyric poetry**. As poetry, it will be poetry that is characterized by its brevity of line length, parallelism, and figurative language. As religious poetry, it focuses on God and His work, especially in the life of His people. In contrast with narrative poetry as in Job, lyric poems are abbreviated pericopes.
2. The **generic** classification of Psalm 1 is that of wisdom. As such, our reading of Psalm 1 is influenced by our prior understanding of other wisdom literature such as the book of Proverbs. Wisdom literature contrasts the righteous and the wicked. It also has an emphasis on God's blessing on the righteous, those who in faith obey the Law, and God's judgment on the wicked. Wisdom literature's didactic thrust is to direct the people of God into a godly way of life. Consequently, as we read Psalm 1, we expect to see the same type of emphases (Longman, *Psalms*, pp. 32–33).
3. The **historical** setting is left on a very general level. Because of its similarities with Proverbs, Solomon perhaps may have written it. However, this is based on circumstantial evidence. Because the psalmist pictures Israelites as experiencing the covenant blessings and curses described in passages such as Leviticus 26, Deuteronomy 28, 30, we are best to see it as having been composed during the monarchy before the Babylonian invasion of Judah in 605 B.C.
4. The **topic** is developed in v. 1, "the godly man." Though the author does not use the term "godly," the manner in which he depicts this man is consistent with the Old Testament concept of a "godly man." We might tentatively think the topic or subject is the contrast between the two ways. Though the treatment of the wicked is approximately comparable in length to that of the

godly and both are introduced in v. 1, the point of the contrast is to use the wicked as a foil. The emphasis of the psalmist is to promote godliness. Therefore, the **theme** of Psalm 1 is this: “the godly man is blessed.”

5. The content of the poem primarily follows a **descriptive structure**. It describes a godly man and an ungodly man. The development of thought falls into three units: vv. 1–3 are a description of the righteous, vv. 4–5 a description of the wicked, and v. 6 summarizes the two. We could visualize the structural scheme in the following manner:



Because of the nature of the summary of the two types of people in v. 6, we broke this verse into two parts. An overview of the entire psalm would look like this:

A	B
vv. 1–3	vv. 4–5
 A <sup>1</sup>	 B <sup>1</sup>
v. 6a	v. 6b

The psalmist develops his theme by using a prolonged **contrast** between two types of people. We will presently trace the psalmist’s flow of thought through the three structural units. In the first unit, vv. 1–3, the author develops his theme by contrasts. He begins v. 1 with a pronouncement of blessedness, commonly referred to as a “beatitude,” on the godly man. A

contrast immediately follows by picturing the blessed man avoiding the wicked's influence. In v. 2 the psalmist gives the basis for the blessed man's godliness and illustrates in v. 3 the extent of his blessedness. The second unit in vv. 4–5 begins with a contrast, "the ungodly are not so." This is to say, the ungodly do not receive the blessings that the godly receive. The psalmist then illustrates their unstable life in the remainder of v. 4. In v. 5 he concludes the second unit by describing the judgment of the wicked. He once again draws a contrast by indicating that the ungodly will be separated from the godly. The third unit, v. 6, contrasts the godly and ungodly. The godly have a special relationship with the LORD but the ungodly will perish.

How does the contrasting structure contribute to the theme, "the blessedness of the godly man"? It sets forth that making choices to separate from the ungodly and to diligently study God's Word develops godliness. It implies that life involves struggles and hard choices. It sets forth that in the midst of this difficult life, God is taking care of his own and permits the wicked to experience the justice that they deserve.

6. The most detailed part of a poetic analysis is examining its **poetic texture**. The previous five steps have focused on the overall effect of a poem, but this step deals with the details of a poem. The message of a poem is discerned by analyzing details such as the poem's rhetorical devices and figurative language. The details of a poem are isolated to discover their meaning in its context. These details make up the psalm's poetic texture. Two questions should be asked of the details in the poem. Why is this figure or device used here? What is the logic of this figure or device in its context? In analyzing the poetic texture of a psalm, it is best to go through the text progressively, unit by unit (Ryken, *Words of Delight*, p. 210).

In doing this analysis, it is best to use exegetical commentaries and other helps. Producing a running commentary on the rhetorical devices and figurative language of a psalm does this. Because this is somewhat detailed, we will only use v. 1 as an example.

The meaning of v. 1 is communicated through three metaphorical statements that explain what it means to be a "blessed man." This blessed man "walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly." The metaphor is that of taking a walk down a path named "the Counsel of the Ungodly." The verb "walketh" is a metaphor for following. It denotes a continuous movement to a destination. The term "counsel" is a legal term. This type of "counsel" has a societal influence. When applying the text, this could be viewed as representing issues such as cultural influence and peer pressure. The godly man does not comply with the pressure of the ungodly.

The second metaphorical statement is “nor standeth in the way of sinners.” The verb “stand” connotes a position of remaining somewhere. “The way of sinners” is a reference to the ungodly and their behavior in life. This is a reference to not participating in the evil activities of sinners. The third metaphorical statement, “nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful,” implies active involvement in decision-making processes with the scornful. To sit in someone’s seat implies a settling in somewhere securely and actively participating in the deliberations. The scornful are those who mock God. The godly are not securely and actively involved with the mockers of God in directing society to the level of mocking God.

These three metaphorical statements have often been interpreted as an example of progressive parallelism, walking to standing to sitting. Though this may make good “preaching” for some, it is not the point of the text. The point of the text is not a description of how one becomes progressively involved in sin, but the emphasis is to describe the man who has God’s blessing on his life. We should understand that there is an intensification with each parallel line but the point is that the godly man separates on any level of life that God has commanded. If the point is to describe the godly man, then this is not describing the steps downward into apostasy.

Though it is beyond the scope of this presentation, our next step would be to analyze the poetic details of v. 2, then v. 3, and continue verse by verse until we reach the final verse.

## PART V: PROVERBS

### I. Introduction

In this introduction to Proverbs, we will look at its title, authorship and date, its growth as a book, canonicity, relationship between Proverbs 22:17–24:22 and *the Instruction of Amenemope*, characteristics of proverbs, literary form, theme and purpose, theological emphases, and interpreting proverbs.

#### A. Title

MT: *Mišlê š'ēmô*, “The Proverbs of Solomon”

LXX: *Pariomiai Salomōntos*, “Proverbs of Solomon”

V: *Liber Proverbiorum*, “The Book of Proverbs”

#### B. Authorship and Date

##### 1. Tradition

###### a. Jewish

*Baba Bathra* 15a states that “Hezekiah and his company wrote the Proverbs.”

E. J. Young has taken the verb “wrote” from this quote and pointed out that it can also include the idea of editing (p. 312). Bullock also follows this (*OT Poetic Books*, p. 156).

###### b. Christian

Church Fathers saw Solomon as author of the entire book of Proverbs. This is due to the obscurity or absence of titles in Greek and Latin versions for Proverbs 30 & 31.

##### 2. Critical

These views are primarily based upon an evolutionary theory for the development of Israelite religion.

###### a. Driver

The following is the manner in which Driver (*Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, pp. 370–83) has broken down the material contained in Proverbs (also followed by A. B. Davidson).

###### 1) 1:1–9:18

This was composed supposedly before the exile. This was three and a half centuries after Solomon.

###### 2) 10:1–22:16

The present form of this section dates to about the 7th century B.C. This is the nucleus around which the rest of the book of Proverbs

revolves. Some will concede that Solomon wrote small portions of this section.

3) 22:17–24:34

This reached its present form in the postexilic period. This is based on the assumption that this had been borrowed from the Egyptian *Instruction of Amenemope*.

4) 25:1–29:27

This was probably composed about the same time as 22:17–24:34.

5) 30:1–31:31

This was written latter than any other part of the book (latter in the postexilic period than 22:17–24:34).

b. Toy

Nothing in Proverbs is earlier than 350 B.C. The book was completed in the second century B.C. (p. xxxiii).

c. Eissfeldt

He sees 1:1–9:18 as reaching its final form in the 4th or 3rd century B.C. However, he does maintain that there are Solomonic proverbs in this section. His primary reason for viewing this as late is chapter eight. He maintains that the personification of wisdom reflects a Greek influence (pp. 472–73).

d. Scott

The wisdom literature developed under Solomon's reign. Since Solomon received material assistance (for building programs) from Egypt and Tyre (1 Kgs 9:16; 5:1–12), he also received literary assistance from them. Therefore, Solomon served as a catalyst for the wisdom movement. Scott concludes: "The most probable conclusion is that, for genuine historical reasons, Solomon's name had come to be associated with wisdom writing by literary convention, and that the material included came from many unidentifiable sources" (p. 13).

3. Internal evidence

Since we affirm that all Scripture is God-breathed, we must look at what the actual text says about its authorship. What we will do in this section is look for the superscription that begins each section. These introductions had a function of introducing those involved in producing that unit of material.

a. 1:1–9:18

In 1:1 this material is ascribed to Solomonic origination.

b. 10:1–22:16

According to 10:1 Solomon was the author of this unit.

c. 22:17–24:22

In 22:17 this section is ascribed to the wise men.

d. 24:23–34

Following the lead verse to this unit, this is also affirmed as coming from the wise men.

e. 25:1–29:27

In 25:1 our text indicates that Solomon was the author of this section; however, the scribes of Hezekiah apparently had an editorial capacity at least in organizing the Solomonic proverbs.

f. 30:1–33

According to 30:1 this chapter derives from Agur son of Jakeh.

g. 31:1–31

In 31:1 this material was ascribed to Lemuel. This king was not an Israelite. The subject matter changes in v. 10. However, since there is no introductory heading, we will assume that this is derived from Lemuel as well.

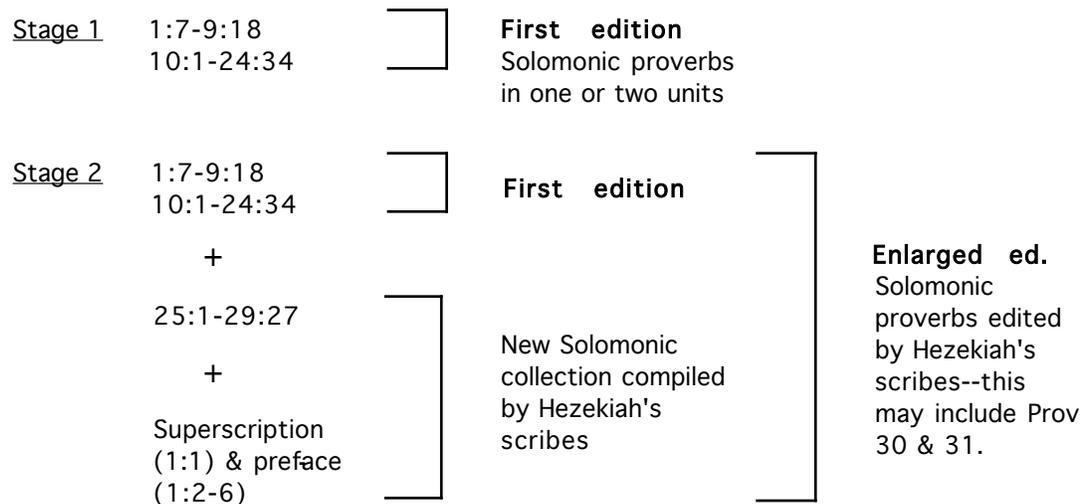
Our examination of the unique headings to each of the seven sections of Proverbs reflects that the book of Proverbs is a “collection of collections of wisdom material” (Hubbard, p. 153). These various headings reflect that there were initially seven different collections of proverbial material. These were then collected into the book of Proverbs. The following chart reflects this collection of collections.

Introduction	Chapters
Proverbs of Solomon	1:1–9:18
Proverbs of Solomon	10:1–22:16
Words of the Wise	22:17–24:22
Words of the Wise	24:23–34
Proverbs of Solomon transcribed by Hezekiah’s scribes	25:1–29:27
Words of Agur	30:1–33
Words of Lemuel	31:1–31

#### 4. Date

The date of the book would range from an inception point of ca. 970 B.C. and a *terminus ad quem* at approximately 700 B.C.

## C. Growth of the Book of Proverbs



(This chart was taken from Bullock, p. 162).

## D. Canonicity

## 1. Position

## a. In Hebrew canon

In some traditions Proverbs follows Psalms and in another it follows Job.

## b. In Septuagint and Vulgate

Proverbs follows Psalms.

## 2. Citations in NT

Prov 1:16 cited in Rom 3:15

3:11	Heb 12:5
3:24	Jam 4:6
3:34	1 Pet 5:5
10:12	1 Pet 4:8
11:31	1 Pet 4:18
26:11	2 Pet 2:22

## 3. Jewish questions about the canonicity of Proverbs

The Talmud (*Shabbath* 30b) indicates that some Jewish scholars had some questions about the supposed contradiction between Proverbs 26:4, "Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself," and 26:5, "Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes."

The Talmud then goes on to say that one pertains to the Law and the other to secular affairs (see Young, p. 315). The fact that the Jews had some

questions about this should not be understood to mean that they were necessarily questioning its canonicity; in fact, the obverse is true; they had to come up with some explanation of this superficial contradiction because it was in their canon. I would see this supposed contradiction as superficial. Whatever else can be said, it is obvious by the juxtaposition of these verses that they were not taken as contradictory. I would see them as complementary. Sometimes it is best not to stoop to a fool's level; however, there are times when it is mandatory to rebuke his foolishness.

## E. The Relationship Between Proverbs 22:17–24:22 and *The Instruction of Amenemope*

### 1. Various views concerning the date of this Egyptian literature

The thirty sayings of Amenemope have some similarities with the thirty sayings found in Proverbs 22:17–24:22. The issue pertains to who borrowed from whom. For any conclusion to be reached, one must come to some kind of conclusion concerning both documents in question.

Critical Bible scholars often work on the premise that Proverbs had to be borrowed from Amenemope because the Hebrews would borrow from the Egyptians but the Egyptians would not have borrowed from Hebrew.

- a. For conservative Old Testament students there is no problem with dating since we do not accept this premise.
- b. Various theories:
  - 1) E. A. Willis Budge discovered *The Instruction of Amenemope* in 1888. He provisionally dated this in the 18th dynasty (1580–1314 B.C.).
  - 2) Spiegelberg, Griffith, and Lange brought the date down to 21st dynasty (ca. 1000 B.C.), to the 22nd dynasty (945–730 B.C.), to the 24th dynasty (730–715 B.C.), and down to the Persian or Greek period (539 and lower).

### 2. Parallels between Proverbs and Amenemope

<u>Proverbs</u>	<u>Amenemope</u>
1st saying, 22:22–23	Chapter 2, 4:4–5
2nd saying, 22:24–25	Chapter 9, 11:13–14
3rd saying, 22:26–27	Chapter 9, 13:8–9
4th saying, 22:28	Chapter 6, 7:12–13
5th saying, 22:29	Chapter 30, 27:16–17
6th saying, 23:1–3	Chapter 23, 23:13–18
7th saying, 23:4–5	Chapter 7, 9:14–10:5
8th saying, 23:6–7	Chapter 11, 14:5–10
9th saying, 23:9	Chapter 21, 22:11–12
10th saying, 23:10–11	Chapter 6, 7:12–15; 8:9–10

25th saying, 24:11

Chapter 8, 11:6–7

(This is taken from the analysis of Buzzell, p. 955 and Pritchard's *ANET*, p. 424, n. 46.)

3. There are a number of problems with understanding that this section in Proverbs has been borrowed from *The Instruction of Amenemope*.
  - a. The difference in length
    - 1) The Egyptian is much longer than Hebrew.
    - 2) The 30 chapters in *Amenemope* ranges in length from 7 to 26 lines.
    - 3) But Proverbs basically has 4 lines/stanza.
  - b. The problem related to dating
 

The many differences of opinion in dating indicate that we have nothing definite at this point. Wilson (from *ANET*) maintains a date between the 7th and 6th century B.C. If we take the text at face value and accept the fact that Solomon reigned between 970–930 B.C. and Hezekiah between 726–686 B.C., this material in the book of Proverbs could not have been borrowed from the Egyptians.
  - c. Very few verses are significantly similar.
 

If we assume for argument sake that *The Instruction of Amenemope* was written earlier than Proverbs, there are some similarities in eleven of the thirty stanzas. These very general similarities account for about 37% of the material. Even if these eleven possible parallel stanzas influenced Solomon (i.e., he borrowed them), he has not slavishly copied them, but he has artistically modified them and has incorporated these into their present context. However, the differences are significant enough to question even this kind of conclusion.
  - d. The theological difference
 

Whatever parallels there are, they have been put in terms of Israelites' faith; e.g., Proverbs 22:23a "for the LORD will plead their cause."

Therefore, we should be very skeptical about Solomon's supposed borrowing from *The Instruction of Amenemope*. We are in a theologically safer position to assume that we have similarities that have come about because of common cultural similarities, but there is no literary dependence.

#### F. Characteristics of Proverbs

The proverb, or aphorism, is found throughout the Bible. It is often simplistically assumed that the use of proverbs is confined to the book of Proverbs. The wisdom literature of the Old Testament such as Ecclesiastes and Job are characterized by their use of proverbs. Proverbs are commonly found

in poetic literature (Ps 119:105). Jesus also uses proverbs (Mark 12:17). The Epistle of James also contains many proverbs. The proverb is a common literary form used in the Bible.

A biblical proverb is a concise, memorable saying, usually in poetic form, expressing a generally accepted observation about life as filtered through biblical revelation. From this definition, we can observe that a proverb is characterized as being concise and memorable, simple yet profound, specific yet general, generally expressed in poetic form, and observations about life as filtered through biblical revelation. To clarify our understanding of the nature of proverbs, we will examine these five characteristics in individual proverbs.

1. A proverb is concise and memorable.

The verbal conciseness aids in making it memorable. The sage who creates a concise and memorable saying must be skillful in his use of words and syntax. By reducing his observation about life into a proverbial form, the sage was aiming to make his observations permanent. As such, a proverb is a high point drawn from the sage's observations about life. With the proverb, the sage "captures the clearest and most affective moment and the point of greatest light" (Ryken, *Word of Delight*, p. 315).

2. A proverb is simple yet profound.

An example of this is found in Proverbs 21:2: "All a man's ways seem right to him, but the LORD weighs the heart." The basic point of this proverb is that people think they have an accurate self-evaluation for their actions but the LORD has an evaluation of their heart that is truly accurate because of His divine perspective. Though this proverb is simple, it is quite profound. God knows exactly what is in the heart of every single person better than each individual knows himself, and God with His omniscient knowledge evaluates everyone according to His standard of holiness.

3. A proverb is specific yet general.

This is illustrated in Proverbs 26:27, "If a man digs a pit, he will fall into it; if a man rolls a stone, it will roll back on him." "A man who digs a pit" specifically refers to someone laying a trap for another and "a man who rolls a stone" refers to placing a weight upon one's opponent from which he cannot escape. The result in either case is that the trap backfires. The general point of this proverb is that one reaps what he sows.

4. A proverb is consistently cast into poetic form.

Hebrew poetry is characterized by brevity in line length, parallelism, and figurative language. If we compare the line length of Proverbs 1 with a narrative such as Judges 1, it is readily apparent that the length of each line in Proverbs 1 is shorter than the length of each line in Judges 1. Proverbs 4:1 is a familiar example of poetic parallelism. Solomon provides an exhortation, "Listen, my sons, to a father's instruction." The second part of

this verse parallels the first part with a specification of his purpose, “pay attention and gain understanding.” The parallelism flushes out what the sage’s point is: listen to a godly father in order to gain wisdom. Proverbs 4:17 demonstrates the use of figures when Solomon picturesquely compares the wicked’s unbridled lust to their eating habits, “They eat the bread of wickedness and drink the wine of violence.” Eating “the bread of wickedness” and drinking “the wine of violence” is a graphic way of illustrating that wicked people live for “wickedness” and “violence.”

As noted in the preceding paragraph, Hebrew poetry is characterized by parallelism. As we observed in our discussion of Psalms, parallelism is essentially an additional thought found in a second line of poetry (see above). The two dominant forms of parallelism in the book of Proverbs are that of contrast and comparison. The most dominant of the two forms is parallelism of contrast. In Proverbs 10–15 approximately 90% of the proverbs are contrastive. This sets before the reader the responsibility to choose wisdom over folly. The comparative parallelism essentially says that at a common point “A is like B” (Parsons, pp. 155–56).

a. Contrast

This has also been called antithetical parallelism. This occurs when the poet places a line in contrast to its corresponding line. Proverbs 10:4

Lazy hands make a man poor,  
but diligent hands bring wealth.

b. Comparison

This has also been called emblematic parallelism. This is related to the subordination category of parallelism in that the comparative clause is subordinate to the other. A comparison is made between two lines in such a way that it forms a simile. Proverbs 10:26

As vinegar to the teeth and smoke to the eyes,  
so is a sluggard to those who send him.

5. A biblical proverb is an observation about life as filtered through biblical revelation.

A biblical proverb is different than a non-biblical proverb. The non-biblical proverb is a concise, memorable saying expressing a generally accepted observation about life. The difference between this and a biblical proverb is that a biblical proverb views life through the filter of biblical revelation. The biblical sage would make observations about life. He would then interpret his observations through the filter of divine truth. In light of the canons of proverbial literature, he would subsequently express his biblically interpreted observations in written proverbial form. By following the

canons of proverbial literature, a proverb will tend to express general truth, allowing for possible exceptions (Stein, *Playing By the Rules*, pp. 85–86).

## G. Literary Form

After looking at wisdom literature on a general level, we will look at the categories in the book of Proverbs.

### 1. Wisdom literature has two main categories of form.

As far as a general understanding of the forms of wisdom literature (see above) and the basic content are concerned (see above), we could classify wisdom literature into two broad categories.

- a. Contemplative wisdom could also be called speculative wisdom. These are monologues, dialogues, or essays dealing with basic issues in life, such as the problem of suffering or the meaning of life (LaSor, Hubbard, and Bush, p. 534).
- b. Practical wisdom may be in the form of short or long instruction. These state guidelines for personal happiness and welfare or condensing the wisdom related to experience (ibid., pp. 533–34).

#### 1) Ancient Near Eastern

- a) In Babylon (W. G. Lambert, *Babylonian Wisdom Literature* [London, 1960]), the emphasis was not necessarily on morality but on skills in the cult and magic lore. The sage was the one who got what he wanted from the gods. However, they did have an emphasis on the practical and ethical as well.
- b) In Egypt, the sages emphasized success and ethics. However, their literature was more verbose than Israel's for they would deal with one theme in a paragraph.

#### 2) Biblical

In 1 Kings 4:29–31 we should note that Solomon was a leader in wisdom movement and was even considered as such among his ancient Near Eastern neighbors. The issue with many critics involves the issue of the provenance of biblical wisdom. Who borrowed from whom?

- a) Did our book of Proverbs come from the ancient Near East with its magical lore etc.?
- b) Did our book of Proverbs more generally come from cosmopolitan practices, such as trade, intermarriage, etc. in ancient Near East?
- c) Did the Israelite sages receive influence from other cultures to stimulate the development of their own?

d) We have no definite answer to these questions, though the solution suggested with the first question about magical lore is highly improbable. At the end of the day, we can only fall back on the fact that God ultimately superintended in the process that resulted in His miraculous work in inspiration.

2. The proverbial literature of Proverbs may be placed into more precise literary forms.

I am using the term “form” as a descriptive category denoting the manner in which wisdom material is presented (Garrett, p. 28). There are two predominant literary forms, instruction and saying (for a development of these, see McKane, pp. 1–22), and eight secondary forms. We will briefly examine each of these.

- a. **Instruction** is the dominant form found in Proverbs 1–9 and 22:17–24:22. It is a longer form of the admonition (a command or prohibition), usually involving one or more paragraphs explaining a number of related admonitions. The instruction is directed to “my son” or “sons” (which may include the concept of “disciple”) and generally provides a reason for the instruction. It generally praises wisdom and its attributes or provides a warning about the traps of folly and its disciples. The primary point of the instruction is to give advice on wisdom or a related subject or to provide a warning against folly or a related subject (Hubbard, p. 18).
- b. **Admonition** is an abbreviated form of the longer instruction form, usually comprised of one to three verses. It expresses either a positive command or a prohibition followed by a motive clause. The motive clause provides a reason why the command should be followed. When we interpret the admonition, we should note the connection between the command and the motive clause. This connection is helpful in understanding the point of the admonition (Hildebrandt, p. 241). A command followed by a motive clause is found in Proverbs 4:23, “Above all else, guard your heart, for it is the wellspring of life.” The importance of this command is seen by the motive clause, viz., what is manifest in one’s life is an overflow from the contents of his heart.
- c. A **wisdom speech** is a subcategory of the instruction. In this type, wisdom as well as folly, wisdom’s antithetical form, is personified as a woman publicly proclaiming a message. For example, the lady wisdom cries out to deliver its recipients in Proverbs 1:20–33; 8:1–36; 9:1–6. The counterpart to the wisdom speech is folly. The lady folly calls aloud to mislead in 9:13–18 (Hubbard, p. 18).
- d. **Saying** is the dominant form used in Proverbs 10:1–22:16 and 25:1–29:27. A saying is essentially a sentence involving two parallel lines.

While the mood of the instruction form is imperatival, the mood of the saying is indicative. As filtered through special revelation, the force of a saying is found in the wisdom or folly displayed in human experience (ibid.).

- e. A **comparative saying** is a subcategory of the saying. It generally uses a simile or metaphor to intensify the main point of the saying. An example of this is Proverbs 26:8, “Like tying a stone in a sling is the giving of honor to a fool.” In interpreting this type of saying, we must note the images being used, the main point of the proverb, and the connection between them. The image in the first clause is that of securely fastening a stone in the sling. The main point of the saying is in the last clause, “is the giving of honor to a fool.” The point of this saying is that honoring a fool is as foolish as making it impossible for a stone to get out of the sling.

At other times, the lines may simply be in juxtaposition. “A whip for the horse, a halter for the donkey, and a rod for the back of fools” (Prov 26:3). The images in the first two clauses are the horse and donkey. The main point is in the last clause, “a rod for the back of fools.” The point of this saying is that the fool, being as difficult to control as the horse and the donkey, must be controlled by strong force.

- f. **Better-than sayings** are a variation of comparative sayings. This saying is designed to set forth priorities and values. Some have concluded that this type of proverb is a form of relativism advocated by the sages of Israel. Against this, it is more precise to view this as eliminating one element and affirming another (Hildebrandt, p. 242). “Better a poor man whose walk is blameless, than a rich man whose ways are perverse” (Prov 28:6). To be rich and crooked is not a lifestyle to be valued, but there is value in being poor with integrity.
- g. **Numerical sayings** are another subcategory of the saying. It is the dominant form used in Proverbs 30. The numerical saying will begin with a number line in the  $X/X + 1$  pattern, where the second number is one digit larger than the previous number. The number line will also state the element that binds the list together. The number line is then followed by a list of items. The number of items in the list will correspond to the highest number in the number line. An example of this is Proverbs 6:16–19,

There are six things which the LORD hates,  
Seven that are detestable to him:  
    haughty eyes,  
    a lying tongue,  
    hands that shed innocent blood,

a heart that devises wicked schemes,  
 feet that are quick to rush into evil,  
 a false witness who pours out lies,  
 and a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.

As stated in the number line, Solomon lists seven things that God hates. In interpreting the numerical sayings, the final element listed is usually the author's main point (Hildebrandt, pp. 241–42). In Proverbs 6:16–19, the zenith of abominable items to God is “a man who stirs up dissension among brothers.”

- h. **Example story** recounts an illustration or personal experience and how from experience he has learned a truth worth leaving to others. This form has three basic parts: an opening where the sage notes his experience, a story illustrating his point, and the moral conclusion. Proverbs 24:30–34 is an example of this (also see 7:6–23). The opening is in v. 30, the example story in vv. 31–32, and the moral conclusion in vv. 33–34 (Klein, Blomberg, and Hubbard, p. 317).
- i. **Beatitudes** are pronouncements of blessing on someone by an authority figure. When this is used in wisdom literature, it provides a motivation to convince someone that blessing comes by following the advised course of action (see 3:13–14; 8:32, 34; 16:20; 20:7; 28:14; 29:18). Proverbs 20:7 reads like this: “The righteous man leads a blameless life; blessed are his children after him.” Because a man has a life of integrity, his children will be the beneficiaries from his integrity.
- j. An **acrostic poem** uses the Hebrew alphabet as a device for structuring. An acrostic poem is used in Proverbs 31:10–31 to describe the virtuous women. The acrostic poem connotes completeness by emphasizing that this woman's qualities go from A through Z, from beginning to end, she is a most excellent woman. The point is that her virtuous character has been thoroughly presented.

#### H. Theme and Purpose

The theme of Proverbs is found in 1:7 and the purpose is in 1:2–6.

1. The theme of Proverbs is found in 1:7, “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and discipline” (this makes Proverbs fundamentally different than other ANE literature). The word for “fear” denotes a reverential fear. This reverential fear is the Old Testament counterpart of the New Testament concept of saving faith. The fear of the LORD expresses itself in reverential submission to God and whatever He commands. This type of fear is the “beginning of knowledge.” The Old Testament concept of “beginning” can refer to that which is “first” or to that which is “primary and controlling.” In Proverbs, the concept of

“beginning” does not primarily mean that the fear of the Lord is the “starting point” of knowledge. Rather, the fear of the Lord is a “primary and controlling element” in developing wisdom. This same theme is restated in 9:10, toward the conclusion of the first section of material in Proverbs. As such, it sets the parameters for this unit.

2. Based upon the fear of Yahweh, the purpose focuses upon helping one live successfully and skillfully. This purpose is reflected in the five following clauses in 1:2–6: “for attaining wisdom and discipline,” “for understanding words of insight,” “for acquiring a disciplined and prudent life,” “for giving prudence to the simple,” and “for understanding proverbs and parables, the sayings and riddles of the wise.” These five clauses reflect a twofold emphasis.
  - a. One emphasis in Proverbs is to develop moral wisdom, vv. 2a, 3–4. Solomon’s purpose in proverbs includes helping one “to know wisdom and instruction.” The word translated as “wisdom” is a term that focuses on developing “skill.” In Proverbs this term emphasizes skill in living. In light of vv. 3–4, this skill relates to living a life that is morally pleasing to God. The term translated as “instruction” in v. 3 emphasizes “discipline” or “training.” In this context, its emphasis is on a training that focuses on developing one’s moral nature.
  - b. A second emphasis in Proverbs is to develop mental wisdom, vv. 2b, 6. The last clause in v. 2, “to discern the sayings of understanding,” emphasizes one learning how to compare ideas and make evaluations about subjects. This emphasis is clearly seen in v. 6, emphasizing an understanding of proverbs, parables, and riddles. This type of discernment emphasizes one’s mental acumen.

#### I. Theological Emphases

The book of Proverbs has three emphases that inform us of its theological framework.

1. In conformity with other wisdom literature, Proverbs has a practical orientation (Osborne, *Hermeneutical*, p. 192). The wisdom of Proverbs is especially addressed to the youths of Israel. As such, they needed to be encouraged about subjects such as acceptable speech and etiquette (Prov 29:20), domestic relationships (10:1), self-control (25:28), material possessions (10:22, 11:4), and the certainty of divine retribution (11:21; 16:4; 20:22; 26:26–27). The practical nature of wisdom literature is reflected by Kidner’s arrangement of the content of Proverbs around these eight subjects: God and man, wisdom, fools, sluggards, friends, words, the family, and life and death (*Proverbs*, pp. 31-56; for other topical arrangements, see also Ross [pp. 897–903], Voorwinde, and Woodcock).

2. Proverbs, like other wisdom literature, emphasizes that one must have a complete dependence on God. Since God is a Sovereign who with His absolute control of everything (16:1, 4, 9) permits the godly, wise person to experience suffering and difficulty as a part of His discipline (3:11–12), this teaching in Proverbial theology should force the believer to recognize with a humble and believing spirit his limitations and God’s complete control of life (21:1). This is demonstrated from three theological observations.
  - a. Proverbs sets forth that wisdom is predicated on the Mosaic Covenant. This is demonstrated by the fact that the instruction in places such as Proverbs 3:1-12 and 4:4-5 are predicated upon a father’s teachings being consistent with the Torah (cf. Prov 3:3 with Deut 6:6-8). We should also notice how genuine obedience results in blessing (cf. Deut 6:24 with Prov 3:9-10) and disobedience disgrace and judgment (Prov 10:16, 21; 19:3, 9). Since God is the One bringing the results according to His time schedule (cf. Prov 3:1-10 with vv. 11-12), one must live his life in an environment of faithful obedience to the covenant.
  - b. The book of Proverbs has a tendency to personify wisdom as an attribute and extension of God. This is “seen in one sense as a ‘craftsman’ standing alongside of and aiding the God of creation (Prov 8:29-30), as a female teacher inviting students to learn from her at the gates of the city (Prov 1:20-21; 8:1-36) and as a hostess inviting people to her banquet (9:1-12). Wisdom is contrasted with the adulteress (2:16-19; 7:6-27) and with a foolish hostess (9:13-18)” (Osborne, *Hermeneutical*, p. 193). Since this type of wisdom comes from God, we must look to Him for this.
  - c. Proverbs has a strong emphasis on fearing God. Though the fear of God is not found exclusively in Proverbs, or even wisdom literature (Deut 6:24), it does receive an emphasis in Proverbs (1:7; 3:7; 8:13; 16:6; 31:30). The Hebrew term for fear may be used in contexts that are of a legal nature, religious, or moral (Smith, p. 6). The focus of wisdom is in the moral realm. The fear of God denotes a relationship with God resulting in a morally pleasing lifestyle. In Proverbs 2:4-5 fearing God is correlated with knowing God. A result of this is that one hates evil in 8:13. Other practical results include qualities such as confidence (14:24), humility (3:7), and contentment (15:16). We might define the fear of God as an unconditional, reverential submission to the Sovereign LORD (ibid.).
3. As wisdom literature Proverbs has an emphasis on creation theology. This is seen in Proverbs 8 where God in His wisdom created the world (Prov 3:19-20; see also Job 38:4–7; Ps 104:24). The many references to God’s creative activities in Proverbs 8 set a dominant theme in the book, viz., God’s orderly design is the substance that holds life together. In Proverbs 30, the

many comparisons between animals and man suggest that God control both. Proverbs' creation theology also suggests that there is a connection between divine remuneration and retribution. Furthermore, God's creative work as used in wisdom material is foundational for enjoying life. Man's food, drink, work, youth, wife, and other privileges in this life are part of God's creative design for man in this life (Prov 5:18; 10:1, 28; 12:4, 20; 29:2-3; in other wisdom literature, see Eccl 2:24-25; 3:12-13, 22; 5:18-19; 8:15; 9:7-10; 11:8-9; 12:1; Cant 1:4; 3:11). "The righteous, though part of the finite, creaturely world, can experience joy as part of God's design in creation" (Zuck, p. 219).

## J. Interpreting Proverbs

When we are interpreting the material from the book of Proverbs, there are six considerations we need to factor into our interpretation.

1. The characteristics of proverbial literature influence our interpretation of individual proverbs. A proverb is an observation about life filtered through divine revelation and expressed in conformity with the canons of proverbial literature. As such, a proverb commonly expresses general truth, allowing for exceptions (see above).
2. Since Proverbs is a collection of seven collections of proverbs, an individual proverb should be interpreted in light of its immediate collection (see above).
3. We should also consider the literary form in which a proverb is found (see above). For example, the saying form of the proverbs in 10:1–22:16 and 25:1–29:27 reflects that each proverb is a sentence. As a result, the immediate context is not necessarily very helpful since the form is an independent sentence.
4. The various proverbs should also be interpreted in light of theme and purpose of the book of Proverbs (see above). We should also consider the book's theological emphases (see above).
5. Literary clues in an individual passage are also helpful in interpretation. We will give a brief overview of the literary features that are found in paragraphs of proverbial material and in one-verse units.
  - a. When examining units containing more than one verse, there are many literary clues on which to focus. We will examine only three of these.
    - 1) **Repetition** is a major device in biblical poetry for showing emphasis. In Proverbs 30:11–14, the Hebrew word translated as "those who" stands at the head of each verse in the Hebrew Old Testament. The NIV places it at the head of vv. 12, 13, and 14, it follows "there are" in

v. 11. This Hebrew term places an emphasis on those characterized by whatever is described in a given context. This term is best correlated with a group of society having similar characteristics. It is not just an occasional individual but a group within the society who are characterized in this context by showing disrespect for their parents, self-righteousness, arrogance, and oppression of the needy.

- 2) The use of **synonyms** will also show an emphasis in a passage. This is demonstrated in 6:20–35. After an exhortation to follow his commandments in vv. 20–23, Solomon provides his “son” with a proverbially packaged treatment of “You shall not commit adultery.” He uses a number of synonyms to describe a potential partner in adultery. She is called an “immoral woman,” an “a wayward wife” (v. 24), a “prostitute,” an “adulteress” (v. 26), and his “another man’s wife” (v. 29). She is also characterized in v. 25 as having “beauty” and knowing how to use her eyes. In v. 26 she is further characterized as one who reduces a man “to a loaf of bread” and as one who “preys upon your very life.” The build up of synonyms shows that the adulteress is an evil and cunning foe of God’s moral will.

Through the use of synonyms for wisdom and folly, as well as examples of each, the overall unifying theme of Proverbs 1–9 is an extended conflict between wisdom and folly. The addressees of these chapters are encouraged to choose wisdom over folly (for a fuller development, see Ryken, *Words of Delight*, pp. 317–19).

- 3) Certain **literary features** show the emphasis of a passage. The numerical saying places an emphasis on the enumerated item that corresponds to the highest digit in the number line. In 30:18–19 the sage indicates that there are four items which are too wonderful for him to understand. The emphasis of the text is on the fourth enumerated item, “the way of a man with a maiden” (see above).
- b. When we examine units of one verse, we must look at other literary clues to see the emphasis in the verse. The dominant feature of the sayings in 10:1–22:16 and 25:1–29:27 is this one-verse format. We will examine three types of emphases in these chapters (while we recognize that Alter is writing from a different theological perspective, his presentation of this subject is thorough, see pp. 163–84).
- 1) One-line sayings built on the model of contrastive parallelism may show a certain emphasis through the use of a “punch-word” (ibid., p. 168). An example of this is seen in Proverbs 11:1.

A-false balance is-an-abomination to-the-LORD,  
But-a-just weight is-His-delight.

In Hebrew this proverb takes seven words, four in the first line and three in the second. I have hyphenated the terms to reflect which expressions were one word in the Hebrew text. The antithesis of “a-false balance” is “but-a-just weight.” The two Hebrew terms, “an-abominations to-the-LORD,” are compressed into a significant one-word counterpart with “His-delight.” Both of these latter expressions are strong theological descriptions of that which is an abhorrence and a pleasure in God’s sight. The counterpart of “an-abomination to-the-LORD” is the theological punch-word “His-pleasure” (ibid.). This compressed punch-word is a theologically satisfying emphasis of this one-verse unit. In contrast to that which is abominable in His sight, this verse affirms that God’s pleasure is found not only in worship but even in the marketplace.

- 2) Other one-line sayings built on the parallelism of specification or intensification may reflect a “consequentiality.” This type of proverb shows that certain types of activity generally lead to certain types of consequences. Theologically, it reflects that God has created and governs the world and man in such a way that certain consequences are generally the result of specific actions. “Train a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not turn from it” (Prov 22:6). God has designed life in such a way that when parents seriously instruct their children according to a godly pattern, the consequence is that they generally share the same godly patterns as their parents. In a modified manner, we see another example in 21:31, “The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but victory rests with the LORD.” The first part of the verse focuses on preparing the horse for battle. The last half moves to the conclusion of the battle. The last half is unexpected in that we have a new figure introduced into a proverbial equation, “the LORD” (ibid., pp. 172–73). This is to say we do not have a strict cause-and-effect relationship between the first half of the verse and the second. However, from the sage’s perspective, God is the ultimate cause for everything in life.
- 3) One-line sayings may also reflect a type of riddle format. The riddle format not only includes a riddle, but it may also include a perplexing statement or an image. The pattern of this format will have a riddle, perplexing statement, or image introduced in the first half of a verse with the second half explaining it. A perplexing and shocking image is used in Proverbs 11:22, “Like a gold ring in a pig’s snout is a beautiful woman who shows no discretion.” The image in the first half of the verse would have been repulsive and ludicrous to a Jew. How foolish it is to think that a gold ring could beautify a pig. The second half makes the point. An undiscerning and ungodly beautiful woman is comparable to the same attempt to beautify a repulsive pig. Another

example is 17:12, “Better to meet a bear robbed of her cubs than a fool in his folly.” A fool in his folly is a greater danger than meeting a bear that has been robbed of her cubs (*ibid.*, pp. 176–78). As Alden has said, “Consider meeting a fool with a knife, or gun, or even behind the wheel of a car; a mother bear could be less dangerous” (p. 134).

6. The rest of Scripture should always balance problematic passages in Proverbs. This hermeneutical principle maintains that Scripture interprets Scripture. What this means is that the entirety of Scripture is the context and the guide in interpreting specific passages in Scripture

How is a passage such as Proverbs 17:8 (“A bribe is a charm to the one who gives it; wherever he turns, he succeeds”) to be harmonized with 17:23 (“A wicked man accepts a bribe in secret to pervert the course of justice”), or Exodus 23:8 and Deuteronomy 16:18–19? How do we respond to critics who maintain that the book of Proverbs is less authoritative than the special revelation contained in the Prophets? To establish their point that Proverbs is inferior in authority, critics point to contradictions within Proverbs. Proverbs 26:4 says, “Do not answer a fool according to his folly, or you will be like him yourself.” But this is supposedly contradicted in the following verse, “Answer a fool according to his folly, or he will be wise in his own eyes.” Do we answer the fool or avoid answering the fool? According to the critical scholar, if both of these proverbs is inspired and, therefore, presents absolute truth, only one of them can be absolute. How can this be special revelation from God if it is contradictory? How is the Bible-believing Christian to explain these problematic verses, as well as similar problem passages in Proverbs? Are we to say that the book of Proverbs is less inspired and, therefore, less authoritative than other parts of the Bible?

We would contend that every verse when originally written in our canonical book of Proverbs was as fully inspired as the Prophets or any other portion of Scripture (see 2 Tim 3:16). If the entirety of Proverbs is inspired, then it is inerrant. Consequently, Proverbs in its entirety is descriptive truth. This guarantees the accurate preservation of the entirety of Proverbs. However, not all of Proverbs is prescriptive truth. This is also true with the rest of Scripture. All Scripture is descriptive truth, but not all Scripture is prescriptive truth. For example, Satan’s desire to get Job to curse God in Job 2:4–5 and his lie in Genesis 3 are both examples of descriptive truth. Descriptive truth demands that whatever Scripture originally recorded was preserved with historical accuracy. Satan really did what Scripture says he did in Job 2 and Genesis 3. However, prescriptive truth pertains to those truths by which the people of God are to regulate their lives. Satan’s lies and deceitful tactics are not to be followed by God’s people.

How then do we determine if a proverb is prescriptive truth? Comparing Scripture with Scripture most easily does this. More specifically, by comparing a proverb with other biblical revelation, we can determine if we should view a proverb simply as *descriptive* truth or, more normatively, as *prescriptive* truth.

- a. A **descriptive** proverb describes a situation of life without noting how it applies or what its exceptions are (Klein, Blomberg, Hubbard, pp. 313–14). It is not seeking to influence behavior, rather it seeks to present life the way it actually occurs. It is the reader’s responsibility to discern what is prescriptive and to accept the rest as descriptive truth. An example of a descriptive proverb is 17:8, “A bribe is a charm to the one who gives it; wherever he turns, he succeeds.” Another example is found in Proverbs 14:20, “The poor are shunned even by their neighbors, but the rich have many friends.” A further example is Proverbs 31:6–7, “Give strong drink to him who is perishing, and wine to him whose life is bitter. Let him drink and forget his poverty, and remember his trouble no more.” While this proverb may reflect that the fruit of the vine was used to help one who was in an emotionally distressing phase of life, as a medical doctor today might use Valium in similar states of misery, the real point is that this is describing the way life is. This proverb is describing the way that life is in extreme situations (for prescriptive proverbial material against the use of alcohol, see Proverbs 23:29–35). Proverbs 31:6–7 is a descriptive proverb, and we need to turn to other inscripturated revelation that presents prescriptive revelation on this subject.
  
- b. A **prescriptive** proverb does more than simply tell about the way life is. It seeks to characterize an attitude or an action in order to influence behavior (ibid.). There are three types of prescriptive proverbs.
  - 1) A prescriptive proverb that allows for exceptions is a **generalization**. There are two categories of generalizations.
    - a) Some proverbs allow for limitations in various circumstances. The example we looked at earlier in Proverbs 26:4–5 is certainly an example of this. Wise planning with proper advice is praised in 15:22. However, this is balanced by Proverbs 19:21, “Many are the plans in a man’s heart, but it is the LORD’s purpose that prevails” (Parsons, p. 160). The folly “bound up in the heart of a child” in 22:15 may provide a hindrance to the generalization in 22:6 (Zuck, p. 234).
    - b) Other proverbs are generalizations because they are bound to the dispensation of law. For example, Proverbs 10:22 says, “The blessing of the LORD brings wealth, and he adds no trouble to it.” The blessings of wealth were promised to the obedient Israelite in

Deuteronomy 28:8–14. This type of promise is not made to believers in the New Testament. At times, a generalization may even be limited in the dispensation of law. An example of this is Proverbs 10:30, “The righteous will never be uprooted, but the wicked will not remain in the land.” When this text says the righteous will not “be uprooted,” the sage is referring to the righteous not being uprooted from the land of Israel. However, there were exceptions to this, viz., Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Daniel. However, the point is that this proverb could only have meaning under the dispensation of law.

- 2) A prescriptive proverb that has no exceptions is a **moral absolute**. This will often be true in proverbs dealing with an action or characteristic of God. Proverbs 11:1 says, “The LORD abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight.” Another example is 14:31, “He who oppresses the poor shows contempt for their Maker, but whoever is kind to the needy honors God.” The instructional material in Proverbs 5 against adultery by maintaining a proper marital relationship is a moral absolute. It upholds the moral absolute, “You shall not commit adultery” (Exod 20:14).
- 3) A prescriptive proverb may contain both a **moral absolute** and a **generalization**. Proverbs 3:1–2 is an exhortation to honor one’s father with a promise of long life and peace. The command to honor one’s parents is a moral absolute; however, the promise about life is only a generalization for Jesus Christ was the embodiment of honor to His earthly parents, yet He was crucified in His early thirties. “God in His sovereignty may make an exception as in the case of Jesus” (Parsons, p. 161, n. 72).

## II. Analysis

### A. Prologue, 1:1–7

1. The title of the book, v. 1
2. The purpose of the book, vv. 2–6
  - a. Summary statement, v. 2
    - 1) To develop quality of life, v. 2a
    - 2) To develop quality of mind, v. 2b
  - b. The particulars, 1:3–6
    - 1) To develop quality of life, vv. 3–5
    - 2) To develop quality of mind, v. 6
3. The theme of the book, v. 7

### B. Exhortations to embrace wisdom, 1:8–9:18

1. Warning against enticement, 1:8–19
2. Warning against rejecting wisdom, 1:20–33

3. Moral benefits of wisdom, 2:1–22
  - a. Three requirements for obtaining wisdom, 2:1–4
    - 1) Internalizing the teaching of one's parents, vv. 1–2
    - 2) Desiring understanding, v. 3
    - 3) Seeking for wisdom, v. 4
  - b. Five results of obtaining wisdom, 2:5–22
    - 1) The wise man will understand the fear of Yahweh and find the knowledge of God, vv. 5–8
    - 2) The wise man will know to take the right course of action, vv. 9–11
    - 3) The wise man avoids the enticements of the wicked to fool their wicked ways, vv. 12–15
    - 4) The wise man will avoid the enticements of the adulteress, vv. 16–19
    - 5) The wise man will follow the example of godly men, vv. 20–22
4. Further benefits of wisdom, 3:1–35
  - a. Long life and prosperity, vv. 1–2
  - b. Favor and good reputation, vv. 3–4
  - c. Success in life, vv. 5–6
  - d. Health, vv. 7–8
  - e. Abundance, vv. 9–10
  - f. Loving discipline, vv. 11–12
  - g. Better returns, vv. 13–18
  - h. Creation, vv. 19–20
  - i. Life, safety, and confidence, vv. 21–26
  - j. Generosity, grace, and honor, vv. 27–35
5. Wisdom is supreme, 4:1–27
  - a. Seek it, vv. 1–9
  - b. Choose it, 10–19
    - 1) The way of wisdom, vv. 10–13
    - 2) The way of wickedness, vv. 14–17
    - 3) The two ways compared, vv. 18–19
  - c. Follow it, vv. 20–27
    - 1) An exhortation to heed the father's (or teacher's) moral instruction, vv. 20–21
    - 2) The reason for the exhortation, v. 22
    - 3) The particulars of the exhortation (or instruction), vv. 23–27
6. Warning against adultery, 5:1–23
  - a. The adulteress, vv. 1–6
  - b. The price of unfaithfulness, vv. 7–14
  - c. The delights of faithfulness (a biblical view of sex), vv. 15–23
7. Warning against folly, 6:1–19
  - a. The folly of assuming bad risk, vv. 1–5

- b. The folly of the sluggard, vv. 6–11
- c. The folly of the mischief-maker, vv. 12–15
- d. The folly of seven detestable things, vv. 16–19

7 things God hates

1. Haughty eyes=  
wrong attitude:  
pride
2. A lying tongue=  
wrong speech
3. Hands that shed  
innocent blood=  
wrong action
4. A heart that  
devises wicked  
schemes=wrong use  
of the mind:  
plotting to harm
5. Feet that are quick  
to rush into evil=  
wrong inclinations:  
eager to do evil
6. A false witness  
who pours out lies=  
wrong testimony:  
perjury
7. A man who stirs up  
dissension among  
among brothers=  
wrong influence

7 things God loves

1. Right attitude:  
humility (servant  
attitude, service  
oriented)
2. Right speech: truth
3. Right action:  
protect and value  
human life
4. Right use of the  
mind: planning  
to help others
5. Right inclinations=  
eager to do good
6. Right testimony=  
integrity
7. Right influence=  
promote harmony  
and unity among  
believers

8. Another warning against adultery, 6:20–35 (cf. ch. 5)
9. Warning against the adulteress, 7:1–27
  - a. “An ounce of prevention,” vv. 1–5
  - b. The drama, vv. 6–23
    - 1) The victim, vv. 6–9
    - 2) The seductress, vv. 10–12
    - 3) The tactics, vv. 13–21
      - a) introduction, v. 13
      - b) the ideal occasion, vv. 14–15
      - c) the ideal place, vv. 16–17
      - d) the proposition, v. 18
      - e) nothing to fear, vv. 19–21
    - 4) The fall, vv. 22–23
  - c. A closing warning, vv. 24–27

10. Wisdom's call, 8:1–36
  - a. The guide of everyone, vv. 1–5
  - b. The partner of morality, vv. 6–13
  - c. The key to all success, vv. 14–21
  - d. The very principle of creation, vv. 22–31
  - e. The one necessity of life, vv. 32–36
  
11. Invitation of wisdom and of folly, 9:1–18
  - a. The invitation of wisdom to its feast, vv. 1–12
  - b. The invitation of folly to its feast, vv. 13–18
  
- C. The Main Section of the Book: the Proverbs of Solomon, 10:1–22:16
  1. Proverbs contrasting righteous and wicked living, 10:1–15:33
  2. Proverbs exalting righteous living, 16:1–22:16
  
- D. The Sayings of the Wise Men, 22:17–24:34
  1. Thirty sayings of the wise, 22:17–24:22
  2. Additional sayings of the wise, 24:23–34
  
- E. More Proverbs of Solomon (Hezekiah's Collection), 25:1–29:27
- F. The Sayings of Agur, 30:1–33
  1. Introduction, v. 1
  2. Knowledge of God, vv. 2–9
  3. Observations about life, vv. 10–33
- G. The Sayings of King Lemuel, 31:1–9
- H. Epilogue: The wife of noble character, 31:10–31  
(an alphabetic acrostic in the Hebrew)
  1. She is valuable, vv. 10–12
  2. She prepares food and clothing, vv. 13–15
  3. She tends a vineyard, vv. 16–18
  4. She spins and weaves, vv. 19–24
  5. She is godly, vv. 25–27
  6. She is praised, vv. 28–31

(This outline is derived from Kenneth L. Barker, "Introduction and Syllabus: Exegesis in Proverbs"; minor modifications were made from Buzzell, p. 906.)

## PART VI: ECCLESIASTES

### I. Introduction

Our introduction will focus on the title of Ecclesiastes, authorship and date, canonicity, integrity, literary structure, and message.

#### A. Title

- MT: *Qōheleṯ*, “one who calls an assembly together”  
 LXX: *’Ekklesiastes*, “one who gathers an assembly”  
 V: *Liber Ecclesiastes*, “The Book of Ecclesiastes”

#### B. Authorship and Date

##### 1. Late in Solomonic Reign

Although Solomon is not specifically stated as being the writer of this book, there are a number of reasons for accepting this.

- a. In 1:1 the text states that Qohelet was the son of David who ruled in Jerusalem.
- b. Solomon appears to fit most closely the description of being the wisest man who had taught in Jerusalem, 1:16; see also 1 Kings 4:29–30.  
 In addition, note his opportunities for carnal pleasures, 2:3;  
 extensive building programs, 2:4–6;  
 tremendous number of servants, 2:7; and  
 unequalled wealth, 2:8.
- c. The “fear of the Lord” motif in 3:14, 5:7, 7:18, 8:12–13, 12:13 is parallel with the concept in the Book of Proverbs, see Proverbs 1:7, *passim*.
- d. Jewish tradition strongly supports this, see *Megilla 7a*, *Shabbath 30*, Aramaic Targum, Midrash *Ecclesiastes Rabbah*.
- e. Christian tradition strongly supported Solomonic authorship until Luther when this began to be questioned.

##### 2. Postexilic Date: 350–250 B.C.

Many liberal scholars take this view. The reasons for this are the following:

- a. The major argument for this book’s lateness revolves around linguistic considerations.
  - 1) The vocabulary and syntax are supposedly closer to a later stage of Hebrew.
    - a) Liberals taking this view have borrowed the arguments used by the conservative OT scholar Franz Delitzsch who also argued for a late date for the book; however, he maintained that the book was written around 400 B.C. before the canon had been closed. Delitzsch had found at least 96 words and expressions that are

found only in postexilic OT books such as Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther, Chronicles, and Malachi as well as the later source, the Mishnah.

b) Some critics have found other late expressions. These are generally called Aramaisms and/or Persian loan words.

2) Mitchell Dahood has shown that many of these so-called Aramaisms are really Phoenician loan words; however, Dahood has used this evidence to argue for a 4th century B.C. date (see Dahood's arguments for a Phoenician background [pp. 30–52, 191–221]; he uses this to argue for a date in the 4th century B.C.).

b. There is no mention of Solomon's name.

Supposedly, this absence of Solomon's name is quite significant when it is considered that in all his other writings his name is associated with his work, see Proverbs 1:1, 10:1, Song of Solomon 1:1.

1) In 1:12 our text indicates that the writer of this work was identified as having already ruled in the past and not the present, "I *was* king over Israel in Jerusalem." With this argument the past tense of the verb *was* is stressed. Thus, Solomon was no longer king when this was written.

2) In 1:16 it is stated that there were a number of kings who ruled in Jerusalem before the writer of the book. The only Israelite king who ruled in Jerusalem before Solomon was David. Thus, Solomon could not have been the writer.

c. The background of Ecclesiastes does not fit Solomon's time period.

This was a time of misery, 1:2–11.

The splendor of Solomon's age was gone, 1:12–2:26.

A time of death for Israel had begun, 3:1–15.

Injustice and violence were present, 4:1–3 (see Young, p. 348.)

d. Miscellaneous item: The book of Ecclesiastes cannot be dated later than 250–200 B.C. because of the Qumran evidence and its influence on Ecclesiasticus (c. 190 B.C.).

3. Postexilic Date: 450–350 B.C.

This view has been adopted by a number of conservative scholars such as Hengstenberg, Delitzsch, Beecher, Armerding, Eaton, Harrison, Young, et al. The same rationale as presented for the 350–250 B.C. date is generally followed for this date with the primary reason being the linguistic criterion (see above).

4. Response to Postexilic Dates

a. In response to the first argument about the late linguistic and syntactical considerations, two items should be noted.

- 1) It should be noted that many of the so-called Aramaisms are not necessarily very significant today since Aramaisms have been found in other early literature like Ugaritic which everyone agrees was destroyed as a nation no later than 1200 B.C.
  - 2) The argument that Dahood used for a fourth century B.C. date based on Phoenician loan words is an extremely tenuous lexical argument. Because Phoenician is also well known much earlier than the fourth century B.C., Archer has used the same data to argue for a date in the Solomonic era ([1969], pp. 167–81). Fredericks's conclusions from his recent examination of this subject are especially germane at this point. He has concluded that the linguistic standards used in earlier studies to determine Qohelet's date "neglected the genre and dialectical uniqueness of Qoh[eleth], and have resulted in a scholarly consensus on a post-exilic date that is invalid" (*Qohelet's Language*, p. 266).
- b. The second argument about Solomon's name not specifically being used is an argument from silence. We have other books where the author's name is not explicitly mentioned. In these cases, we have then drawn certain conclusions based on either the content within the text or from other specific statements in Scripture. An example of this is the book of Lamentations where the author's name is never specifically given, yet many would argue for Jeremiah as having authored the book (for a condensation of the argument's on Jeremianic authorship of Lamentations, see below).
- 1) The use of the past tense verb *was* in 1:12 is completely irrelevant since the Hebrew verbal system is more aspect oriented than tense oriented.
  - 2) The more cogent argument is based on 1:16. However, it should also be noted that Scripture has preserved a number of other outstanding kings who ruled over Jerusalem, though not being Israelites. These include kings such as Melchizedek (Gen 14:12), Adoni-Zedek (Josh 10:1), and Araunah (2 Sam 24:23).
- c. The argument that the misery and suffering do not harmonize with the conditions of Solomonic success is also weak. In the ancient Near East there are many examples of kings living in splendor while the average person was suffering hardship.
- d. An attendant question must be asked since some conservative authors hold this view, How is the internal data which supposedly best fits Solomon to be explained? The suggestion that this is an impersonation genre has been adopted by many to explain this. Is this valid (see Bullock, p. 185, for a positive discussion of this)? What is the difference between a pseudographa and an impersonation genre? Or any literature

written under the guise of another author? Does this say anything about inerrancy?

## 5. Conclusions

Though much of the argumentation for all views is somewhat circumstantial, I find no compelling reason for rejecting a Solomonic date and, therefore, I would opt for Solomon as the author. The circumstances weigh far more heavily on the side of Solomonic authorship.

## C. Canonicity

We will examine its place in the Canon and questions about its canonicity.

### 1. Place in the Canon

#### a. In the Hebrew canon

It is found in the section called the Kethubim in the subsection called the Megilloth.

#### b. In the Septuagint

It follows Proverbs.

### 2. Questions about Its Canonicity

a. The Book of Ecclesiastes is part of the Antilegomena. The Mishnah informs us about Jewish disputes between Hillel's school and the school of Shammai.

b. Ecclesiastes is not clearly cited in the NT, though possible allusions may be found in Romans 8:20 and James 4:14.

c. This book was cited by early Church Fathers. For example, Hermas cited Ecclesiastes 12:13, Clement of Alexandria cited 1:16–18 and 7:13, and Tertullian cited 3:1.

d. The Apocryphal work Ecclesiasticus was written from Ben Sirach who clearly assumed its canonicity.

e. The Pseudepigraphical IV Ezra (completed by A.D. 100) contains clear reference to a 24-book canon of the OT. This would almost have to include Ecclesiastes.

f. The major problem appears to be explaining why it was in the correct list of OT works. However, the fact that they tried to give a rational explanation for some of the tensions in Ecclesiastes appears to be founded on the assumption that it was already in their OT canon.

## D. Integrity

The supposed problems for the issue of unity are motivated by the polarity of structure in the book. A number of solutions have been offered in explanation of this antithetical framework. The critics have seized upon this to disavow a single author and have consequently denied its unity. In 1899 Tyler saw a Greek influence upon this book in order to explain the book's Epicurean bend. He dated Ecclesiastes about 200 B.C. Morris Jastrow followed Tyler. Recent critics maintain a basic unity in Ecclesiastes such as Scott. Yet, even Scott

explains some divergent thoughts as a balancing of heterodoxy with orthodoxy. In order to maintain orthodoxy, an orthodox interpreter added 12:13–14 (for more information, see Eaton, pp. 36–40).

## 1. Reinterpreting the Problem Passages

### a. Jewish

Early Jews allegorized passages such as 9:7 (see Eaton, p. 37 on the Aramaic Targums).

### b. Christian

Early and Medieval Christians interpreted this book like the Jews did.

## 2. Literary Debate

Due to the oscillations of thought in the book, some have suggested that there were two writers of this book, one was a sensual worldling and the other a refined sensualist (so Herder and Eichhorn). Others have explained the oscillation of thought as being within the writer's mind (Cornill).

## 3. History of Redactions

At the beginning of this century, McNeile, Barton, and Podechard maintained that Ecclesiastes was a skeptical work with quite a few additions (see Eaton, pp. 38–39).

## 4. Unity in Diversity

How have critical scholars with a somewhat conservative bend and evangelical scholars responded to the diversity of thought in this book? There are some scholars who have recognized this diversity yet have maintained that there is a unity that includes diversity.

### a. Critics

Today, many critics see a basic unity with minimal glosses but the book has a basic negative stance. Assuming a negative theological view of life, Robert Gordis seeks to mitigate some of the book's tensions by explaining the contradictions as quotations introduced by Qohelet in order to discuss them (an example of this is his treatment of Eccl 8:12, see pp. 184, 296–97).

### b. Conservatives

- 1) Leupold explains expressions like “under the sun” as a reference to Qohelet's observations about human wisdom as explained from a human perspective (p. 28; cf. with pp. 42–43).
- 2) Leupold's view is essentially the same view as that of the *Old Scofield Reference Bible* and this has been basically followed in the *New Scofield Reference Bible* (see Caneday, pp. 25–26, esp. n. 24).
- 3) Hengstenberg placed the unorthodox statements in the mouths of impious Jews; e.g., 9:5–7, “the dead know nothing” reflects natural reason.

- 4) Shank and Caneday have maintained that there is no conflict between Qohelet's natural reason and special revelation. Qohelet viewed life as an OT believer who viewed his world and life in light of the reality of the curse and its all-encompassing effect on the world. In the midst of this sin-cursed world, the only cure was a proper relationship to Yahweh. Then one can enjoy life as it was meant to be enjoyed, even with its limitations in a sin-cursed world (Caneday, pp. 29–30).

#### E. Literary Structure

Many OT scholars have maintained that there is no cohesive arrangement in Ecclesiastes. This was even maintained by Delitzsch and Hengstenberg. This had been maintained by seeing an analogy between Ecclesiastes and Proverbs. Though the logical development of the author's message is clearly not that of an Occidental mind, this cannot be taken to mean that it lacks unity. Based upon internal structural features, the unity of the book is quite clear. Setting aside the title (1:1), epigram (1:2, 12:8), and conclusion (12:9–14), the book begins and ends with a poem (1:3–11, 11:7–12:7). Addison G. Wright (1968) has cogently demonstrated that there is a break in thought between 6:9 and 6:10. The first section (1:12–6:9) emphasizes the phrases "everything is meaningless" and "chasing after the wind." In the second section (6:10–11:6), 6:10–12 is transitional. These three verses summarize two thoughts from the first section (what is, is; and the meaninglessness of many words) and draws two conclusions from section one, "who knows what is good for man to do" and "who can tell him what will be after him" (p. 322). The first is addressed in 7:1–8:17 and the second in 9:1–11:6. This could be visualized in this manner:

- A Introductory title, 1;1
- B Opening poem, 1:2–11
- C First discourse, 1:12–6:9
- C<sup>1</sup> Second discourse, 6:10–11:6
- B<sup>1</sup> Concluding poem, 11:7–12:8
- A<sup>1</sup> Conclusion, 12:9–14

#### F. Message

A *crux interpretum* of this book is deciding the message of the book. The various proposals are legion. These will be briefly summarized under the categories of unsympathetic and sympathetic interpretations. Since the primary rhetorical problem in Qohelet revolves around the polar structure in the book, those who take an unsympathetic view gravitate toward explaining the book in light of the negative tension and those who take a sympathetic view tend to harmonize these tensions from the positive side. This will be followed by a presentation of the message of Ecclesiastes.

## 1. Unsympathetic Interpretations

Those who gravitate to interpreting Ecclesiastes from the negative pole generally do so because Qohelet supposedly did not have enough theological truth to solve the problems of meaning and purpose in life.

a. Qohelet's negative tensions reflect an Epicurean perspective on life. Because Qohelet cannot find meaning to life, he argues for a form of Epicureanism. Most critical scholars have seen this as reflecting some kind of Epicureanism. In the nineteenth and early twentieth century, many saw this Epicurean influence as originating from the Greeks (Tyler, pp. 30–32). Most have abandoned this and would simply maintain that this reflects a form of Epicureanism that was present in the ancient Near East. Crenshaw has stated it in this fashion: “Neither material possessions, human friendship, nor religious devotion alter the fact that nature is oppressive, that death is the negation of all good, that God is therefore untouched by the plight of creatures” (“Popular Questioning,” p. 389). The advice of Qohelet is to “eat, drink and be merry for tomorrow we die.”

b. Qohelet's worldview is negative, the positive elements are to be understood as quotations cited for discussion. This is the view of Robert Gordis. Gordis seeks to alleviate some of the tension between the negative elements in the book and the positive by explaining that the positive elements were citations by Qohelet to demonstrate the perspective of another person or situation. The positive elements do not reflect Qohelet's point of view (p. 96). For example, 8:12b–13 have been taken as a positive statement; however, Gordis has claimed that *yôd□ā* in v. 12b is used by Qohelet to introduce his citation of positive, conventional wisdom. According to Gordis, Qohelet is attempting to refute this conventional wisdom. Gordis develops this unit in this manner: 8:11–14 is a unit of thought. In vv. 11–12a Qohelet recognizes that when judgment is not quickly carried out, men are encouraged to continue living sinfully. In vv. 12b–13 Qohelet then concedes “though I know [*yôd□ā*] the answer that ‘it will be well in the end with those who revere God because they fear Him and it will be far from well with the sinner, who, like a shadow, will not long endure, because he does not fear God’” (p. 105). Qohelet then refutes this with his negative teaching in v. 14, “Here is a vanity that takes place on the earth—there are righteous men who receive the recompense due the wicked, and wicked men who receive the recompense due the righteous. I say, this is indeed vanity”(ibid.). Though Gordis makes sense of this unit, the main problem is that this verb *yôd□ā* is in the middle of a statement that is being cited (Caneday, p. 25), violating Qohelet's normal grammatical patterns.

- c. Qohelet's negative expressions are to be understood as a rationalistic apologist explaining natural events from a human perspective. This is the view of Leupold and the *Old Scofield Reference Bible*. As such, this book is seen as being partially theistic. This illuminating note is found in *Old Scofield Reference Bible*: "This is the Book of man 'under the sun,' reasoning about life; it is the best man can do, with the knowledge that there is a Holy God, and that he will bring everything into judgment." The key phrases are 'under the sun'; 'I perceived'; 'I said in my heart.' Inspiration sets down accurately what passes, but the conclusions and reasonings are, after all man's." What precisely does Scofield mean with his note? He clarifies his view in a subsequent publication with these words: "The student should notice that it is not at all the will of God which is developed, but that of man 'under the sun' forming his own code. It is, therefore, as idle to quote such passages as ii.24, iii.22, etc., as expressions of the divine will as it would be to apply Job ii.4, 5 or Gen. iii.4. The constant repetition of such expressions as 'I perceived,' 'I said in my heart,' 'then I saw,' etc., sufficiently indicate that here the Holy Spirit is showing us the workings of man's own wisdom and his reaction in weariness and disgust" (C. I. Scofield, *The Scofield Bible Correspondence School*, vol. 1 [Los Angeles: Bible Institute of Los Angeles, 1907], p. 111, cited by Fields, p. 84).

Perhaps this was only the view of *Old Scofield Reference Bible*! However, the same position is reflected by these words in the *New Scofield Reference Bible* (p. 696): "Ecclesiastes is the book of man 'under the sun' reasoning about life. The philosophy it sets forth, which makes no claim to revelation, but which inspiration records for our instruction represents the view of one of the wisest of men."

We might think that this was the view of only a few of editors of the Scofield Reference Bible. Fields has noted that most of the revisers of the *New Scofield Reference Bible* took the same pessimistic interpretation as their forerunner. This can be substantiated from a Transcript of the Proceedings of the New Scofield Reference Bible Committee, Gaebelien stated that Qohelet offered "no hope of immortality in this book. It's a cynical volume, and is sometimes entitled 'The Gentle Cynic.' . . . It is human earthly philosophy, and I feel that it is here by inspiration to show us the best that natural man can do" (Trans. G., #155, Rev. 1, Eccl. #1A, SRB 696, Disc 23a [examined by Weston Fields in the rare book room at Grace Theological Seminary Library, cited by Fields, p. 84, n. 3). Though the editors of both Scofield Reference Bibles surely did not intend it, their words could lead to an unwarranted dichotomy between inspiration and revelation. Based upon the remarks of those associated with both editions of the *Scofield Reference Bible* and interpreted in light of our discussion of descriptive and prescriptive truth in Proverbs (see above), we would be forced to

conclude that Ecclesiastes is a biblical book that essentially contains descriptive truth and not prescriptive truth, with the exceptions that there is a holy God and He will bring everything into judgment—these are Qohelet's only two truths about prescriptive truth.

How far do we go with this type of reasoning, why not say that some of the books written by Moses or David were simply written for the value of descriptive truth? What about Luke's account in the book of Luke since he claims to have made a thorough study of Christ's life (Luke 1:1–4)? Since he is not claiming to have received direct revelation, why can we not say he possibly was preserving descriptive truth? In contrast to this type of reductionist approach to theology, we would contend that Ecclesiastes is affirming much more prescriptive truth, like the other 65 books of the Canon, than the editors of the *Scofield Reference Bible* allow.

## 2. Sympathetic Interpretations

Those who tend to explain Ecclesiastes from the positive pole generally do so because Qohelet is viewed as having a world and life view that was more positive, at least in the sense that it was based on God's special revelation.

a. Qohelet makes a distinction between the way life seems to be and the way life really is.

This is the view of Kaiser (p. 17) and Woudstra. As such the negative side of the book is only the way life *appears* to be, it is not necessarily what it really is. There is thus a distinction between faith (what comes by special revelation) and sight (one's perception of the world and life).

b. Qohelet recognizes that man lives in a sin-cursed world and that, therefore, man cannot understand many facets of this world and depraved man's actions. As a biblical theologian Qohelet informs us on how to live godly lives in the midst of an ever-puzzling and frustrating world. We will presently develop this message.

## 3. The Message of Ecclesiastes

The message of this book may be summarized in this fashion: Life with its frustratingly enigmatic nature for finite, fallen man who along with his world has been victimized by the Fall can judiciously be enjoyed when one has a vital relationship with the sovereign God who holds mankind accountable.

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon was trying to figure out the meaning and purpose of life and how this affected his daily living. The message of Ecclesiastes focuses on life in a sin-cursed world. I would like us to see two aspects of Solomon's message: first, life in a sin-cursed world cannot be fully

comprehended by man, and second, life in a sin-cursed world can be judiciously enjoyed by man.

a. Life in a sin-cursed world cannot be fully comprehended by man.

To demonstrate that life in a sin-cursed world cannot be fully comprehended by us, we need to notice how this was the subject of the book. This will be further substantiated by an examination of Solomon's theological *a priori*s and a development of the book's dialectical nature.

1) The placement of the *hebel* motif reflects the book's subject.

a) After a brief introduction in 1:1, Qohelet provides a sweeping generalization in 1:2, "Breath of breaths, says Qohelet, breath of breaths, all is breath." Qohelet's placement of this motif at the inception of the book is where we might expect an author to place his subject. His catchword *hebel*, "breath," is used five times in this verse. That this is the subject is further confirmed by the fact that Qohelet concludes his work with three uses of *hebel* in 12:8. This forms an *inclusio* marking the parameters of his work. Within this framework, *hebel* is used thirty other times.

b) The noun *hebel* is used in the Hebrew Bible 73 times, and 38 of these occurrences are found in Ecclesiastes. The literal meaning of *hebel* is "vapor, breath." In Isaiah 57:13 a "breath" will carry away idols. In this context *hebel*, "breath," is parallel with *rûah*, "wind," in the preceding colon. The metaphorical use of this term denotes that which is "evanescent, unsubstantial, worthless, vanity." Outside of Ecclesiastes the metaphorical use of *hebel* consistently denotes something that is vain or has no value. This pejorative understanding has been carried over into its use in Ecclesiastes. However, a number of interpreters have recognized that this exclusively negative meaning of *hebel* does not harmonize with Qohelet's exhortations to enjoy the gifts of life and his commendation of wisdom. Furthermore, we should expect other synonymous words or phrases with *hebel* to be used by the author if his point was that life had no value. We need to examine this word more carefully in Ecclesiastes to determine exactly how *hebel* is being used.

c) This metaphorical rendering of *hebel* can be traced back to Septuagint translation of Ecclesiastes where *hebel* was rendered as ματαιότης, "emptiness, futility, purposelessness, transitoriness" (BAGD, p. 495). Since the Greek term includes the nuance of "transitoriness," it allows for a broader use than a strictly negative sense. However, the dominance of the pejorative sense of vanity owes its allegiance to Jerome, who translated *hebel* with *vanitas*,

“unsubstantial or illusory quality, emptiness, falsity, untruthfulness” (Glare, *Oxford Latin Dictionary*, p. 2010). Since that time most versions have rendered *hebel* as “vanity.” This is the rendering found in the KJV, NKJV, RSV, and NRSV. The TEV deviates from this pattern by translating it as “useless” and the NIV does likewise with its rendering as “meaningless.” The NASB translates *hebel* as “vanity” 22 times, “futility” 12 times, “fleeting” twice and “emptiness” once. The multiple renderings in NASB are a problem, at least in Ecclesiastes. If Qohelet announces in 1:2 and 12:8 that “all is *hebel*” and then describes the specifics of the “all” and evaluates these as *hebel*, then it must have a common nuance in Ecclesiastes. This has also been noted by Fredericks, who has perceptively observed that it is an error “to see distinct spheres of meaning for the word and to select the correct one for each context, ending in a multifarious description of reality that is contrary to a significant purpose for the unifying and generalizing agenda of Qoheleth—‘everything is breath’” (*Coping with Transience*, pp. 23–24).

- d) If *hebel* does not contain distinct spheres of meaning, what is the common sphere of meaning? These various suggestions for this common sphere of meaning include translation values such as “absurd” (Fox), “transience” (Fredericks) “bubble” (Burkitt), “ceaseless change” (Knopf), “contingency” (McKenna), and “incomprehensible” (Ogden, Staples, and Murphy; for a listing of these translation values and others, see my article, “The Message of Ecclesiastes,” pp. 89–92). The problem with “absurd” is that it is tied to Fox’s existentialism. The problem with “transience” is that it does not do justice to passages such as 8:14, for a “fleeting” problem would not have been a problem to Qohelet. The problem with “bubble” and “ceaseless change” is that they are tied to a purely negative evaluation of life. If *hebel* represents a devaluation of life, can this legitimately be harmonized with his motifs of enjoying life and praising wisdom? Qohelet’s description of the sovereignty of God in 3:1–15 is too absolute to allow for the ambiguity associated with “contingency.” Though it would appear that no English term provides an equivalent to *hebel*, the closest of the options is probably “incomprehensible” or a synonym such as “enigma” or “mystery.” However, a limitation of “incomprehensible” is that it does not necessarily account for the emotive connotations of *hebel*. This is expressed in 2:17 where Qohelet states that he hates life because his work had been grievous. We would grant that this is hard to comprehend, but it is more than that. Life with its difficulties and vicissitudes as a result of the Fall is a puzzle that finite man cannot figure out and it frustrates Qohelet in his search for meaning and purpose. In his

attempt to master life, Qohelet eventually realizes with defeated expectations that he cannot understand God's scheme of things. Though in English we do not have a precise word equivalent to the meaning associated with this Hebrew term, I would prefer to translate it something like a "frustrating enigma." There are three reasons for this.

- i) The phrase "chasing after wind" (*re'ût rûah*) provides a qualifying element to *hebel*. An example of this is found in 1:14 where *re'ût rûah* is used to complement *hebel*. This is also used in 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6; 6:9. In 1:17 and 4:16 a closely related phrase is used, *ra'yôn rûah*, "chasing after wind." Both *re'ût rûah* and *ra'yôn rûah* are translated in the KJV as "vexation of spirit." The translators of the NASB rendered these as "striving after the wind," the NIV as "chasing after the wind," and NKJV as "grasping for the wind." The reason for the different renderings of *re'ût* and *ra'yôn* relates to its different uses. Whether this is a "vexation of spirit" or "striving after the wind," the difference is of no consequence for our contention. If the first is the case, this may reflect something that troubles one's thoughts. The latter rendering reflects something that is beyond man's control. As Shank has said, "A man may determine or make up his mind to accomplish something eternally significant in a creation subjected to vanity, yet no matter how hard he tries Qohelet tells him it will be a fruitless endeavor. A man in his toil 'under the sun' grasps after the wind and attains precious little for all his labor" (p. 67). Thus, the concept of "chasing after wind" supports our contention that the semantic range of *hebel* includes a cognitive sense (for other complementary phrases, see Ogden, p. 21).
- ii) If life has no value, how can we harmonize this with Qohelet's positive exhortations about life? At climactic points in this work, Qohelet gives us advice to enjoy God's gifts (2:24; 3:12, 22; 5:17 [in Eng. v. 18]; 8:15; 9:7–10). These gifts include food, drink, work, wealth, possessions, marital relationship, and youth. Though wisdom is not the panacea for all of life's adversities, Qohelet commended it as a solution to many of life's problems (2:13; 4:13; 7:11–12, 19; 9:13–18). These positive exhortations certainly suggest that life has some value.
- iii) Qohelet recounts his quest for meaning and purpose in life. The very nature of this quest was to gain understanding into what gives life meaning. It was not a haphazard search but had been a thorough quest in that it took into account the range of activities occurring "under the sun." Rather than this prepositional phrase

reflecting a limitation to “natural theology” as Leupold would suggest (*Ecclesiastes*, pp. 42–43), it denotes the place where these activities occurred, “on the earth” (Shank, p. 67). The epistemological nature of this search is emphasized in passages such as 1:13 where Qohelet set his mind, *l'q̄b*, to seek and explore by his divinely given gift of wisdom all that been done upon the earth. This is further emphasized by Qohelet’s observations. He saw, *râ’â*, all of man’s works in 1:14, wisdom and understanding in 1:16, madness and folly in 2:12, injustice in the halls of justice in 3:16, labor produced by rivalry in 4:4, riches hurting the one who possesses them in 5:13, one whom God has not enabled to enjoy his wealth in 6:1–2, retribution violating a strict cause and effect relationship in 7:15, unexpected victors in 9:11, inappropriate leadership in 10:7, and people dying in 12:3. The cognitive sense of *hebel* is also stressed in 6:1–11:6. Following Addison G. Wright’s understanding of the structural unity of *Ecclesiastes*, this section of material (6:1–11:6) revolves around finite man’s inability to understand God’s work. In 7:1–8:17, Qohelet punctuates this unit with “not discover” and “who can discover” in 7:14, 24, 28 (twice), and 8:17 (three times). In 9:1–11:6 Qohelet emphasizes “do not know” and “no knowledge” in 9:1, 5, 10, 12; 10:14, 15; 11:2, 5–6 (three times). All of this suggests that the use of *hebel* in *Ecclesiastes* relates to the issue of man’s frustrating inability to comprehend the activities in his earthly sphere of existence.

Therefore, *hebel* is an appropriate term to encapsulate Qohelet’s frustrating and puzzling search for meaning and purpose in life. The use of this term in the sentence “all is *hebel*,” as used in 1:2 and 12:8, sets the parameters for its use in *Ecclesiastes*. In every case where Qohelet evaluates life with this catchword, we should translate it in a consistent manner with this understanding. We might translate 1:2 in this fashion: “Most frustratingly enigmatic, says Qohelet, most frustratingly enigmatic, all is frustratingly enigmatic.” Consequently, Qohelet’s subject is the frustratingly enigmatic nature of all the facets of this life.

- 2) The author’s theological presuppositions point to the book’s subject. To gain a fuller understanding of Qohelet’s subject, we need to consider the theological presuppositions that have influenced him. Qohelet did not simply know that there was a holy God and that He would bring everything into judgment. We are persuaded that he reflects a solid theological grasp of the early chapters of Genesis. This is to be expected since wisdom literature has a focus on God’s creational design as reflected in the early chapters of Genesis. This is especially

true in Ecclesiastes where Qohelet's understanding of his frustrating and puzzling world is directly influenced by his understanding of Genesis.

- a) The influence of Genesis is initially seen when Qohelet poses his thematic question in 1:3, "What is man's advantage from all his labor at which he toils under the sun?" Qohelet has not changed his emphasis from his generalized subject in 1:2 but has reduced his reflections on life's meaning and purpose to a specifically identifiable biblical idea of labor. He poses his question in terms of the dominion mandate originally given to Adam, who as God's vice-regent was to subdue the earth (Gen 1:28; 2:5, 15). However, when Adam chose to disobey God, the fall occurred. This included God cursing the land, making man's labor one of strenuous toil (Gen 3:17–19; cf. Eccl 2:22–23). It is this curse that brought death and destruction, causing the creation to groan under this bondage longing for God's redemption (Rom 8:19–21). It is this quest to find significance through toil that characterizes Qohelet's search.
- b) The Genesis account further informs the theology of Ecclesiastes concerning life and death. Man was made from dust and to dust he shall return (Gen 2:7; 3:19; cf. Eccl 3:20; 12:7).
- c) Man's unconfirmed creature holiness in Genesis 1–2 and subsequent depravity in Genesis 3 are also used as an informing motif in Ecclesiastes 7:29 (8:11; 9:3).
- d) Drawing upon Genesis 3:16, Qohelet additionally notes the fractured relations between husbands and wives in 7:26–28.
- e) Another motif drawn from the Mosaic account in Genesis is God's role as Creator. In agreement with Genesis 1, God is the "Maker of all things" in 11:5 and "Creator" in 12:1.
- f) In Genesis 1–3 God is also presented as the Sovereign. In Ecclesiastes 3:1–15 Qohelet recognizes God's absolute sovereign control over everything in life.
- g) In Genesis God created man in his image and likeness. As God's image bearer, finite man has derivative wisdom. Not only did man's wisdom have natural limitations as a created, finite being, but God also imposed other limitations (e.g., "do not eat..." [Gen 2:17]). When Satan tempted Eve, he challenged God's holy image bearers to gain more wisdom by eating from the tree of knowledge of good and evil. What Satan did not tell Eve was that while gaining increased wisdom, she and her husband would use this

increased wisdom in the context of their resulting depravity. The theology of Genesis has a profound affect on Ecclesiastes. As a sage, Qohelet diligently studied and explored with wisdom every activity done on earth. However, God's curse on man and creation made this a burdensome task (Eccl 1:13). After his poem on God's coordination of earthly activities with time, Qohelet observes that God has made everything beautiful in its season (3:11). Though unable to comprehend God's work, our author is able to appreciate the beauty of God's providential work. Man's quest for the scheme of things is a God-given capacity within man that Qohelet calls *hā'ōlām*. Because of its use in an equivalent manner in v. 14, this Hebrew term is best translated as "eternity." *Hā'ōlām* is apparently part of man's metaphysical constitution as God's image bearer. Though man's longing to see God's scheme of things is divinely given, in v. 11 our writer also indicates that God has placed limitations on man's ability to understand the scheme of things. Because of man's finiteness and the Edenic curse, God's providence is veiled and burdensome to man. God has also limited man's ability to comprehend His moral governing of the cosmos (7:15–18; 8:14) and the future (8:7; 10:14). Qohelet has thoroughly grasped the message of Genesis that God did not want mankind to pursue all wisdom and, consequently, even hindered man's pursuit of his goal.

- h) Qohelet's *Leitmotiv* about celebrating life is also dependent upon Genesis. Since man was cursed to working by the sweat of his brow, this recurring theme appears to reflect Qohelet's expectation that God will bring blessing to his creation. Since God directly made Adam and Eve, he created them in a state of innocence. When temptation came, they succumbed to it, and rather than being confirmed in creature holiness, they became totally depraved. Because Adam was the representative of creation, his sin resulted in all his posterity and the rest of creation becoming subject to the curse. In Qohelet's attempt to understand and master life, he came to realize that this was an impossible task. In Qohelet's own words, all creation has become twisted and crooked because of the fall (1:15; 7:13). God directly imposed the curse. Yet God began a process of bringing blessing to his creation (see Gen 1:28; 3:15; 9:1, 26–27; 12:2–3). He will deliver his creation from the bondage of the curse. Qohelet as a godly sage recognizes God's curse on his creation, yet he also understands that God is working to redeem his creation. This is why Qohelet can strongly recommend the enjoyment of the blessings of God.

Consequently, Qohelet's subject has been directly affected by his theological grasp of Genesis. When Qohelet affirms in 1:2 that

“everything is frustratingly enigmatic,” this encompasses the negative features of life in a sin-cursed world and the positive dimensions of his expectation of God’s restoration. Though he understands God’s curse and blessing, he also lives in a world where God’s providence is veiled. He desires to figure out God’s scheme of things, but in his desire to understand and control life his expectations have been defeated. As such, Qohelet recognized that life has tensions. This reflects an antithetical character to life. Though living in a cursed world which frustrated his quest for meaning and purpose, our author was also a man of faith who recognizes that God is working to redeem his creation.

- 3) The dialectical nature of Ecclesiastes also says something about the book’s subject. As we read Ecclesiastes, we almost feel at first glance as if Qohelet has a “schizophrenic outlook on life” (Osborne, *Hermeneutical Spiral*, p. 200) Qohelet oscillates between a negative outlook on life and a positive perspective. These polarized perspectives reflect the dialectical nature of Ecclesiastes. These polarized perspectives are Qohelet’s way of reflecting the realities of this world. The actual events behind the book of Ecclesiastes reflect Qohelet’s search for meaning and purpose in life. He has examined perspectives and items of life such as wisdom, folly, building projects, pleasure, toil, and wealth. He leads us on a journey through his personal experiences in pursuit of his goal. He takes us down the path of wisdom but it comes to a dead-end. He takes us down the path of pleasure but this also leads to a dead end. We are taken down various dead-end trails until finally we come to “the conclusion of the matter” in 12:13, and he informs us that the answer to his quest is fearing God and keeping his commandments. None of the theories, thrills, or things of life could provide the answer to Qohelet’s quest.

Using various genres such as reflection stories, proverbs, comparative sayings, rhetorical questions, autobiographical material, Qohelet recounts his quest with a lyrical description. In recounting the details of his quest, Qohelet draws us into his world, where he takes us down a dead-end path. However, he abruptly changes paths to one reflecting the beauty of a theocentric worldview. Qohelet lives in a world where unresolved tensions are a part of the baffling puzzle of life. Rather than reflecting a sequential arrangement to his quest, he composes his work by using contrasting motifs to duplicate the tensions he faced in his fallen world. To legitimately interpret Ecclesiastes, we should follow an explanation that harmonizes passages asserting that life is a frustrating enigma with those advocating a celebration of God and his gifts. The overall plan of the book has negative passages being followed by positive passages. Ryken has tabulated that there are fifteen negative pericopes, thirteen positive passages, and three that

combine the two perspectives (*Words of Delight*, p. 320). Furthermore, in terms of space the negative passages exceed the positive ones by three or four to one (“Ecclesiastes,” p. 270). As such, the negative passages receive major attention and the positive ones minor space. Qohelet’s procedure is to initially treat a negative perspective and then follow up with the positive message. Why did he intermingle the two perspectives? “His mingling of negative and positive is realistic and faithful to the mixed nature of human experience. The technique keeps the reader alert. It also creates the vigor of plot conflict for this collection of proverbs, as the writer lets the two viewpoints clash. The dialectical pattern of opposites is a strategy of highlighting: the glory of a God-centered life stands out all the more brightly for having been contrasted to its gloomy opposite” (*Words of Delight*, pp. 320–21). To demonstrate this dialectical nature, we will examine some of these.

- a) Qohelet initially sets up the contrasting nature of his work in 1:4–11. After stating his thematic question in v. 3, our author introduces his work with a poem contrasting temporal man with an enduring cosmos. Generations of people come and go, but the world continues in an uninterrupted manner (v. 4). However, the permanent terrestrial sphere is marked by changes such as the movement of the sun, the wind, and rivers flowing into the sea (vv. 5–7). By the nature of the enduring cosmos being cyclical, we might expect finite man to ultimately comprehend the underlying forces at work in the natural realm. However, man is always taking in what he perceives with his senses and is never able to adequately describe his world; it is an endless task for finite man (v. 8). Qohelet characterizes this search as wearisome. Because man is endlessly taking in the facets of life, surely he will discover something new. What is constant for man is that there is no novelty in life, there is “nothing new under the sun” (v. 9); and if he thinks something is unique, it is because he has forgotten past history (vv. 10–11). The enduring world is characterized by monotonous cycles and yet finite man will never be able to comprehend or describe his milieu. Consequently, Qohelet prepares us to view his work as a microcosmic representation of the realities of God’s good creation subjected to the bondage of the fall.
- b) A wide range of polarized subjects is summarized in 3:1–8. Fourteen pairs of opposites are listed in vv. 2–7. These merisms range from birth and death, love and hate, war and peace, and many other contrasting features of life. These are part of the constant repetition in time that God directs according to his own good pleasure. Therefore, the activities of this life have a polarized nature.

- c) In 2:11 Qohelet evaluates toil as being *hebel*. Furthermore he maintains that labor may not be satisfying because of envy (4:4–6) and selfish greed (4:7–12). This must be contrasted with his recommendation in 2:24 to find enjoyment in work (so also in 3:13, 22; 5:18 [Heb. v. 17]; 8:15).
- d) Another tension is between life and death. In 7:1 Qohelet states that the day of death is better than the day of birth; however, in 9:4–6 he states that anyone who is living has hope and that a living dog is better than a dead lion. On the one hand, he hates life (2:17); on the other hand, he commends its enjoyment (2:24–26).
- e) Furthermore, death is no respecter of animate beings. Man has no advantage over animal life in that both die (3:18–21). A person may strenuously work all his life accumulating wealth, yet he will die like the profligate. When death comes, he must leave behind the results of his work, “as he came, so he departs and what is his advantage since he labors after wind” (5:16, Heb. 5:15). Like the rest of Adam’s race, the sage has no control over the time of his death (8:2–8). Though one may live a godly life, death overtakes him just as it does the wicked (9:2–3). This reflects a life that is filled with tensions and distortions.
- f) Perhaps Qohelet’s most vexing tension relates to the issue of justice. Our author teaches that there is divine justice, but he is plagued by the injustices that God permits in his providence. If there is any place on earth where we expect justice to occur, it is in the court. Contrary to this expectation, our author affirms in 3:16 that “in the halls of justice, wickedness is there; and in the halls of righteousness, wickedness is there.” However, in v. 17 he expresses confidence that God will bring to justice both the righteous and the wicked. In 5:8 (Heb. 5:7), he observes that the oppressed have their rights denied. In some sense, we might contend that the oppressed and the judicially victimized may not be truly righteous. However, in 7:15 Qohelet describes a situation where a genuinely righteous person receives what the wicked should get; and the wicked person receives what the righteous person should get. In the first colon of this verse Qohelet evaluates this scenario as a *hebel* situation. In 8:12–13 Qohelet maintains that God does take care of the righteous and the wicked. However, he once again describes the same two exceptions that he mentioned in 7:15 and again categorizes this as a *hebel* situation in 8:14. It is this incomprehensible situation that vexes our author.

In his pervasive search for meaning and purpose, Qohelet makes a generalization that all the facets of life are frustratingly enigmatic. This search is not based solely on empirical observation. Rather his search is predicated upon his theological understanding of Genesis. He recognizes that the infinite God created a good world but with the Fall God in holy judgment subjected it to his curse. Qohelet observes that all the dimensions of this earthly sphere are influenced by this supernaturally imposed curse. As a result, Qohelet's attempt to fully fathom life has been marked by one exacerbating conflict after another. Qohelet came to recognize that he could not comprehend God's work. He has designed Ecclesiastes to reflect these conflicts by following a dialectical pattern. Because of the infinite nature of God's being and finite man's depravity, Qohelet's attempt to master life with wisdom was misdirected. If the only conclusion that we can draw from Ecclesiastes is that everything about life is frustratingly enigmatic, then Ecclesiastes only make a minimal contribution to normative theology. However, Qohelet as a godly sage realizes that God is actually working to restore his creation. Qohelet's biblical understanding of life thus has a profound influence on his response to the exacerbating and puzzling nature of life.

b. Life in a sin-cursed world can be judiciously enjoyed by man.

In response of the frustrating mystery of life, Qohelet exhorts us to judiciously and reverentially use and enjoy our divinely bestowed gifts in an attempt make the most out of our God-given lives. In examining Qohelet's response, we will primarily focus on the *Leitmotiv* of celebrating life. Qohelet provides this alternative exhortation in order to assist us in navigating through the inscrutable maze of life. This exhortation to enjoy life repeatedly punctuates Ecclesiastes at key junctures. This refrain is found in 2:24–26; 3:12–13, 22; 5:18–20 (Heb. 17–19); 8:15; 9:7–10; and 11:9–12:1. Based upon these, we can synthesize four responses in the face of life's baffling and incomprehensible nature.

1) Man's limitations

Having presented a brief autobiographical sketch of his search for meaning in wisdom, pleasure, and the lack of permanence in life (1:12–2:23), our author introduces us to his first *Leitmotiv* about enjoying life in 2:24–26. In these verses, God enables those who belong to Him to enjoy their food, drink, and find satisfaction in their work. Furthermore, in v. 26 God gives those who are pleasing to him wisdom, understanding and joy, but to sinners God gives them the task of “gathering up” for his people. This is a way God has chosen to provide for his people by even using the labor of reprobates. What is indicated by this refrain's content is God's freedom in using people

and their limitations to carry out God's plan. Man's limitations are further implied by the placement of 2:24–26 immediately after the description of Qohelet's search for meaning in his autobiographical sketch. The longer negative perspective on life is contrasted by the shorter positive point of view. By placing these in juxtaposition, "the writer of Ecclesiastes has set for himself the task of making us feel the emptiness of life under the sun and the attractiveness of a God-filled life that leads to contentment with one's earthly lot" (Ryken, "Ecclesiastes," p. 271). One of Qohelet's key responses to his subject is his focus on our limitations.

The book of Ecclesiastes asserts that his natural weaknesses and sin limit man. For example, in 1:12–18 Qohelet recognizes that increased wisdom results in increased grief. A further limitation is seen in his search for meaning in pleasure seeking (2:1–11) and comparing wisdom and folly (2:12–23). Though we will not look at all man's limitations as presented in Ecclesiastes, the items mentioned here provide a sampling of man's limitations as a depraved, finite person.

Ecclesiastes also develops the limitations man has as a created being. The admonition in 12:1 exhorting youth to remember their Creator reflects a limitation in them as finite beings. As created beings, we have both a beginning and limited knowledge (3:11). Since we cannot know the future, we cannot know if a business investment will succeed. Qohelet, therefore, recommends that we diversify our business investments in 11:1–6. As a finite being man has natural limitations.

## 2) Theocentric perspective of life

Having searched for meaning and purpose in the gifts of life and, subsequently, realizing that this quest had been foolishly misdirected, Qohelet finds the answer in the incomprehensible God. Each of the exhortations commending the enjoyment of life not only places an emphasis on enjoying life but also on God's presence. This theocentric perspective on life is clearly seen in 2:24–26. In the context of chapter two Qohelet despairs of life because he will have to leave the fruit of his labor to another who will not have labored over it and may not use it as wisely. The emphasis has been on what Qohelet had accomplished with God being excluded from his presentation; however, in vv. 24–26 the presence of God dominates every verse. In v. 25 Qohelet uses a rhetorical question, "Who can eat or find enjoyment without Him [God]?" The point is no one can find enjoyment in life without God. Those enabled by God to find enjoyment are described in v. 26 as "those who please God." The emphasis is on a dynamic relationship with the Living God. Consequently, the refrain of 2:24–26 has a strong God-centered

emphasis. Qohelet's theocentric perspective is seen in his other exhortations commending the enjoyment of life.

Qohelet's system of belief emphasizes the Creator-creature distinction, God's incomprehensibility. Qohelet's God is the Sovereign LORD who in His infinite wisdom created the earth and all living things, who is governing the world in his providence and will bring it to its appointed end, and who judged the world at the Fall and who will also judge all people at his eschatological judgment. Does this sound as if Qohelet was theologically deprived? As a biblical theologian, Qohelet's view of life is God-centered; this is to say his observations about life were conditioned by his understanding of special revelation. As Shank has stated, "Qoheleth's perception...refers to a knowledge which is a 'reflex-action' of his fear of God and which penetrates to the essence of the *meaning* of what this world of vanity is all about. Surely, Qoheleth does perceive the vanity 'under the sun' which does not *exclude* the intellectual element of knowledge of these things. Yet that perception also *includes* a deep, spiritual insight into the effects of the curse of God upon life and labor 'under the sun.'" (p. 68).

### 3) Enjoyment of life

When considered in light of death, Qohelet found no satisfaction in wisdom, pleasure, and toil (1:12–2:23). Everything that he labored to accumulate will be left to someone after him. In light of this he recommends in 2:24–26 that as God enables us, we should enjoy our food, drink, and work. He further affirms that God also gives wisdom, understanding, and joy to those who please him. The second refrain is found in the context dealing with God's sovereign appointment of life's events with their divine timing. The God-given desire to understand God's sovereign appointments haunts Qohelet because he recognizes that it is a symmetrical masterpiece, but he is unable to comprehend it. His second refrain advocates that we should be happy and accomplish good in life. He further recommends again the enjoyment of our food, drink, and the fruits of our labor. His third refrain is found in 3:22. The context of this relates to injustice being permitted to take place in this world. Qohelet affirms that God will judge the righteous and the wicked. He further notes that we are finite beings. Recognizing the infinite God's judgment and our finite limitations in this temporal sphere, he again recommends that we find satisfaction in our work.

The fourth refrain in 5:17–19 (Eng. 5:18–20) is situated in a chapter dealing with the liabilities associated with an excessive desire for wealth. In this context, he recommends that the value of riches is relative and that we should enjoy our wealth and possessions as God

enables us. He again commends making the most of our food, drink, and work. The fifth refrain is in 8:15. While confident that God will judge, Qohelet is perplexed by how God morally governs his universe (8:1–14). In this refrain, Qohelet again commends the enjoyment of life, food, drink, and work. One of his more elaborate exhortations celebrating life is his sixth refrain in 9:7–10. In this context, Qohelet affirms that both the righteous and wicked are in the hands of God and neither knows whether love or hate will occur in their future. All men share the same destiny of death. This being the case, he commends joy while we are alive, for the activities of this life will not take place in Sheol. In vv. 7–10 he commends eating and drinking with a joyful heart, the enjoyment of fine clothes, perfume, and our wives. He further commends that we labor diligently and astutely. The final exhortation is in 11:9–12:1. In a context dealing with the uncertain timing of death, Qohelet recommends that young people enjoy their youth commensurate with God’s moral laws and that they have a faithful remembrance of their Creator.

This examination of these passages reveals that Qohelet challenges us to be actively engaged in and to enjoy our food, drink, work, results from our work, spouse, clothes, perfume, and youth. Since this enjoyment is correlated in some contexts with God’s judgment and the fear of God motif, this certainly does not seem to be the remarks of a skeptic advocating unbridled hedonism. Qohelet sounds like an orthodox biblical theologian who had a solid understanding of antecedent theology.

#### 4) Normative theology

Some have claimed that enjoyment-of-life refrains do not reflect normative truth for God’s people. Illustrative of this is C. I. Scofield, who correlated the refrain of 2:24 with Satan’s lie in Genesis 3:4. Since Qohelet has coordinated these refrains with man’s accountability to God, these cannot mean “Do whatever you want.” Instead, we should notice that in the last part of 2:24, he said “this also I saw, that it was from the hand of God.” This is to say, that the items enumerated in vv. 24–26 are from God. He makes a similar statement in 3:13 where the blessings enumerated are referred to as “the gift from God.” In 3:22 the gifts given to man are referred as “his portion” (*hēleq*). This term denotes that which has been apportioned or divided (BDB, p. 324). It indicates what portion God has assigned to man. Man receives a portion but not all of God’s blessings. Qohelet uses *hēleq* twice in 5:18–19 (Heb. vv. 17–18). This same expression is used again in 9:9. In 8:15 “God gives” these blessings. I would conclude from this that Qohelet has designed his advice to be normative theology.

## II. Analysis

### A. Introduction: A Contrast Between Finite Man and a Cyclical, Enduring Cosmos, 1:1–11

1. Introductory Title, v. 1
2. Introductory Poem, vv. 2–11

This opening poem serves as an introduction to the whole book. As such its first two verses not only serve as an introduction to the poem but to the book as a whole. The book's subject is given in v. 2 and its programmatic question is stated in v. 3. The actual poem is in vv. 4–11. In it Solomon grapples with the question of man's ultimate advantage. He describes the subject of human frustration in comprehending the created order of the cosmos. There is a contrast here between man as a temporary resident on the earth and the cyclical, enduring nature of the earth. Though man can see the nature of the earth, he cannot comprehend the significance of it, it is beyond man's ability to understand.

### B. First Discourse: Observations on Various Areas of Life in Order to Demonstrate Finite Man's Lack of Ultimate Gain, 1:12–6:9

Solomon investigates various areas of life in which finite man is involved. This reflection indicates that the achievements made by mortal man have no lasting value. These demonstrate man's failures and limitations. This extended section is unified through the repetition of the phrase "enigmatic, a chasing after the wind." With the exception of 4:4 where it introduces a new unit, this phrase is located as a concluding part for several sections. Consequently, it shows Solomon's conclusions about the worth of human achievement (1:16–18; 2:12–17), pleasure seeking (2:1–11), and labor along with its fruits (2:18–6:9). None of these provide man with the ultimate gain.

#### 1. Finite Man's Lack of Ultimate Gain in This Life Is Reflected by Personal Observations on Various Life Situations, 1:12–3:22.

The content of 1:12–3:22 focuses on what occurred in Solomon's personal life.

##### a. Finite Man's Lack of Ultimate Gain in This Life Is Reflected by Personal Observations on Human Achievement and Wisdom, 1:12–2:26.

Solomon as he pictures himself to his readers is one who cannot obtain this quest for ultimate gain. He wants to see life's purpose and meaning but he cannot acquire this information. Though pictured as failing and limited, man is not hopeless as the conclusion demonstrates. This section is brought to a conclusion by a repetition of the question about man's ultimate gain in 2:22–23, which is then followed by Solomon's positive advice. This section of material can be broken down in this manner:

##### 1) Man's Failures and Limitations in Striving after Wisdom, 1:12–18

Man's failures and limitations are highlighted in his quest for wisdom. Solomon shows how human achievement (vv. 12–15) and human wisdom (vv. 16–18) are futile and incomprehensible.

- 2) Man's Failures and Limitations in Pleasure-seeking, 2:1–11  
Solomon next showed how he conducted a study of pleasure-seeking with wisdom as a guiding principle (vv. 3, 9).
  - 3) Man's Failures and Limitations in Comparing Wisdom and Folly, 2:12–23  
Solomon notices in this section man's failures and limitations by comparing wisdom and folly. In this regard wisdom and folly are seen from the perspective of death (vv. 12–17) and from the perspective of one's successor (vv. 18–23).
  - 4) Recommendation: Enjoy Life, 2:24–26  
In light of man's failures and limitations, Solomon recommends that man enjoy the basics of life given to him by God.
- b. Finite Man's Lack of Ultimate Gain in This Life Is Reflected by the Coordination of Events with the Appropriate Time, 3:1–22  
In this section Solomon demonstrates that man has certain limitations in understanding how God is providentially working.
- 1) Finite Man's Limitations in Understanding God's Providential Arrangement of All the Events of Life, vv. 1–15  
Solomon reflects in this unit that he has observed that God has appointed a time for everything. This is part of God's eternal, inscrutable, unchangeable providence. Solomon initially states his principle in vv. 1–8: there is a time for everything. In v. 9 he notes that toil does not bring meaningful profit. This is followed by his rationale in vv. 10–11 and his recommendation to enjoy life in vv. 12–15.
  - 2) Finite Man's Limitations in Understanding God's Providential Arrangement of the Times of Judgement, vv. 16–22  
Though God's wise and perfect plan includes an appropriate time for everything, there is one item that appears to be exceptional, viz., injustice taking place in the halls of justice. Solomon initially makes this observation in v. 16. He then provides the reasons why God permits injustice to continue in this earthly sphere, vv. 17–21, and he finally makes a recommendation to enjoy the life that God has given us, v. 22.

2. Finite Man's Lack of Ultimate Gain in This Life Is Reflected During the Difficult Times of Life, 4:1–16

This chapter relates to issues that can hinder one from finding satisfaction in his God-given roles. Though vv. 1–3 share a theme of oppression with 3:16–22, I have taken them as two different but related units. Chapter 4 appears to be pointing out certain difficulties of life that may keep one from enjoying his divinely given commands (3:22). These difficulties relate to situations involving oppression (vv. 1–3) and work (vv. 4–12). These situations are bound together by the power structure of society and how people respond to this. Each of the stanzas in this chapter is introduced by the same Hebrew verb that is translated in KJV as “I considered” in vv. 1, 4, and as “I saw” in v. 6; there is one exception and that is vv. 13–16. An additional feature that dominates is the use of the “better than” proverbs in 4:3, 6, 9, and 13. The first two conclude the stanza, the third is at the medial point and functions as the fulcrum of this stanza, and the final initiates its stanza.

a. Man's Failures and Limitations Are Demonstrated in Situations Related to Oppression, vv. 1–3.

3:16–22 was a motivation for this; however, the situation has been broadened here for in 3:16–22 oppression was related to the halls of justice, here it is oppression wherever it occurs. In addition, vv. 1–3 attach an additional thought that there is no one to assist.

b. Man's Failures and Limitations Are Demonstrated in Situations Related to Work, vv. 4–16.

These relate further to hindrances in situations related to work, which hinder man in enjoying his God-given roles. In this section we should notice that man's labor is not satisfying because of labor (vv. 4–6) and selfish greed (v. 7–16).

3. Finite Man's Lack of Ultimate Gain in This Life Is Reflected by the Relative Value of Riches, 5:1–6:9.

In this section Solomon continues the thought of hindrances to the enjoyment theme of 3:22; however, there is one distinction between 4:1–16 and 5:1–6:9. The former focuses primarily on not finding enjoyment in work. The latter emphasizes the fruits of one's labor, the earnings or results of one's labor. This section is brought to a conclusion in 6:9 where “enigmatic, a chasing after the wind” is used for the final time in this book.

In this section Solomon demonstrates that the value of riches is relative. This context is dealing with how one may lose what he has worked for. He shows their relative value by demonstrating how a rash vow may result in God removing his riches (5:1–7), how governmental oppression may result in their loss (5:8–9), how one's own covetousness may result in one not being able to enjoy them (5:10–12), how excessive striving to accumulate

wealth may result in misery (5:13–17). These four issues focusing on the hindrances to enjoying one's wealth form a hierarchy starting with God and moving down to man himself. Though there are hindrances to enjoying wealth, Solomon balances the picture in 5:18–6:9 by demonstrating that there is some value to wealth when enjoyed as God permits.

a. The Relative Value of Riches Is Demonstrated by a Rash Vow Resulting in Their Loss, 5:1–7.

As man searches for ultimate gain, meaning and purpose in this life, Solomon's advice has been to find satisfaction in the roles that God has given man. He then maintains that God may remove this from the Old Testament Israelite when he worships God in a way contrary to what he has prescribed. This is one hindrance to man enjoying the fruit of his labor. Solomon provides a caution about making vows in vv. 1–3 and about honoring vows in vv. 4–7.

b. The Relative Value of Riches Is Demonstrated by Governmental Oppression Resulting in Their Loss, 5:8–9.

In these two verses Solomon describes a situation where one that being superior in authority over another abuses his power. This abuse of authority results in loss for the underdog.

c. The Relative Value of Riches Is Demonstrated by One's Own Covetousness Resulting in One Not Being Able to Enjoy Them, 5:10–12.

Solomon gives three proverbs demonstrating that wealth cannot ultimately satisfy.

d. The Relative Value of Riches Is Demonstrated by Excessive Striving to Accumulate Wealth Resulting in Misery, 5:13–17.

The point of this stanza is to highlight the uncertainty of wealth. This uncertainty is demonstrated by the possibility that they may be lost. He deals with the acquisition and loss of wealth in vv. 13–14a and the results from the loss of one's wealth, vv. 14b–16b. In light of this, he then poses a question about the ultimate gain from wealth, vv. 16c–17.

e. The Relative Value of Riches Is Demonstrated by the Fact that It Has Some Value When Enjoyed as God Enables, 5:18–6:9.

Since wealth is frustrating in that it cannot provide ultimate gain, meaning and purpose in life, what should we then do? In 5:18–20 Solomon gives a moral about enjoying life and toil as a gift from God. He then provides a warning in 6:1–9. Solomon's point with this warning is to demonstrate that God has not given all men the ability to enjoy their wealth.

C. Second Discourse: Exhortations to Godly Living in Spite of Finite Man's Inability to Understand God's Past or Future Work, 6:10–11:6

The expressions involving the concepts “do(es) not know” or “cannot know” (6:12; 9:1, 12; 10:14, 11:2, 6) and “do(es) not discover” or “cannot discover” (7:14, 24, 28; 8:17) are characteristic of this section. In addition, many recommendations, commendations (such as “it is good,” 7:18; or “X is better than Y,” 7:2, 5; 9:16, 18), and imperatives are found in 6:10–11:6.

Consequently, this latter half of the book contains much advice on how to live in the midst of the constant reminders that man is ignorant concerning God's past work (that is, “what God has done,” 7:13; cf. 8:17) and His future work (such as 9:1; 10:14; 11:2). Solomon's intention with this practical advice was to exhort Israel to fear God (7:18; 8:12; 12:13) and to live obedient lives that would please Him (cf. 7:26 with 2:26).

1. Introduction, 6:10–12

This section summarizes what has gone before and it also introduces us to the next section.

a. Summation of the Preceding Section, vv. 10–11

Two ideas are presented here which were mentioned in 1:12–6:9.

“Whatever exists has already been named” (6:10) is found in 1:9, 15; 3:15. In addition, the puzzling nature of many words in 6:11 was part of the fabric of 4:17–5:6. These two concepts summarize 1:12–6:9.

b. An Overview of the Following Section, v. 12

In light of the summation of vv. 10–11, two observations are made in v. 12 that provide an overview of what is to follow: “who knoweth what is good for man” (see 2:3, 24; 3:12, 22; 5:17) and “who can tell a man what shall be after him” (cf. 3:22). Each of these receives much more attention in what follows. The basic idea running through the second part of this book is that man cannot fathom what God has done. Man's inability to comprehend this is demonstrated in two ways: man's inability to find out what God has done—God's plan as it relates to what is good for man (developed in 7:1–8:17) and man's inability to know the future (developed in 9:1–11:6).

2. Man's Inability to Understand God's Plan, 7:1–8:17

This section of material is bound together by expression denoting man's inability to comprehend the plan of God as it pertains to the past and present. Some of the expressions highlighting man's limitations include some such as “who can find it out” (7:24) and “I find not” (7:28). These are part of Solomon's literary fabric that reflects man's finiteness in understanding the plan of God. The conclusion to this section summarizes this quite well. “Then I beheld all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun: because though a man labor to seek it out, yet he shall not find it; yea farther; though a wise man think to know it, yet shall he not be able to find it” (8:17). Man's limitations in this

section relate to what is going on in this earthly sphere of existence as God's plan is being worked out. Some of the various expressions that Solomon uses to describe God's plan are these: "the work of God" (7:13), "the reason of things" (7:25), "all the work of God" (8:17), and "the work that is done under the sun" (8:17). These expressions are Solomon's way of referring to the plan of God. Consequently, these two chapters show that finite man cannot comprehend God's plan. In this section, Solomon shows that a man cannot comprehend the significance of prosperity and adversity (7:1–14), he cannot understand the significance of justice and wickedness (7:15–29), and he is ignorant of the administration of divine retribution, 8:1–17.

a. Man Cannot Comprehend the Significance of Prosperity and Adversity, 7:1–14.

A series of seven proverbs are presented in this first section (vv. 1a, 1b, 2, 3, 5, 8, and 11). In this section Solomon uses the "better than" proverbs to give his advice. To understand the overall significance of these proverbs we must first look at the question in 6:12, "What is good for man in this life, all the days of his enigmatic life," and then compare it with 7:1a and 7:14b. Solomon's point is that in the midst of prosperity and adversity both ultimately coming from God (7:14), one should have a good reputation/testimony (7:1). This is what is good for man. In developing his thought, Solomon shows that one's manner of living is important (v. 1), that wise living reflects on the brevity of life (vv. 2–4), that wise living reflects on wise counsel to live godly lives in all circumstances (vv. 5–10), that wisdom is more valuable for living than wealth (vv. 11–12), and that wisdom reflect that God's plan is unchangeable and incomprehensible (vv. 13–14).

b. Man Cannot Comprehend the Significance of Justice and Wickedness, 7:15–29.

Solomon further develops his observations made in v. 14. If no one can discover anything about his future, how do we harmonize this with a mechanical and immediate view of retribution theology? In these verse Solomon provides some correctives for some extremes in retribution theology. His correctives include three issues: excessive emphasis on one's own righteousness and increasing one's wickedness lead to an early death (vv. 15–18), wisdom is good but it does not absolutely give adequate protection (vv. 19–24), and true righteousness and true wisdom do not exist (vv. 25–29).

c. Man Is Ignorant of the Administration of Divine Retribution, 8:1–17.

In this chapter it is important to see how vv. 1–9 and 10–17 fit together. In v. 1 the benefits of wisdom are magnified; however, in the final verse Solomon notes that man is limited in his wisdom. Wisdom may help a man in avoiding the wrath of a king (vv. 2–9); however, man does not

have enough wisdom to figure out how God administers justice (vv. 10–17).

1) A Wise Man's Prudent Obedience to the King Helps Him to Avoid the King's Wrath, vv. 1–9

In developing the thought of this section, Solomon notes in vv. 1–4 that a wise man knows how to behave in the presence of a king and how a wise man averts the king's anger by his obedience to the king, vv. 5–9.

2) A Wise Man Cannot Understand God's Administration of Justice, vv. 10–17.

Having shown the general advantage, though with some limitations, that a wise man has when it comes to dealing with a king, Solomon now shows that with all his advantages the wise man does not understand how divine justice is administered; this is to say, he does not understand how God works. In vv. 10–14, Solomon focuses on God's justice in this sin-cursed world. He draws attention to his limitations in understanding why the wicked sometimes get what the righteous deserves and the righteous receives what the wicked deserve. However, he is confident that in the final analysis those who fear God will be better off than the wicked. In light of the sometimes-puzzling nature of God's administration of justice, Solomon commends the enjoyment of life and summarizes his attempt to obtain wisdom, vv. 15–17. These verses not only bring this chapter to a conclusion but they also form an appropriate conclusion to this section of material that was begun in chapter seven.

3. Man's Inability to Understand the Future, 9:1–11:6

Solomon repeats a number of key phrases in this section such as “no man knoweth” (9:1, 12; 10:14) or another equivalent revolving around a negation of knowing (9:5, 10, 10:15; 11:2, 5, 6). This basic expression is used three times in 11:5–6 and suggests that it brings this section of material to a conclusion. These expressions reflect that Solomon is dealing with man's inability to know what the future will bring. In this section of Ecclesiastes, Solomon examines man's inability to know what will happen to him and his inevitable death (9:1–16), hindrances to man's wisdom in discerning the future (9:17–10:20), and an encouragement to work diligently in spite of an inscrutable future (11:1–6).

a. Man's Inability to Know What Will Happen to Him and His Inevitable Death, 9:1-16

Solomon's thought can be broken down into four subsections: the inevitability of death for all men (vv. 1–6), the wise man's response to the inevitability of death (vv. 7–10), the unpredictable timing of death

(vv. 11–12), and wisdom’s great value in an unpredictable world (vv. 13–16).

b. Though Wisdom Has Great Value, Its Limitations Hinder Man from Knowing the Future, 9:17–10:20.

Wisdom has great value in assisting man to live in this earthly sphere; however, it cannot help man predict the future. Solomon highlights this in the following six units: wisdom’s strength and vulnerability to a little folly (9:17–18); though folly may have an affect on wisdom, wisdom is superior (10:1–4), an example of wisdom’s vulnerability (10:5–7), wisdom’s constant dangers (10:8–11), the wise man’s ignorance of the future influences the wise man to control the use of his speech (10:12–15), and foolish leadership may be a hindrance to wisdom (10:16–20).

c. Though Man Is Ignorant of the Future, He Should Work Diligently, 11:1–6.

That this is a separate unit from chapter ten is demonstrated by the clear change in subject matter. Solomon now draws upon the created world, like sea, earth, rain, trees, clouds, etc. and in v. 5 he focuses on the Creator. Another issue that indicates that this is a unit relates to the use of imperatives in vv. 1, 2, and 6. In vv. 1–2 Solomon gives a command to labor diligently with wisdom (by diversifying one’s investments), though the future is uncertain. In vv. 3–4 he provides an example of laboring diligently with wisdom, in spite of the future’s uncertainty. His concluding advice is that just as man cannot explain the direction that the wind will take or how a baby’s body is formed in its mother womb, man even more so cannot explain divine providence. Therefore, labor diligently (v. 6) recognizing that God is ultimately in control.

D. Conclusion: Final Exhortation to Enjoy Life in a God-fearing Manner for God Will Judge Man, 11:7–12:14

With this last section of material, Solomon brings his work to a conclusion. Since the subject matter has changed from diversifying one’s investment (11:1–6) to an extended section dealing with making the most of life in an enigmatic world, it would appear that this is a new section. However, this is not to be taken as something that is simply attached with no connection to the preceding unit. This section is bound to the preceding through the use of terminology reflecting the natural realm.

1. Concluding Poem, 11:7–12:8

Based upon content of this poem and the use of “enigmatic” (11:8, 10; 12:8), we could divide these verses in a fourfold manner. In the first section (11:7–8), we should notice that Solomon introduces us to two themes, enjoyment of life and remembering. These are then elaborated on further in the second and third subdivisions. In the second subdivision, he develops the enjoyment theme (11:9–10), and in the third, the remembering theme

(12:1–7). In the final subdivision, the subject of the book is restated (12:8; cf. 1:2).

2. Epilogue, 12:9–14

In the final verses Solomon concludes his work. In vv. 9–12 he reminds us about his authority in writing this book and in vv. 13–14 he concludes with an exhortation to fear God and keep his commandments.

## PART VII: SONG OF SOLOMON

### I. Introduction

Our introduction for Solomon's most excellent song will focus on the title, date and authorship, unity, canonicity, hermeneutical considerations, and purpose.

#### A. Title

MT: *Šîr haššîrîm*, "song of songs"

LXX: *Aisma aismatôn*, "song of songs"

V: *Liber Canticum Canticorum*, "the book of the song of songs"

#### B. Date and Authorship

In examining the issue of date and authorship, we will initially look at the postexilic and Hellenistic period date followed by the Solomonic date.

##### 1. Postexilic or from the Hellenistic period

The primary reason for this is based upon linguistics. Various Aramaic and Persian loan words have been used to support this (see Field's "Solomon's Most Excellent Song").

An example of this is found in 1:10. The Hebrew term *ḥăzûzîm*, "string of jewels," is a *hapax legomenon*. This does not necessarily argue for a late date but may show a dialectical difference. This probably reflects the cosmopolitan nature of our writer.

##### 2. Solomonic

If Solomon was the author of this work, then it would have been written between 971–931 B.C. There are a number of reasons for drawing this conclusion.

- a. The superscription (1:1) would appear to support this.
- b. Solomon's name is mentioned in these verses: 1:5, 3:7, 9, 11; 8:11–12.
- c. The individual as presented in this work would fit well with a king. Some of his possessions were these:
  - 1) an expensive carriage, 3:7–10
  - 2) royal chariots, 6:12
- d. Solomon wrote many proverbs and songs, 1 Kings 4:32.

#### C. Unity

Some would see this as an anthology of love songs and others take this as a genuine unity with a progression of thought in the book.

##### 1. An anthology

Some interpreters view this book as a collection of love songs having no connection as well as not having a specific message (see Gordis, *The Song*, p. 16; and *ISBE*, rev. ed., s.v. "Canticles," by F. B. Knutson, 1:608).

## 2. A didactic unity

To say that there are separate songs that have been put together into a coherent whole presents no problem, but to say that there is no connection presents some major problems. There are several arguments in favor of this song's unity:

### a. There are common figures of speech

Some of these are the following:

- 1) In 1:2, 4:10 the author maintains that love is more delightful than wine.
- 2) Fragrant perfumes are mentioned in 1:3, 12; 3:6; 4:10.
- 3) Reference is made in 1:10 and 5:13 to the beloved's cheeks.
- 4) In 1:15 and 4:1 Solomon compares the eyes of his Shulammitte bride to the eyes of a dove.

### b. There are a number of references to flora and fauna throughout the book.

c. The theme of marital love binds the whole book together.

d. The same characters are used throughout the book.

e. There are a number of Hebrew grammatical peculiarities that are only found in this book.

f. There is a progression of thought in the book.

## D. Canonicity

After looking at its place in the canon, we will look at some questions related to its canonicity.

### 1. Place in the canon

#### a. In the Hebrew Canon

The Song of Solomon is placed in the Megilloth section of Kethubim in the Hebrew Canon. The five books placed there are Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Ecclesiastes, and Esther. There are two different arrangements of the order of these books in the Hebrew Canon.

#### 1) The Chronological Arrangement

The order of the books found in our Hebrew Bibles, *BHS*, the Leningrad Codex, is based on chronology. The books are placed in the following sequence:

- a) Ruth
- b) Song of Solomon
- c) Ecclesiastes
- d) Lamentations
- e) Esther

## 2) The Arrangement According to the Festival Calendar

The order of the books in the Megilloth of the Hebrew Bibles used by Askenazic Jew (these were Jews who lived in northern and middle Europe). The books are placed in the following sequence:

- a) Song of Solomon (used on Passover)
- b) Ruth (Pentecost)
- c) Lamentations (Destruction of Jerusalem, ninth of Ab)
- d) Ecclesiastes (Tabernacles)
- e) Esther (Purim)

### b. In the Protestant Canon

In our canon, Song of Solomon follows Ecclesiastes.

## 2. Antilegomenon: Questions about Its Canonicity

There were some among the school of Shammai in the first century A.D. who had some questions about this book's content. However, we should understand that its canonicity was not the issue for as Rabbi Akiba has stated the case (Mishnah, *Yadaim*, 3:5): "No man in Israel has ever contested that Song of Solomon defiles the hands. For in the entire world there is nothing to equal the day on which the Song of Solomon was given to Israel. All the Writings are holy, but the Song of Songs is most holy" (Young, p. 337).

As we have seen from the preceding, the Song of Solomon in the Askenazic Jewish tradition is correlated with Passover. In order to solve some of the tensions about the content of the book, the Jewish scholars interpreted this book to spiritually speak of God's love relationship with Israel. The validity of this interpretation will be considered in the following section.

## E. Hermeneutical Considerations

A key issue in interpreting this book is how the book should be interpreted. In fact one cannot determine the purpose of the book unless he first determines how he is going to interpret the book.

### 1. Allegorical

#### a. General information

This is the traditional interpretation of this book. Since some Jewish scholars thought that this book had no religious value, they looked for a deeper meaning in the Song of Solomon, viz., God's love for Israel. Subsequent Christian scholars have understood this deeper meaning as a reference to God's love for the church.

#### b. Advocates

##### 1) Jewish

- a) The Targum to Canticle and the Talmud support this interpretation.

b) Other interpreters who embrace this view are Akiba, Saadya, Rashi, and Ibn Ezra.

2) Christian

Origen, Bernard of Clairvaux, Hengstenberg, and Keil, advocated this view. This only lists a few of the many interpreters who have maintained this view. This was quite prominent prior to the twentieth century.

c. Problems

- 1) The most outstanding problem relates to its initial rationale. The fact that it had no religious value because it dealt with sexual issues may ignore the fact that God wanted a book in the canon that dealt with these issues in a context of marriage.
- 2) This type of allegory is one related to interpretation and not authorial intention. An allegorical interpretation is very subjective. In reality, it is more an example of eisegesis. To properly understand the significance of allegorical interpretation, we must distinguish between an allegorical interpretation and an allegorical meaning. An allegorical interpretation lets the interpreter's theological context control his understanding of the text's content. The goal of seeking to determine what the author meant is hindered in the light of the interpreter's theological grid. In contrast to this, an allegorical meaning is a different issue. In the Bible there are valid uses of allegories as intended by the author. A parable has some similarities with an allegory. To help appreciate allegorical meaning we will compare the parable with an allegory (see Virkler, pp. 161, 173).

**Parable**

- 1) extended simile
- 2) story is distinct from its interpretation and/or application
- 3) One focal point of comparison, details are significant only as they relate to focal point
- 4) Example, Isa 5:1-7

**Allegory**

- 1) extended metaphor
- 2) story and meaning are intertwined
- 3) Several points of comparison, does not focus on one central point
- 4) Example, Ps 80:8-16

The author of either determines this type of allegory and parable. In contrast, an allegorical interpretation is an outgrowth of the interpreter's theological context.

## 2. Typical

### a. General information

To avoid the subjectivity of the allegorical interpretation, the typical interpretation arose. This type of interpretation preserves the literal meaning (the emphasis on marital love and devotion) and maintains that there are implications to understand that God also intended this to describe Christ's love for the church.

### b. Advocates

Unger, Harris, Raven, Archer, et al.

### c. Problems

#### 1) Semantic confusion

The difference between an allegorical meaning and typology is that the first is what the original author intended and the latter is what the interpreter discerns. Usually, this is determined by subsequent revelation, but it must be asserted that typology is *not* what was intended by the initial author.

#### 2) An underlying rationale for this is that a work that only deals with marital love is something less than having religious value. Since Proverbs 5–7 is as descriptive of sexual issues, perhaps even more pointed, and since God ordained marriage with a sexual dimension (see Gen 1:26–28), it seems that this is an unwarranted rationale.

## 3. Parabolic

This is the view of Young (pp. 335–36). In reality, it is similar to typical interpretation but the difference from the typological is that Young makes a distinction in that it simply reminds us of God's love.

## 4. Mythological/Liturgical

### a. General information

Based upon comparisons with the religious practices in the ancient Near East, it has been argued that the Song of Solomon was a liturgy derived from the Tammuz-Ishtar cult.

### b. Advocates

T. Meek ("Canticles and the Tammuz Cult," *AJSL* [1922–23]: 1-14) and Pope (*Song of Songs*) are supporters of this.

### c. Problem

In light of Scripture's stance against idolatry, especially in the literature that was contemporary with this, it is highly unlikely that this view

would have any cogency; and it is highly improbable that the Jews would have regarded this or anything closely resembling a pagan cult as being canonical.

## 5. Literal: lyrical or love song

### a. General information

Some have viewed this as a collection of love songs or epithalamia (songs in honor of a bride or bridegroom). As such this may be taken as a description of a wedding celebration or that it was composed to be used in wedding celebrations.

### b. Advocates

Theodore of Mopsuestia, Budde, Wetzstein, Stephens, and Knutson

### c. Problems

#### 1) The impetus

Wetzstein (*Zeitschrift für Ethnologie* 5 [1873]: 270–302) had noted Syrian peasants and their wedding festivities. “In these festivities, which last for a week, the bride and groom play the role of king and queen. The villagers sing songs before them, including the *wasf*, a description of the physical beauty of the bride. Budde maintained that the origin of Canticles was to be found in a similar situation in Israel” (*ISBE*, rev. ed., s.v. “Canticles,” by F. B. Knutson, 1:607).

#### 2) Lack of information for a valid comparison

To say that this was composed for use at a wedding celebration appears to be more precise than the Song of Solomon appears to permit.

To say that this song describes a wedding celebration is certainly true for 3:6–5:1; however, the question is this, does this do justice to the book as a whole?

## 6. Literal or Dramatic: Three part view

### a. General information

This view is sometimes described as a drama, but this is not necessary for this view. The advocates of this theory maintain that there are basically three participants: Solomon, the Shulammitte, and her shepherd lover. This also includes a chorus of maidens. The plot revolves around Solomon falling in love with the Shulammitte girl. He attempts to win her love but she remains faithful to her shepherd lover. The point of the story is to show how true love triumphs over wealth and prestige.

## b. Advocates

Ibn Ezra (though he still held to the allegorical view), Ewald, and Driver

## c. Problems

- 1) There is no evidence of drama in ancient Israel.
- 2) The references to the shepherd lover would be missed if one had not been informed that he was a part of this book.
- 3) If Solomon was portrayed as the villain, would the Jews have accepted this into the canon?
- 4) Solomon could just as easily be interpreted as the shepherd since he owned many flocks (Eccl 2:7).

## 7. Literal or Dramatic: Two part view

## a. General information

This view maintains that the song most naturally reflects only two major participants: Solomon and his Shulammitte bride. It also includes a chorus of maidens. I have followed a revision of the older dramatic interpretation since I doubt that Israel had dramas in the sense as usually defined during Solomon's reign. This would be understood as a lyric poem that has unity and progression. The song deals with Solomon and the Shulammitte falling in love. "The major sections of the Song deal with courtship (1:2–3:5), a wedding (3:6–5:1), and maturation in marriage (5:2–8:4). The Song concludes with a climactic statement about the nature of love (8:5–7) and an epilogue explaining how the love of the couple in the Song began (8:8-14)" (Deere, "Song of Songs," p. 1009).

## b. Advocates

Delitzsch, Glickman, Price, Deere, Fields, and Ryrie

## c. Problems

- 1) Most of the problems have related to whether or not ancient Israel had a forerunner of the Greek drama. This is totally unnecessary. It is best to take it simply as lyric poetry having a progression of thought.
- 2) Since Solomon was a polygamist, could he have genuinely loved one wife?

## F. Purpose

In light of the hermeneutical considerations, it is best to see this as setting forth the beauty and sanctity of marriage as intended by God.

## II. Analysis

## A. The Superscription, 1:1

## B. The Courtship, 1:2–3:5

1. Introduction: The expressions of longing, insecurity, and praise, 1:2-11

- a. The theme of longing, vv. 2–4
  - b. The theme of insecurity, vv. 5–8
  - c. The theme of praise, vv. 9–11
- 2. The growth of love and its intensity, 1:12–3:5
    - a. Mutual praise, 1:12–2:6
    - b. The refrain, 2:7
    - c. A visit to the country, 2:8–17
    - d. The beloved’s fear of losing her lover, 3:1–4
    - e. The refrain, 3:5
- C. The Wedding, 3:6–5:1
- 1. The wedding procession, 3:6–11
  - 2. The wedding night, 4:1–5:1
    - a. The beauty of the beloved, 4:1–7
    - b. The king’s request, 4:8
    - c. The king’s praise of his bride’s love, 4:9–11
    - d. The king’s praise of his bride’s purity, 4:12–15
    - e. The consummation of the marriage, 4:16–5:1
- D. The Maturation of the Marriage, 5:2–8:4
- 1. Indifference and its resolution, 5:2–6:13
    - a. The problem: The wife’s indifference and the husband’s absence, 5:2–8
    - b. The attractiveness of the lover, 5:9–16
    - c. The lover in his garden, 6:1–3
    - d. The reconciliation: The lover’s praise of his beloved, 6:4–13
  - 2. Praise of the beloved and her love, 7:1–10
    - a. The beloved charms, vv. 1–6
    - b. The lover’s desire, vv. 7–9
    - c. The refrain of mutual possession, v. 10
  - 3. An invitation from the beloved, 7:11–13
  - 4. The beloved’s desire for a greater intimacy, 8:1–4
- E. The Conclusion: The Nature and Power of Love, 8:5–7
- 1. A picture of love, v. 5
  - 2. An explanation of love, vv. 6–7
- F. The Epilogue: How Love Began, 8:8–14  
 (This outline was taken from Jack S. Deere, “Song of Songs,” pp. 1010-1011.)

## PART VIII: LAMENTATIONS

### I. Introduction

In our introduction to Lamentations, we will look at its title, authorship and date, its literary features, canonicity, and purpose.

#### A. Title

MT: *ʾêkâ*, “How!” or “Ah!”

LXX: *Threnoi*, “dirges” or “wailings”

V: *Threni [id est lamentationes ieremiae prophetae]*, “Dirges [which are the lamentations of Jeremiah the prophet]”

Like the titles for the five books of the Torah, the title reflected in the MT is derived from the first word of the book. The adverb *ʾêkâ* also begins chapters two and four of the Hebrew text. As with other laments, this type of exclamation was common in laments (2 Sam 1:19, Jer 9:19). This book has been called *qînôṭ*, “laments” or “dirges” in the Talmud (*Baba Bathra* 15a). The Septuagint and Vulgate have assigned titles to this book that are consistent with the understanding of the Talmud. The subtitle in the Vulgate, *lamentationes*, is the source from which our English versions have derived their title for this book.

#### B. Authorship and Date

The content of the book of Lamentations reflects that it is an outgrowth of Judah’s destruction and exile by the Babylonians. Because of the vividness of its content, the date must have been shortly after 586 B.C. The suggested dating for this book is generally between 586–530 B.C. This is true of conservative theologians. Though liberal theologians generally see the individual poems being written in the sixth century B.C., many will see the book’s final redaction later. For example, the liberal scholar, Otto Eissfeldt, dates chapters 2, 4, and 5 somewhere between 586–538 and chapters 1 and 3 to sometime prior to 538. Sellin considers the fifth lament to be the latest and dates it somewhere between 550–520 B.C. Though liberal scholars generally see early dates for the units, this does not answer the question as to when they were edited and put together. Eissfeldt has asserted that there is no reason for seeing these placed together any later than the fifth century B.C.; that is, no later than 400 B.C. (pp. 504–5). Against this, it should be noted that most conservatives see a single author, usually Jeremiah, writing all five chapters shortly after the events described in the book.

The book of Lamentations does not provide any explicit statement about its authorship and neither does any other verse in the Canon. However, a good case can be made for Jeremiah’s authorship of Lamentations from a strong extra-biblical tradition and from implicit information in Scripture. The LXX opens the book in this fashion: “And it came to pass after Israel had been taken

away into captivity and Jerusalem had been laid waste that Jeremiah sat weeping and lamented this lamentation over Jerusalem and said....” These words are repeated in the Vulgate. The *Baba Bathra* 15a states that “Jeremiah wrote Lamentations.” This is a fairly strong tradition. In fact, it was not until A.D. 1712, when Hermann von der Haardt wrote his commentary on Lamentations, that this tradition was questioned. However, with all tradition, we must check it by biblical data. It has been suggested by Young (p. 342) and Harrison (p. 1069) that support for the traditional understanding was exclusively derived from 2 Chronicles 35:25. This passage asserts that Jeremiah wrote lamentations over Josiah and that these were written in Lamentations: “Jeremiah composed laments for Josiah, and to this day all the men and women singers commemorate Josiah in the laments. These became a tradition in Israel and are written in the Laments.”

If the information concerning Jeremianic authorship of Lamentations contained in the LXX, V, and Talmud is exclusively derived from 2 Chronicles 35:25 and since there is nothing written in our book of Lamentations about Josiah, this is not very satisfying. We need to look at other Scriptural data to see if it can sustain the traditional understanding of the authorship of Lamentations. Though Harrison and Young question the tenuous presentation of support for the traditional understanding of the authorship of Lamentations, they are nevertheless convinced that there are other arguments that support Jeremianic authorship of Lamentations. In order to be clearly informed about the veracity of Jeremianic authorship for Lamentations, we will look at both sides of the discussion.

#### 1. Arguments against Jeremianic Authorship of Lamentations

Four arguments are generally set forth supporting this position.

a. There is a variation in the alphabetic acrostic set forth in chapters two, three, and four from its use in chapter one. This argues at the minimum for at least two different authors (Driver, p. 434). Along this line of reasoning, Naegelsbach had maintained that it is hard to conceive that the author of Jeremiah who was free could force himself to be bound by several acrostic poems (“The Lamentations of Jeremiah,” in vol. 6 of *Lange’s Commentary on the Holy Scriptures*, p. 10).

**PROBLEM:** There may be other reasons for this variation than the one set forth by Driver (see the following discussion on p. 121).

b. In light of Jeremiah 37:6–10 where Jeremiah proclaimed that the coming Babylonian judgment was God’s will for Judah, it seems strange to have Jeremiah lamenting the fall of Jerusalem. It would appear that Jeremiah would have called his people to repentance and submission to the Babylonians, Jeremiah 29 and 42:7–22 (Eissfeldt, p. 505).

**PROBLEM:** There is no problem with one lamenting the fact that a loved one who has gone astray is punished since this is God’s clearly

revealed will concerning what happens to His people in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 when they violate His covenant. In fact, this reflects a healthy attitude of concern for God's people and yet having a proper view of God's clearly revealed will in judging that which is opposed to God's covenant. One would hope that God would use this to bring repentance and submission to His clearly revealed will. This is exactly what the author calls for in 3:40–42.

- c. In Lamentations 2:9 the writer states that the prophets do not receive any visions from Yahweh. The words appear to be spoken by one who was not a prophet (Driver, p. 434).

**PROBLEM:** The point in the context is not that the Law or Prophetic revelation has entirely ceased, but that the city has been destroyed which included the Temple from where no doubt the priests gave forth the Law. Even the prophets had been affected by the fall of the city. They had either been taken into captivity such as Ezekiel or had apostatized. The point in the context is that the fall of Jerusalem affected the kings and princes (vv. 2, 9), the priests (vv. 6, 9), and the prophets (v. 9).

- d. In Lamentations 4:17 the writer identifies himself with those who looked to Egypt for protection from Babylon. The historical setting would appear to indicate that the other nation mentioned in v. 17 was Egypt. According to Jeremiah 37:5–10 Jeremiah never did this (Driver, p. 434).

**PROBLEM:** This verse is written in the first person plural which indicates that writer is referring to the nation and this was not his own political perspective. The use of the first person plural is what we sometimes call the preacher "we." When this is used we do not mean "we" but "you."

## 2. Arguments for Jeremianic Authorship of Lamentations

- a. Since the author describes the events associated with the fall of Jerusalem in a precise fashion, he appears to have been an eyewitness (see 1:13–15; 2:6, 9; 4:10).
- b. The books of Jeremiah and Lamentations appear to be written by an individual who had a true sorrow for the judgment on Judah yet he comprehended the significance of this judgment as something that Yahweh had to do as a judgment on sin and it was through this vehicle of judgment that the nation would be renewed.
- c. In both books, the cause for the nations judgment was national sin (cf. Lam 1:5, 7, 14, 18; 3:42; 4:6, 22; 5:7, 16 with Jer 14:7; 16:10–12; 17:1–3), the result of the sins of prophets and priests (cf. Lam 2:14; 4:13–15 with Jer 2:7, 8; 5:31; 14:13; 23:11–40), and a similar punishment will

overtake the nations that rejoiced over Judah's downfall (cf. Lam 4:21 with Jer 49:12) (Young, p. 343).

- d. Though 2 Chronicles 35:25 cannot be used to directly support Jeremianic authorship of Lamentations, at the minimum it does suggest that Jeremiah had a certain skill in writing lamentations. This would at least say that he is a candidate for writing this book.
- e. There are many similarities in style and thought between Jeremiah and Lamentations. Some of these include the following:
  - 1) "Terrors on every side" (see Lam 2:22 and Jer 6:5; 20:10)
  - 2) "My eyes flow with tears" (see Lam 1:16; 2:11 and Jer 9:1, 18; 13:17)
  - 3) "Wound" or "destruction" (see Lam 2:11, 13; 3:47, 48 and Jer 4:6, 20; 6:1, 14; 8:11, 21; 10:19; 14:17)
  - 4) "I have become the laughing-stock" (see Lam 3:14 and Jer 20:7)
  - 5) "Terror and the pit" (see Lam 3:47 and Jer 48:43)

(This chart was taken from Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *A Biblical Approach to Personal Suffering* [Chicago: Moody Press, 1982], p. 29; Young, p. 343, and Driver, p. 434).

### 3. Conclusion

Though the book itself is anonymous and the testimony in Scripture is likewise silent, the best conclusion that we can draw is that an eyewitness wrote the book. In light of the theological similarities between Jeremiah and Lamentations and the fact that Jeremiah wrote other lamentations, the most likely author of this book would have to be Jeremiah. This is the conclusion drawn by Young (p. 345) and Harrison (p. 1070). Harrison argues that the date should not be any later than 550 B.C. However, there is nothing in the book that would demand a date later than 580 B.C. (Bullock, *OT Prophetic Books*, p. 271).

## C. Literary Features

In this section we are focusing on those aspects of the book that are of a literary nature, this is to say, our focal point is on the unique features of this poetic composition. This includes such things as the alphabetic acrostic in chapters 1–4, the lament meter, the book's structure, and its genre.

### 1. Acrostic Arrangement

#### a. The Definition of an Acrostic

An acrostic is a composition usually in verse form where the first word is combined with the first word of the successive lines to form a word, a series of words, or lists the successive letters of the alphabet. This latter use is called an alphabetic acrostic. There are a number of these in the Old Testament, Psalms 9, 10, 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, 119, 145, Proverbs 31:10–31, and each of the first four chapters of Lamentations.

b. The Use of the Acrostic

In the first chapter, there are twenty-two verses. Each verse forms a stanza. A letter of the Hebrew alphabet begins each stanza and each stanza has three lines. For example, v. 1 is begun with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, א ('aleph); v. 2 with the second letter, ב (beth); etc. The second poem/chapter is arranged the same way. The fourth chapter follows the same pattern with the exception that each stanza has only two lines. Though the third chapter is also an acrostic, it has a variation of this arrangement. In this poem the first three lines begin with the first letter of the Hebrew alphabet, א; the next three verses with the second letter, ב; etc. This chapter is made up of sixty-six verses. The fifth chapter is unique in that it is not an alphabetic acrostic, though it does have twenty-two verses which is similar to the Hebrew alphabet.

c. The Alphabetic Acrostic in Lamentations 2–4

In these three chapters, the order of the sixteenth letter, ו ('ayin), and seventeenth letter, פ (p, peh), of the Hebrew alphabet has been reversed, resulting in a פ (p, peh)-ו ('ayin) order. This reflects that there was an alternate way of listing the Hebrew letters. This same reversal was found on an abecedary text known as the Izbet Sartah Sherd dating about 1200–1000 B.C. (see Aaron Demsky and Moshe Kochavi, "An Alphabet from the Days of the Judges," *Biblical Archaeology Review* 4 (September/October 1978): 22–30).

d. The Significance of the Alphabetic Acrostic

Why was this alphabetic acrostic used? One suggestion is that this form is used for mnemonic purposes. However, if the book of Lamentations is a genuine unit, would this form have been very effective in helping one to remember that a particular line began with an א ('aleph) since this would not aid him in remembering which of the four poems was being referred to. Though there may be some value as a memory aid, this would appear to have limited value in this particular book.

A second suggestion is that this was used to symbolize the *completeness* of Judah's suffering. Because of her sin and deviation from the God of the covenant, Yahweh brought a severe judgment on them that resulted in a *full expression* of grief.

A third suggestion is that this reflects the literary artistry of the poet. His purpose was to use this form in order to maintain some constraints as this lament was used. This would not break down into an uncontrolled mourning.

It would seem to me that all these could be reasons why Jeremiah used this alphabetic acrostic. It would seem that the second and third

suggestions were the controlling factors in his use of this form (see LaSor, Hubbard, Bush, *OT Survey*, pp. 618–19).

## 2. Dirges

The book of Lamentations contains five laments or funeral dirges. A lament was a song or poem composed and recited for one who had recently died. In this book Jeremiah laments the death of the nation. By using this literary metaphor he emphasizes the emotions of sadness and suffering due to the loss of his beloved nation.

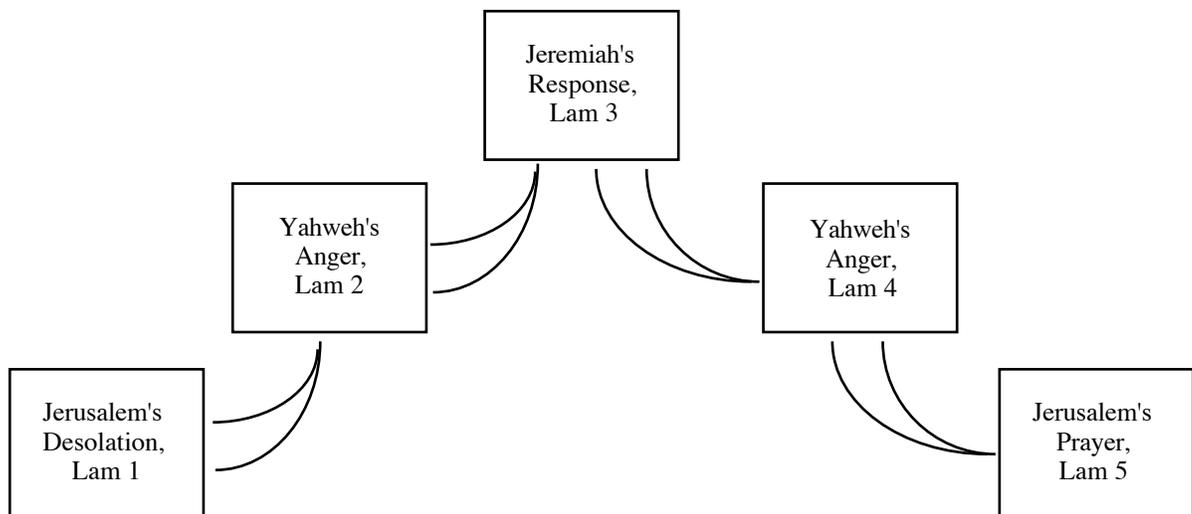
Two structural features are generally found in the lament. First, the Hebrew exclamatory term *'êkâ* (“How!” or “Ah!”), is repeated (see Lam 1:1; 2:1; and 4:1). Second, Karl Budde identified a metrical arrangement that he found in laments as a *qinah* meter (s.v. “Poetry [Hebrew],” *A Dictionary of the Bible*, 4:2–13). A characteristic of the *qinah* or lament meter is its falling or limping pattern. The first line will have three stresses and the second line will have two (for a review of meter, see above). It could also exhibit a 4 + 3 pattern; however, the 3 + 2 pattern is the more dominant form. This metrical arrangement could also be used to emphasize any number of types of tragedies, especially those that were irreversible (see LaSor, Hubbard, Bush, *OT Survey*, p. 619).

Some problems have been found with Budde’s analysis. He overstated his case about the use of the *qinah* meter in Lamentations. There are many lines that exhibit either a 3 + 3 stressed line or a 2 + 2 pattern, and occasionally a 2 + 3 pattern. In addition, this metrical arrangement is not used exclusively in situations of irreversible tragedy. It is used in the Song of Solomon 1:9–11 and in Isaiah 40:9, neither of which can be classified as a tragedy (see *ISBE*, rev. ed., s.v. “Lamentations,” by S. K. Soderlund, 3:66). “In short, the presence of the *Qinah* meter in Lamentations cannot be affirmed with anything approaching the confidence it once was, though the appropriateness of the designation for much of the poetry in book need not be denied altogether” (ibid., 3:67).

## 3. Overall Structure

The book of Lamentations reflects that it has a specific structural arrangement. The first poem is a lament over Jerusalem’s state of destruction after the Babylonian devastation. This is balanced by the fifth poem. The author’s prayer continues the lament over Jerusalem’s pitiable condition. Poem 2 dealing with Yahweh’s anger is balanced by the same theme in poem 4. The apex is found in third poem. This poem’s climactic position is clearly demonstrated by its central position in the book. This is further emphasized by an intensification of its acrostic arrangement (see above). The arrangement of the book of Lamentations is considered a chiasm. By chiasm, we normally have a form a-b-b-a. This form has a slight modification in that it has an apex, a-b-c-b-a. For purposes of clarification,

we would call this concentric arrangement of the chiasm, a pivotal chiasm or a climactic chiasm. The following chart reflects this arrangement:



With this third lament, the nation is personified. There is a movement between the prophet, an individual lament, and the national, a communal lament. Robert Gordis has called this type of movement, fluid personality (*The Song of Songs and Lamentations*, p. 174). Bullock has summarized the content of this central poem quite well. “After introducing the idea that the nation suffers because of the rod of the Lord’s anger, the poet engages in a Joban complaint (vv. 3–20), followed by affirmation of trust in the Lord (vv. 21–36). Then the last part of the chapter proceeds through an admission that the catastrophe was the Lord’s doing (vv. 37–39), a call to repentance (vv. 40–42), another complaint (vv. 43–54), and concludes with a consideration of what the Lord would now do about His enemies” (*OT Prophetic Books*, p. 268).

#### 4. Genre

The genre of this book is a lament with the poet using the figure of personification. The forms of poems 1, 2, 4, and 5 are laments spoken from the lips of Jerusalem. In each of these the author mixes his laments with his own commentary. The lament of the third poem is placed in the mouth of the nation mixed with personal lament (see Bullock, *OT Prophetic Books*, pp. 265–66).

#### D. Canonicity

Since the book’s canonicity has never been seriously questioned, we will only look at its place in the canon.

### 1. In the Hebrew Canon

Lamentations is placed in the Megilloth section of Kethubim in the Hebrew Canon. In the chronological listing, it follows Ecclesiastes and in the order based on the festival calendar, it followed Ruth in memorial to the destruction of Jerusalem (to see how it fit in with the order of books in this section, see above).

### 2. In the Protestant Canon

In our canon, Lamentations is placed with the Major Prophets following the book of Jeremiah.

## E. Purpose

Because Judah had been unfaithful to the God of the covenant, Yahweh used a wicked nation to bring His judgment on the Judah, which included the fall of Jerusalem and the destruction of the temple. Lamentations was written with the purpose of mourning this tragedy and with the purpose of encouraging Israel to recognize that the God of the covenant judged them because of His righteous standards and to repent of their wickedness by turning back with covenant loyalty to the God of the covenant.

## II. Analysis

### A. First Dirge: The Desolation and Misery of Jerusalem Because of Her Sin, 1:1–22

1. Lament for Jerusalem, vv. 1–11
2. Lament by Jerusalem, vv. 12–22

### B. Second Dirge: Yahweh's Anger Expressed by His Punishment of Jerusalem, 2:1–22

1. The Result of Yahweh's Anger, vv. 1–10
2. The Agony of the People, vv. 11–17
3. Plea for Relief, vv. 18–22

### C. Third Dirge: Jeremiah's Encouraging Response in the Midst of Affliction, 3:1–66

1. The Suffering Nation, vv. 1–2
2. Judah's Complaint, vv. 3–20
3. Trusting in Yahweh, vv. 21–36
4. Yahweh's Judgment, vv. 37–39
5. Call to Repentance, vv. 40–42
6. Further Complaint, vv. 43–54
7. An Appeal for Vengeance, vv. 55–66

### D. Fourth Dirge: Yahweh's Anger Expressed Because of Jerusalem's Sin, 4:1–22

1. The Horrors of the Siege, vv. 1–12
2. Reasons for the Siege: Sins of the Prophets and Priests, vv. 13–20

3. Call for Vindication, vv. 21–22

E. Fifth Dirge: Jerusalem's Prayer to Yahweh, 5:1–22

1. The Affliction of Yahweh's People, vv. 1–18

2. Prayer for Restoration, vv. 19–22

(This outline was taken from Charles H. Dyer, "Lamentations," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: Old Testament*, p. 1211; Bullock, *OT Prophetic Books*, pp. 272–73; H. L. Ellison, "Lamentations," in vol. 6 of *The Expositor's Bible Commentary*, p. 701; and Dan G. Kent, *Lamentations*, p. 7).