

THE EQUIP INSTITUTE

Theme: Christian Story

Topic: OT Survey – Wisdom Literature and Poetry

Fall 2026

Introduction

The Equip Institute exists to equip members of Taylors First Baptist Church to think rightly about God and his Word for the sake of living rightly before God in his world. Our theme for this fall is Christian Story. This session is an introduction to the OT Wisdom Literature and Poetry

An Introduction to Wisdom Literature and Poetry

Wisdom is an important theme in the OT. According to the *ESV Study Bible*, biblical wisdom “might be defined as skill in the art of godly living, or more fully, that orientation which allows one to live in harmonious accord with God’s ordering of the world.” The Jewish understanding of wisdom is rooted in fear of Yahweh (Prov. 1:7), which means a wholehearted devotion to the one God who is perfectly holy and is the Creator, Ruler, and Judge of all peoples. Normally, biblical wisdom is concerned with the art of faithful living, most notably in the Proverbs. Biblical wisdom can also be more philosophical, as with Job and Ecclesiastes.

In addition to this primary emphasis on the fear of Yahweh, the OT has much else to say about wisdom. There are limits to human wisdom since we are finite creatures. Our sin leads us to often ignore God’s wisdom. Generally, heeding God’s wisdom leads to flourishing while rejecting His wisdom leads to various forms of suffering. One fruit of enjoying a covenant relationship with God is a life characterized by godly wisdom, which includes sincere worship and faithful obedience to God’s commands. Wisdom should be passed on from generation to generation.

Poetry accounts for about 50% of the OT, but it is especially identified with the Psalms and Song of Solomon. Though Hebrew Poetry is its own genre, it is also often considered a subset of wisdom literature. The most important theme of Hebrew poetry is faithfulness to the Lord, which includes wise living.

Wisdom Literature, including Hebrew poetry, is similar in form and even many emphases to pagan writings in the

Ancient Near East. What differentiates the biblical writings is their wholehearted devotion to Yahweh. This means Wisdom Literature had an apologetic function, challenging rival worldviews, but in a form that would have been familiar to many of the people groups who would have encountered the Jews. In a world of many so-called gods, the OT offers wisdom that is divinely revealed by the One True God.

Wisdom Literature and Poetry

Job

Job is named for the main character in the book. The authorship is anonymous and the date is unknown. Many scholars believe the author was a Jew, but we don't know for certain. The setting of the book is the time of the Patriarchs, placing it early in the Bible's chronology. However, the author cites from Psalms and Isaiah, meaning the book itself was written sometimes between the exile (587–538 BC) and before about 200 BC, when the earliest copies of Job are available. Chapters 1–2 are a prologue that establishes Job's character. Chapters 3–41 offer a series of dialogues between Job and his friends about why Job is suffering. Chapter 42 is a conclusion where Job submits to God, he experiences restoration, and his friends are rebuked.

Key themes:

- God is sovereign over evil and suffering and His character remains unchanging
- We can trust God, even when we cannot understand our own suffering
- God is not afraid of hard questions from His people, though they should be asked sincerely from a posture of faith
- The wisdom of humans is confounded by the wisdom of God

Psalms

Psalms is named for the Greek word *psalmos*, which means "song." The Hebrew title of the book is *Tehillim*, which means "praises." The book is sometimes referred to as the Psalter because it is a collection of psalms. The book has many authors, the most famous of whom was David, who wrote about half of the psalms. The oldest psalm (Psa. 90) dates to the time of Moses (ca. 1400 BC), about half were written during the time of David (ca. 1000

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Song of Solomon is named for Solomon, who either wrote the book, or in whose honor the book was written. Jewish and Christian scholars are divided as to the authorship, in part because the details in the book are difficult to reconcile with what we know about Solomon. However, most scholars still date it to Solomon's reign in the tenth century BC, arguing that even if Solomon was not the author, it was possibly a poem written in his honor.

Option 1: Song of Solomon is an allegorical poem symbolizing the love between God and His covenant people. This has been the dominant view throughout Christian history. After all, both the OT and NT use marriage as an analogy for God's relationship with His people. This interpretation is the reason the book was included in the canon. However, the sexual language has always made some readers uncomfortable. Also, spiritual interpretation has fallen out of favor in the last 200 years. Since the nineteenth century, this view has been unpopular with most Bible scholars.

Option 3: Song of Solomon is a poem honoring the dignity of marriage and sexual intimacy. This view has been popular since the mid-twentieth century, especially

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Craig G. Bartholomew and Ryan P. O'Dowd, *Old Testament Wisdom Literature: A Theological Introduction* (IVP Academic, 2014).