**The Story of the Old Testament**

**Lecture #7 –Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon**

**The Wisdom & Praise of God’s People**

1. **Worship**

*Though You Slay Me* by Shane & Shane.

1. **Quick Review of the Covenants**

Does anyone remember the **6 covenants**? Let’s review them. You will find me repeating myself over and over again on the main parts of the story because that is the only way that I can learn and, I believe, that anyone can learn (unless you have a photographic memory, and, in that case, I don’t like you very much!). So, here they are:

* **The Adamic Covenant (#1) – Genesis 2**
* **The Noahic Covenant (#2) – Genesis 9**
* **The Abrahamic Covenant (#3) – Genesis 12, 15, 17**
* **The Mosaic Covenant (#4) – Exodus 19-24**
* **The Davidic Covenant (#5) – 2 Samuel 7**
* **The New Covenant (#6) – Hint in Deuteronomy 30:6, Jeremiah 31:31-34, Ezekiel 36:22-32, Deut. 30:6**

1. **Introduction**

The books that we will look at in this section do not advance the narrative of the Old Testament. As a result, this section of the course will differ than the previous sections. The books in this section do not directly tell the story of the Old Testament but they do continue to reveal the Lord to us, who we truly are, how we should understand and live in the world around us, and how we can approach and worship the Lord in every season of our lives as men and women who are caught up in the story that runs through the Old and New Testaments.

In the books that we have looked at to this point, we have looked at the Lord’s progressive fulfillment of his redemptive promises through the lives of certain key individuals in the story. **Adam and Eve** are the first key individuals who are created in a covenant relationship with the Lord and who break that covenant by eating of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil. **Noah** and his family are the next key individuals who find favor with the Lord and are spared of the flood and recipients of the Lord’s covenant promise to fulfill his promise of restoration before destruction comes. **Abraham and Sarah** are the next key individuals who receive the Lord’s covenant promises of land, numerous offspring, and worldwide blessing. **Isaac and Jacob** are the next key individuals as the ones who inherit the promises made to Abraham. Then **Jacob’s sons** are the key individuals who become the twelve tribes of Israel, with particular focus on **Joseph** who the Lord uses to preserve the people of Israel and **Judah** as the tribe through whom a promised king will come to bring about the promised restoration.

**Moses** is the next key individual who the Lord raises up to deliver Israel from Egyptians slavery, mediate a covenant between the Lord and Israel, and give the people of Israel his law according to which they could know how to live lives of grateful obedience to his revealed will. **Joshua** is the next key individual who leads the people of Israel to the Promised Land and gives each of the tribes (save the Levites) their portion of the land. The **series of judges** form the next group of key individuals. **Naomi, Ruth, and Boaz** are also highlighted through the book of Ruth. The series of **kings and prophets** form the next group of key individuals, with particular focus on **Samuel, Saul, David, Solomon, Elijah and Elisha**. **Ezra, Nehemiah, Esther and Mordecai** are the key individuals from the period after the return from the exile.

But, what about the people of Israel who did not fall within the category of “key individuals.” What was their experience like as the story progressed? Or, to say it another way, how were they to relate to and understand the Lord, understand who they were as his covenant people, and make sense of the world around them? The books that we are going to study in this section – Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon give us great insight into these questions and find continuing significance in our lives as Christians as we seek to relate to and understand the Lord, understand who we are as his covenant people, and make sense of the world around us.

The scope of these books is huge. We are just going to scratch the surface here. My goal in these few short pages is to give you a taste for the beauty and wonder of these books so you will come back for more and feast on what is contained within them. With that in mind, we will have three objectives as we approach each book: (1) ascertain the overall message of each book and the key texts that articulate and develop that message, (2) discern the role of the book in the Old Testament canon, and (3) discover how the book ultimately points to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

1. **Job** (42 chapters - takes about 1 *½ hours* to read for the average person)
   1. **The Overall Message of the Book of Job & Key Texts**

The overall message of the book of Job is that, even though we are the Lord’s covenant people, life doesn’t always work out like we think it should. Yet, the Lord is sovereign over all the uncertainties and confusion of life and we can, and must, trust him in the midst of blessing and suffering.

The book of Job can be divided into five main parts: (1) the introduction in Job 1-2, (2) the conversation between Job and his three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) in Job 3-31), (3) Elihu’s speech in Job 32-37, (4) the Lord’s conversation with Job in Job 38-42:6, and (5) the conclusion in Job 42:7-17.

* + 1. *Introduction (Job 1-2)*

The introduction to the book of Job in Chapters 1 and 2 introduce us to a righteous man Job who has been very blessed by the Lord. He had many children, servants, and animals “so that this man was the greatest of all the people of the east.” (1:3) So far, so good.

The story takes a dramatic turn in the remainder of these chapters as we are allowed to eavesdrop on a conversation between the Lord and Satan. Satan is given permission by the Lord to inflict great suffering on Job. And, Satan brutally acts to bring about this great suffering upon him. Job loses his children, livestock, servants and, ultimately, his health over a short period of time.

Such loss would crush most of us, but Job’s response is remarkable: “Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’ In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong.” (1:20-22) Job was clearly a man who knew, trusted, and loved the Lord deeply.

Job’s wife, quite understandably in light of the staggering loss and suffering that has come upon Job, encourages him to curse the Lord and die. Job’s friends Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar, at first, seem to provide greater insight and comfort than his wife. When they hear of Job’s sufferings, they drop everything and visit him for the purpose of showing him sympathy and comforting him. When they first see him, they weep, tear their clothes, put dust on their heads, and sit with him for seven days and nights without speaking a word.

* + 1. *Conversation Between Job & His Friends (Job 3-31)*

As Job’s conversation with his three friends continues, it becomes clear that they serve to increase Job’s suffering rather than to comfort him in the midst of his suffering. Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar increase Job’s suffering because they are misguided and speak falsely about the Lord and his ways. The Lord makes this clear at the end of the book when the Lord’s anger burns against them and he makes it clear that they have spoken falsely about him and his ways. (Job 42:7-9) However, not everything spoken by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar is incorrect. For, example, Paul quotes Eliphaz in 1 Corinthians.[[1]](#footnote-1)

The common error repeated again and again by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar throughout their dialogue with Job recorded in Chapters 3-31 is their incorrect belief that Job is suffering as a result of his sin. They have reduced the life into a simplistic formula and fail to recognize their limited ability to fully understand the mysteries of life. Through the Lord’s rejection of the shared perspective held by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar we learn that, as Schreiner rightly notes: “True wisdom does not offer simplistic formulas about human life but rather recognizes life’s complexity, ambiguity, and irrationality. . . . The notion that suffering is always due to personal sin is categorically rejected by Job . . . Job teaches us that true wisdom, which is marked by fear of the Lord and honoring him, does not lend itself to such a pat answer.”[[2]](#footnote-2)

Notice that the friends’ counsel was rejected because it claimed that suffering *always* was the result of sin – not because it suggested that suffering, at times, is the result of sin. We all know this to be the case. Many of our wounds are, in fact, self-inflicted. But, this does not mean that all suffering is the result of our sin.

Job, again and again, rejects the simple formula proposed by his friends and insists that his suffering is not the result of his sin. In fact, Job points out that the exact opposite formula is frequently observed; namely, that the wicked prosper and the righteous suffer. For example, in Job 12:6 job notes that: “The tents of robbers are at peace, and those who provoke God are secure, who bring their god in their hand.”[[3]](#footnote-3) Schreiner comments on this verse as follows: “Job’s point is that the wicked, who ignore God, often prosper, and that is evident to anyone who takes a sober and clear look at the world.”[[4]](#footnote-4)

It should be noted here that Job does not say that he is without sin – quite the opposite. He acknowledges several times throughout the book that he has sinned against the Lord.[[5]](#footnote-5) Job’s correct critique of his friend’s position is that they fail to see that suffering is not always the result of a person’s sin. Since everyone has sinned, why is not everyone experiencing the suffering that has come upon Job?

Job is aware that more is going on in the midst of his sufferings than is proposed by his friends, but he doesn’t know what it is. And, that is the limitation that runs through Job’s reflections on his suffering in these Chapters. As his friends contain error in what they say to Job, so Job’s words are not without error. Job’s most significant error, as we will see in the Lord’s rebuke of him in Chapters 38-41, is that he calls into question the Lord’s justice and fails to see the larger working out of the Lord’s redemptive promises.[[6]](#footnote-6) Job, like his friends, fails to properly acknowledge his limitations and the Lord’s limitlessness. Job improperly imposes his own limitations upon the only uncreated Lord of the universe.

As Job gives “free utterance to [his] complaint” and speaks “in the bitterness of [his] soul”[[7]](#footnote-7) in these Chapters:

* he cries out for death: “Oh that I might have my request, and that God would fulfill my hope, that it would please God to crush me, that he would let loose his hand and cut me off!” (6:8-9);
* he cries out for the Lord to “let me know why you contend against me” (10:2) and declares his “desire to argue my case with God.” (13:3)
* he asks why the Lord allowed him to survive childbirth: “Why did you bring me out from the womb? Would that I had died before any eye had seen me and were as though I had not bee, carried from the womb to the grave.” (10:18);
* he strikes out against his friends and asks that they shut up and leave him alone: “[Y]ou whitewash with lies; worthless physicians are you all. Oh that you would keep silent, and it would be your wisdom!” (13:3-4); and
* he cries out for the good-old days: “Oh, that I were as in the months of old, as in the days when God watched over me, when his lamp shone upon my head, and by his light I walked through darkness, as I was in my prime, when the friendship of God was upon my tent, when the Almighty was yet with me, when my children were all around me . . . .” (29:2-5).

These are profound statements, requests, and inquiries from a man hurting more than most of us can fathom. For those of us who can fathom the scope of Job’s suffering, these words no doubt resound with you on a deeper level than the rest of us can fathom. In the midst of intense pain, the concern for being politically correct or for how one is perceived by others in general fades to the background. Honest, not polished and measured, words are often the most comforting in the midst of such suffering.

Despite the intensity of Job’s anguish and the bitterness of his cries in the midst of his suffering, his faith in the Lord has not been extinguished. In Job 19:25-27, some of the most famous verses in the Old Testament, Job expresses his continued faith in the midst of his sufferings: “For I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another. . . .” Much has been written about these verses and their support for the belief of a bodily resurrection after death in the Old Testament. At a minimum, Schreiner rightly notes: “It seems that Job has come to believe that vindication will come for him after life ends.”[[8]](#footnote-8) From a canonical perspective, for those of us who have placed our faith in the person and work of Jesus Christ, that vindication will come as we are declared righteous because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ and allowed to enjoy the incomprehensible beauty of perfect intimacy with the Lord forever in the new heavens and new earth!

The remnant of Job’s faith in the midst of his intense suffering is also evidenced by Job’s correct understanding of the meaning and necessity of walking in the fear of the Lord: “Behold, the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom, and to turn away from evil is understanding.” (28:28) Schreiner rightly comments on this verses as follows: “What is remarkable here is that the heart of wisdom concurs with what we read in Proverbs (1:7; 9:10) and Ecclesiastes (12:13). Those who are wise are rightly related to the Lord. They stand in awe of him and consequently do his will. According to Job, wisdom does not mean that one has a nicely packaged answer to suffering. (chaps. 26; 38-42). Suffering has an irrational character that evades the intelligence of human beings, but human beings must understand their responsibility as creatures. They are to fear and honor the Lord. They are to submit to his lordship, even if they do not understand why they are suffering.”[[9]](#footnote-9)

* + 1. *Elihu’s Speech (Job 32-37)*

As we enter Chapter 32, we are introduced to a new character - Elihu. We are told that Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar “ceased to answer Job, because he was righteous in his own eyes.” (32:1) Like those who have come before him, Elihu’s speeches are a mixture of truth and error.[[10]](#footnote-10) On the side of truth, Elihu rightly criticizes Job for (1) seeking to justify himself rather than the Lord (Job 32:2), (2) for counting the Lord as his enemy (Job 32:10-11), and (3) failing to adequately take into account the greatness of God and the limitations of man (Job 32:12, 36:26, 37:5).[[11]](#footnote-11) Likewise, Elihu correctly criticized Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar for failing to provide an adequate answer to Job’s cries. (32:3) Elihu also correctly notes that the Lord is the source of all understanding (32:8) and that “he does great things that we cannot comprehend.” (37:5)

However, much of Elihu’s speeches deteriorate to the same simplistic formula for life and suffering proposed by Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar.[[12]](#footnote-12) For example, Elihu states that “For according to the work of a man he will repay him, and according to his ways he will make it befall him.” (34:11) As Schreiner notes: “A more clarifying word is needed, and it is coming.”[[13]](#footnote-13)

* + 1. *Conversation Between Job & The Lord (Job 38-42:6)*

We finally encounter words without error as we read the Lord’s response to Job in Job 38-41. Though Job was correct in asserting that his suffering was not the result of his sin, he erred by thinking that he was able to ascertain the depth of the Lord’s wisdom and sovereign orchestration of all of reality with the limitations of knowledge and understand that come with being a created being.[[14]](#footnote-14)

The Lord points out Job’s limitations through a string of questions that contemporaneously highlight the Lord’s greatness and glory and Job’s weakness and lack of glory. The Lord speaks “out of the whirlwind” and asks:[[15]](#footnote-15)

* Who darkens counsel by words without knowledge? (38:2)
* Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? (38:4)
* Have you commanded the morning since you days began, and caused the dawn to know its place . . . . ? (38:12)
* Have the gates of death been revealed to you, or have you seen the gates of deep darkness? (38:17)
* Have you entered the storehouses of the snow, or have you seen the storehouses of the hail . . . . ? (38:22)
* Do you know the ordinances of the heavens? Can you establish their rule on the earth? (38:33)
* Do you give the horse his might? Do you clothe his neck with a mane? (39:19)
* Is it by your understanding that the hawk soars and spreads his wings toward the south? (39:26)

Schreiner rightly notes: “The sovereign Lord created and runs the world. Job, as a mere creature, scarcely understands the word, nor does he ordain what happens.”[[16]](#footnote-16) Job gets the point and declares in Job 40:4: “Behold, I am of small account; what shall I answer you? I lay my hand on my mouth.”

But, the Lord knows that Job needs further instructions, and so he continues with this questioning. This line of questioning begins with a stinging question: “Will you even put me in the wrong? Will you condemn me that you may be in the right?” (40:8) Schreiner rightly notes in commenting on this verse: “Job is not suffering for his sins, nor is he being disciplines for his sins, but he has gone astray in questioning God’s justice and righteousness.”[[17]](#footnote-17)

The Lord then makes it clear that Job that there are other created beings who would crush him in their relative power and greatness. (40:12-41:10) In so doing, the Lord points to the fact that he is even more glorious as the only uncreated one and the one who created and rules over everything. The Lord drives this point home in Job 41:10-11: “Who then is he who can stand before me? Who has first given to me, that I should repay him? Whatever is under the whole heaven is mine.” The Lord does not owe Job an explanation for anything and even if he decided to give Job an explanation, he would not have the ability to understand it.

Again, Job responds correctly in light of this overwhelming revelation of the greatness and incomparability of the Lord: “I have uttered what I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know . . . I had heard of you by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees you; therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes.” (42:3-6)

Garrett summarizes the essence of the lesson being taught through these chapters as follows: “I am the only one who can manage all the chaotic forces of life and who can bring about the ultimate triumph of righteousness, and I know what I am doing. If this has meant some suffering on your part, you must understand that this does not mean that I am unfair or that you have the right to challenge my justice. I will do what must be done to defeat Leviathan and all the powers of chaos and evil. This may sometimes require suffering on the part of the righteous, but I will bring all things to a just conclusion. Your role is simply to trust in my wisdom and goodness.”[[18]](#footnote-18)

* + 1. *Conclusion (Job 42:7-17)*

The end of the book is a beautiful picture of restoration. For, the Lord restores the lost fortunes of Job and gives him twice as much as he had before and after seeing “his sons, and his sons’ sons, four generations” he died, an old man, and full of days.” (42:10-17) But, we should not think that the Lord’s restoration of Job during his life means that restoration will always be experienced on this side of eternity. For, the cross teaches us that restoration, for most of us, will happen in the new heavens and new earth!

* 1. **The Role of the Book of Job in Old Testament Canon**

The book of Job plays an important role in the Old Testament. To this point of our study, we have seen over and over again that covenant blessings flow from obedience and covenant curses flow from disobedience. If the covenant people walk in grateful obedience to the revealed will of the Lord, things go well for them. If the covenant people walk in disobedience to the revealed will of the Lord, things do not go well for them.

The book of Job paints a more nuanced picture than any simple equation. There were certainly people living lives of grateful obedience during times that the nation as a whole was experiencing the covenant curses. Likewise, there were certainly people living lives of outright rebellion when the nation as a whole was experiencing covenant blessing. The book of Job helps us to properly understand that reality.

But, even deeper than that, the book of Job allows us a glimpse into the heavenly realm and “another level of reality.”[[19]](#footnote-19) There is an entire level of reality that, as humans, operates beyond the realm of our knowledge and understanding. There is mystery and unanswered questions in this life. But, the Lord reigns in every level of reality and we properly understand the suffering that comes in this life in light of:

* the Lord’s complete sovereignty over all things,
* the Lord’s character is being the only wise, true, good, loving, merciful, gracious, patient, peaceful, just, perfect, blessed, beautiful, and glorious one, and
* the fact that the Lord is actively working in the midst of our suffering to bring about the complete restoration that is yet to come according to the Lord’s covenant promises.

The book of Job helps us understand the Lord’s words through the prophet Isaiah, the wisdom in Paul’s declaration in Romans 11:33-36, and the hope Paul sets before us in Romans 8:18:

* *Isaiah 55:8-9* – “For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, declares the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways and my thoughts than your thoughts.”
* *Romans 11:33-36* – “Oh, the depth of the riches and wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are his judgments and how inscrutable his ways! ‘For who has known the mind of the Lord, or who has been his counselor?’ ‘Or who has given a gift to him that he might be repaid?’ For from him and through him and to him are all things. To him be glory forever. Amen.”
* *Romans 8*:*18 –* “For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us.”
  1. **How The Book of Job Points to Jesus Christ**

The ultimate hope for members of the Lord’s covenant people in the midst of our sufferings in this life is that this life is not all that there is. In other words, the Lord will completely fulfill his promise of restoration that we have been tracing throughout the story of the Old Testament. The new heavens and new earth spoken of in Revelation 21-22 will bring about an end to the pain that we encounter in this life. It is here that the Lord will wipe away every tear from our eyes and expel death, mourning, crying, and pain from the realm of human existence.[[20]](#footnote-20)

The battle between the line of restoration and line of rebellion that began in Genesis 3:15 ends with the life, death, resurrection, ascension, and return of the offspring of the woman, Jesus Christ. It is only in the light of the victory of Jesus Christ and the complete restoration that springs forth from that victory that we can properly understand the mysteries and sufferings of this present life. But, we are not given answers to all of our questions. Schreiner’s concluding comments on the book of Job will serve as ours: “The book of Job teaches that God is sovereign and just, but it does not explain why God allows such evil in the world in a way that answers all questions. It leaves us instead with questions with this God confronts Job in chapters 38-41. It leaves us with the truth that God as creator and Lord of the world knows what he is doing. As human beings, we are not given all the answers . . . Instead, we are called upon to trust him and to rest in the truth that he will make all things right in the end. . . . From a canonical perspective, the evil unleashed by Satan and humanity in the world will be conquered by the one who overcomes evil not through warfare but through suffering. He conquers the power and mystery of evil by letting it do its worst to him and then triumphing over it. What sustains through suffering is a relationship with a loving, just, and mysterious God. This God has taken on flesh and evil has done its best to destroy him, but he has conquered demons and death.”[[21]](#footnote-21)

1. **Psalms** (150 chapters – takes about 4 hours to read for the average person)
   1. **Overall Message of the Book of Psalms & Key Texts**

The overall message of the book of Psalms is that, as the Lord’s covenant people, we should engage with, worship, and passionately seek the Lord intimately through *every season of life*. The Lord is the same through our victories, our defeats, our ups, and our downs. The is the Lord who is actively working, no matter our present reality, to progressively fulfill his redemptive promises so that our future reality is sure.

This general message is embodied in the general structure of the book of Psalms. Sailhamer rightly notes that: “The book of Psalms can be read as a single book with each individual psalm intentionally arranged within the book in a meaningful way. Underlying the arrangement of the psalms within the book is the view that they are to be read as pointing to the messianic King.”[[22]](#footnote-22) David Platt additionally notes that: “The Book of Psalms was written by many authors from the early monarchy until after the exile. David wrote a lot of the psalms but he didn’t write the entire book of Psalms. . . . The psalms were written throughout the history of God’s people.”[[23]](#footnote-23)

Putting Sailhamer and Platt together, then, the book of Psalms was compiled in its current form after the exile with the focus of pointing the readers back to the Lord’s promise to David within the context of the Davidic Covenant that one of his sons would be an eternal king who would reign over an eternal kingdom in and through which would be accomplished all of the promised restoration.

The compiler of the book of Psalms set out to achieve this purpose in the way that he arranged the book. The book of Psalms is actually divided into five books:

* Book I contains Psalm 1-41 and generally focuses on David’s life and his experience of the Lord’s deliverance;[[24]](#footnote-24)
* Book II contains of Psalm 42-72 and generally focuses on David’s life and his experience of the Lord’s deliverance,[[25]](#footnote-25)
* Book III contains Psalms 73-89 and generally “relays the discouragement that Israel feels because Davidic kings no longer reign”;[[26]](#footnote-26)
* Book IV contains Psalms 90-106 and generally reminds Israel that the Lord will fulfill his covenant promises by reflecting on his faithfulness to his covenant people in the past (particularly through the lives of Moses and David);[[27]](#footnote-27)
* Book V contains Psalms 107-150 and generally “celebrates with praise the salvation that will come from a new David, with the Psalms of Ascent celebrating the truth that the exile will end and Israel will experience the blessing promised to Abraham.”[[28]](#footnote-28)

Thus, the general flow of the book generally traces the story of the Old Testament from the reign of King David to the anticipated reign of the promised son of David who will be an eternal king over an eternal kingdom in and through which all of the promised restoration will come! This is quite amazing. As we saw in Genesis 3:15, the progressive fulfillment of the Lord’s redemptive promises which ultimately comes about through the Davidic King will come about through an intense and long battle between the line of restoration and line of rebellion. This battle is captured throughout the book of Psalms with the psalmist often calling for the Lord’s judgment upon his enemies. This calls for judgment can be confusing if they are not understood within the cosmic battle going on between the two lines. For, these calls for judgment don’t provide us with a model to call out God’s judgment on *our personal enemies*, but rather a model to pray for the Lord’s victory over *his enemies; namely, those who have aligned themselves with the line of rebellion*.

But, the book of Psalms does not just point us to the promised son of David who will be the eternal king over an eternal kingdom and the battle that will occur until the ultimate fulfillment of the Lord’s promises in and through this eternal kingdom. The book of Psalms shows us how we are to live and intimately connect with the Lord through every season of life in light of the hope that we have in the coming son of David who will be an eternal king over the promised eternal kingdom! The book of Psalms does this by giving us several different types of psalms that give us the words to properly approach the Lord in the midst of every emotion and situation that the realities of life bring our way.

The two most significant types of psalms from the perspective of how the covenant people of the Lord should approach him in every life context are (1) *psalms of praise* and (2) *psalms of lament*. These are not the only types of psalms, but they are the types that we will focus upon in our short examination of this limitless book. The *psalms of praise* provide the words which we individually and corporately as his covenant people can approach the Lord with thanksgiving and praise as we enjoy seasons of blessing. The *psalms of lament* give us the words that we can, individually and corporately as his covenant people, approach the Lord in the midst of our loss and suffering as we go through seasons of hardship.

Our approach for the remainder of our examination of the book of Psalms will be to highlight certain psalms that (1) *carry forward* the framework of the book of Psalms from David’s reign to the future expectation of the promised son of David and (2) *facilitate* our intimate fellowship with the Lord through seasons of blessing and loss as we progress through the overarching storyline of the book of Psalms from the reign of David to the anticipated reign of the son of David who will be an eternal king over the promised eternal kingdom of restoration.

* + 1. *Book I (Psalm 1-41): David’s Life & Deliverance*

The line of restoration and the line of rebellion are set forth in Psalm 1. The line of restoration is represented by those who delight in, and meditate upon, the law of the Lord. The line of rebellion is represented by the wicked who will not be able to stand in the final judgment.

Psalm 2 sets the tension between the two lines pronounced in Genesis 3:15 as a battle the kings of the earth (line of rebellion) against the Davidic King (line of restoration). The victory pronounced for the line of restoration in Genesis 3:15 is seen in Psalm 2:4-6: “He who sits in the heavens laughs; the Lord holds them in derision. Then he will speak to them in his wrath, and terrify them in his fury, saying, ‘As for me, I have set my King on Zion, my holy hill.’”

Psalm 2:7 makes it clear that the victory of the line of restoration will come through the promised son of David who will be an eternal king over an eternal kingdom. Psalm 2:7 quotes a key verse from 2 Samuel 7 where the Davidic Covenant is recorded: “I will tell of the decree: The Lord said to me, ‘You are my Son; today I have begotten you. As of me, and I will make the nations your heritage, and the ends of the earth your possession.’”[[29]](#footnote-29) Schreiner rightly notes: “The promise to Abraham that all nations will be blessed through him will become a reality through the Davidic king, for the ‘ends of the earth’ will be his ‘possession.’”[[30]](#footnote-30)

The end of both lines is made clear at the end of Psalm 2. The line of rebellion will perish in judgment and the line of restoration will be blessed as they take “refuge in him.” (Psalm 2:12)

Psalm 3 is set within the context of David’s flight from his rebellious son Absalom. In this difficult time in David’s life he cries out to the Lord in faith: “But you, O Lord, are a shield about me, my glory and the lifter of my head. I cried aloud to the Lord, and he answered me from his holy hill. I lay down and slept; I woke again, for the Lord sustained me.” (Psalm 3:3-5) Having that difficult time in David’s life fresh in our mind and the faith that he demonstrated in his response to the ark being sent back to Jerusalem and the slander of a relative of Saul who cursed him gives deep meaning to these verses!

Psalm 6 shows David crying out in anguish to the Lord and serves as a model for us when the pain of life threatens to immobilize us. David here is seen being weary with moaning and flooding his bed with tears. In this deep anguish, he cries out: “O Lord, rebuke me not in your anger, nor discipline me in your wrath. Be gracious to me, O Lord, for I am languishing; heal me, O Lord, for my bones are troubled. My soul also is greatly troubled. . . .” (Psalm 6:1-3)

Psalm 8 gives us a picture of the Lord’s glory evidenced by creation: “O Lord, our Lord, how majestic is your name in all the earth! You have set your glory above the heavens. . . . When I look at your heavens, the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him?” (Psalm 8:1, 3-4) Psalm 8:3-4, just quoted, and the following verses (Psalm 8:5-6) are picked up by the author of Hebrews and applied to Jesus. We will look at this below as we look at how the book of Psalms points to the person and work of Jesus Christ.

Psalm 9 celebrates the eternal reign of the Lord: “[T]he Lord sits enthroned forever; he has established his throne for justice, and he judges the world with righteousness; he judges the peoples with uprightness. The Lord is a stronghold for the oppressed, a stronghold in times of trouble. And those who know your name put their trust in you, for you, O Lord, have not forsaken those who seek you. Sing praises to the Lord, who sits enthroned in Zion! Tell among the peoples his deeds!” (Psalm 9:7-11) The Lord’s perfect character and acts throughout history provide the proper basis for praise. As we have seen, worship is simply praising the Lord for who he is and what he has done!

Psalm 13 once again shows David feeling the devastating absence of the Lord’s presence and yet trusting and praising the Lord in the midst of it: “How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? . . . . But I have trusted in your steadfast love; my heart shall rejoice in your salvation. I will sing to the Lord, because he has dealt bountifully with me.” (Psalm 13:1, 5-6) Here we see a glimpse in the depth of true worship. It is worship based not on circumstances but, rather, on trust in the Lord’s fulfillment of his redemptive promises! This is a cause of praise that never fluctuates and always grounds the heart of the redeemed in faith and worship.

Psalm 16 beautifully portrays the blessing of intimacy with the Lord: “The Lord is my chosen portion and my cup; you hold my lot. The lines have fallen for me in pleasant places; indeed, I have a beautiful inheritance. . . . . I have set the Lord always before me . . . . Therefore my heart is glad, and my whole being rejoices; my flesh also dwells secure . . . . You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forever more.”

Psalm 19:1-4 again shows the cosmic scope of the Lord’s glory: “The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork. Day to day pours out speech, and night to night reveals knowledge. There is no speech, nor are there words, whose voice is not heard. Their voice goes out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the world.” Psalm 19:7-11 recounts the perfection of the Lord’s words and ways as a basis for praise: “The law of the Lord is perfect, reviving the soul; the testimony of the Lord is sure, making wise the simple; the precepts of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart; the commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes; the fear of the Lord is clean, enduring forever; the rules of the Lord are true, and righteous altogether. More to be desired are they than gold, even much fine gold; sweeter also than honey and drippings of the honeycomb. Moreover, by them is your servant warned; in keeping them there is great reward.”

Psalm 23 famously describes the Lord as a shepherd who provides for his people and gives them rest, leading, and restoration through the midst of trouble and ultimate victory in his presence: “Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff, they comfort me.” (Psalm 23:4) In the darkest of times, even when it feels as though the Lord has left us in our suffering, the truth is that he is with us and we have every reason to trust and rest in his provision and deliverance.

Psalm 24:1-2 recounts the reality that all of the world falls under the Lord’s sovereignty: “The earth is the Lord’s and the fullness thereof, the world and those who dwell therein, for he has founded it upon the seas and established it upon the rivers.” In light of such a huge view of the Lord and his control over all things, it is only natural to join with David’s:

* *request for wisdom* recorded in Psalm 25:4-5: “Make me to know your ways, O Lord; teach me your paths. Lead me in your truth and teach me, for you are the God of my salvation; for you I wait all the day long.” and Psalm 39:4-5: “O Lord, make me know my end and what is the measure of my days; let me know how fleeting I am! Behold, you have made my days a few handbreadths, and my lifetime is as nothing before you. Surely all mankind stands as a mere breath!”
* *declaration of trust* in Psalm 27:1: “The Lord is my light and my salvation; who shall I fear? The Lord is the stronghold of my life; of whom shall I be afraid?” and Psalm 34:22: “The Lord redeems the life of his servants; none of those who take refuge in him will be condemned.”
* *declaration of singular devotion and desire* in Psalm 27:4: “One thing have I asked of the Lord, that will I seek after: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze upon the beauty of the Lord and to inquire in his temple.”
* *call to wait on the Lord’s deliverance* in Psalm 27:14: “Wait for the Lord; be strong, and let your heart take courage; wait for the Lord!” and Psalm 33:20-22: “Our soul waits for the Lord; he is our help and our shield. For our heart is glad in him, because we trust in his holy name. Let your steadfast love, O Lord, be upon us, even as we hope in you.”
* *declaration of deliverance* in Psalm 28:6-8: “Blessed be the Lord! For he has heard the voice of my please for mercy. The Lord is my strength and my shield; in him my heart trusts, and I am helped; my heart exults, and with my song I give thanks to him. The Lord is the strength of his people; he is the saving refuge of his anointed.”
* *call to worship* in Psalm 29:1-2 “Ascribe to the Lord, O heavenly beings, ascribe to the Lord glory and strength. Ascribe to the Lord the glory due his name; worship the Lord in the splendor of his holiness” and in Psalm 33:8-9: “Let all the earth fear the Lord; let all the inhabitants of the world stand in awe of him! For he spoke, and it came to be; he commanded, and it stood firm.” and in Psalm 34:8: “Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!” and Psalm 37:4: “Delight yourself in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart.”
* *declaration of the greatness of his ways* in Psalm 36:5-6: “Your steadfast love, O Lord, extends to the heavens, your faithfulness to the clouds. Your righteousness like the mountains of God; your judgments are like the great deep; man and beast you save, O Lord.”

In Psalm 32, David also encourages the covenant people of the Lord to confess their sins to him so that they may the experience healing and restoration that comes with the Lord’s blessing and forgiveness. The sad state of those who fail to confess their sins before the Lord is described in Psalm 32:3-4: “For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer.” In contrast, the glorious state of those who confess their sins before the Lord is described in Psalm 32:1-2: “Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.” The Lord knows us fully – all of us – all of our past, present, and future sin. We are to come before him humbly, acknowledging our sin and weakness and enjoying his forgiveness and blessing!

Book I ends, as do all the books, with praise: “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! Amen and Amen.” (Psalm 41:13) In Book I we have seen David seeking and encountering the Lord in every season of life. He sought in in his distress. He sought him in his victory. He sought him in his guilt and shame. He encountered his glory as he pondered creation. He was brought to a place of worship as he reflected on his faithfulness. And on and on. The encouragement from these chapters is to, like David, lean into the Lord regardless of your current situation.

* + 1. *Book II (Psalm 42-72): David’s Life & Deliverance*

Book II continues the general focus on David’s life, reign, and experience of the Lord’s deliverance. Through this book, we see:

* A *deep* *desire* for the Lord: “As a deer pants for flowing streams, so pants my soul for you, O God. My soul thirsts for God, for the living God. . . .” (Psalm 42:1-2) and “O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water. So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory. Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you. So I will bless you as long as I live; in your name I will lift up my hands.” (Psalm 63:1-4)
* A *deep trust* in the Lord despite bad circumstances: “Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God.” (Psalm 42:5) and “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth gives way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.” (Psalm 46:1-3) and “In God, whose word I praise, in the Lord, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can man do to me?” (Psalm 56:10-11) and Psalm 62:1-2, 8: “For God alone my soul waits in silence; from him comes my salvation. He alone is my rock and my salvation, my fortress; I shall not be greatly shaken. . . .Trust in him at all times, O people; pour out your heart before him; God is a refuge for us.”
* A *cry for the Lord to act* on behalf of his people: “Awake! Why are you sleeping, O Lord? Rouse yourself! Do not reject us forever! Why do you hide your face? Why do you forget our affliction and oppression? For our soul is bowed down to the dust; our belly clings to the ground. Rise up; come to our help! Redeem us for the sake of your steadfast love!” (Psalm 44:23-26)
* David’s powerful prayer of *confession and repentance* in Psalm 51: “Have mercy on me O God, according to your steadfast love; according to your abundant mercy blot our my transgressions. Wash me thoroughly from my iniquity, and cleanse me from my sin! . . . . Purge me with hyssop, and I shall be clean; wash me, and I shall be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones that you have broken rejoice. Hide your face from my sins, and blot out all my iniquities. Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me. Cast me not away from your presence, and take not your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation, and uphold me with a willing spirit.” (Psalm 51:1-2, 7-12)
* David’s *proclamation of the Lord’s salvation* in the midst of battle: “But I call to God, and the Lord will save me. Evening and morning and at noon I utter my complaint and moan, and he hears my voice. He redeems my soul in safety form the battle that I wage, for many are arrayed against me. God will give ear and humble them, he who is enthroned from of old, because they do not change and do not fear God.” (Psalm 55:16-19)
* David’s *worship* in the midst of distress: “But I will sing of your strength; I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning. For you have been to me a fortress and a refuge in the day of my distress. O my Strength, I will sing praises to you, for you, O God, are my fortress, the God who shows me steadfast love.” (Psalm 59:16-17)
* A *call to worship the Lord* for his great deeds: “Shout for joy to God, all the earth; sing the glory of his name; give to him glorious praise! Say to God, ‘How awesome are your deeds! So great is your power that your enemies come cringing to you. All the earth worships you and sings praises to you; they sing praises to your name.’” (Psalm 66:1-4)
* All call for the *nations to be glad* in the Lord: “May God be gracious to us and bless us and make his face shine upon us, that your way may be known on earth, your saving power among all nations. Let the peoples praise you, O God; let all the peoples praise you! Let the nations be glad and sing for you . . . .” (Psalm 67:1-4)

The last Psalm in Book II, Psalm 72, is a messianic psalm, forecasting the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham through a Davidic king.”[[31]](#footnote-31) We learn that the reign of the promised son of David who will be an eternal king over an eternal kingdom will be:

* characterized by justice, prosperity, righteousness, peace, abundance
* a place where the poor and needy experience deliverance and the oppressor is crushed,
* like “rain that falls on the mown grass” and showers that water the earth,”
* extended from “sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth!”
* sovereign all other lesser kingdoms
* known by the fame of its king that will “continue as long as the sun!” and
* where people will be blessed by being in the eternal and famous king.

Book II ends like the others, with a word of praise: “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, who alone does wondrous things. Blessed be his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory! Amen and Amen!” (Psalm 72:18-19)

In Book II, wee have seen the psalmist’s deep desire for the Lord, deep trust in the Lord despite bad circumstances, a cry for the Lord to act on behalf of his people, a powerful prayer of confession and repentance, a proclamation of the Lord’s salvation in the midst of battle, worship in the midst of distress, a call to worship the Lord because of his great deeds, a call for the nations to be glad in the Lord, and a reminder that the Lord’s redemptive promises will ultimately be fulfilled through the promised son of David who will be an eternal king over an eternal kingdom, and, lastly, a glimpse of what this eternal kingdom of restoration will look like when it comes.

As we leave Book I and II, we leave the first major portion of the structure of the book of Psalms as a whole – David’s life, reign, and experience of the Lord’s deliverance. As we move into Book III, we step into a darker portion of Israel’s history, the exile, and repeatedly feel the disappointment and discouragement that characterized the people of Israel in the absence of a Davidic king.

* + 1. *Book III (Psalm 73-89): Discouragement in the Absence of a Davidic King*

Book III generally focuses on the period of the exile and captures the disappointment felt by the people of Israel in the absence of a reigning Davidic king.[[32]](#footnote-32) The first psalm in the book, Psalm 73, fits the general focus well as “Asaph envies the prosperity of the wicked upon seeing their health, happiness, and prosperity. Surely Asaph’s experience matched Israel’s experience in exile, where seeing Babylon’s glory must have been quite dispiriting.”[[33]](#footnote-33) But, the Lord graciously reveals to Asaph that the end of the wicked will not match their present experience – for, their end will be judgment. (Psalm 73:18-20) With a restored and true view of reality, Asaph beautifully proclaims: “Whom have I in heaven but you? And there is nothing on earth that I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever.” (Psalm 73:25-26)

The Lord is the eternal portion of his covenant people regardless of their present and temporary circumstances. This is a crucial truth for the Lord’s covenant people to cling to in difficult circumstances. We are reminded again and again in Book III of Israel’s present difficulties and hear the people of the Lord cry out for his deliverance from them:

* “O God, why do you cast us off forever? Why does your anger smoke against the sheep of your pasture? Remember your congregation, which you have purchased of old, which you have redeemed to be the tribe of your heritage!” (Psalm 74:1-2)
* “We do not see our signs; there is no longer any prophet, and there is none among us who knows how long. How long, O God, is the foe to scoff? Is the enemy to revile your name forever?” (Psalm 74:9-10)
* “O God, the nations have come into your inheritance; they have defiled your holy temple; they have laid Jerusalem in ruins. They have given the bodies of your servants to the birds of the heavens for food, and the flesh of your faithful to the beasts of the earth. They have poured out their blood like water all around Jerusalem, and there was no one to bury them. We have became a taunt to our neighbors, mocked and derided by those around us.” (Psalm 79:1-4)
* “Restore us, O God; let your face shine, that we may be saved!” (Psalm 80:3)

Yet, despite the difficult circumstances of the people of the Lord which characterize Book III, the sound of intimate praise and deep trust is still heard throughout:

* “We give thanks to you, O God; we give thanks, for your name is near. We recount your wondrous deeds.” (Psalm 75:1)
* “I will remember the deeds of the Lord; yes, I will remember your wonders of old. I will ponder all your work, and meditate on your mighty deeds. Your way, O God, is holy. What god is great like our God?” (Psalm 77:11-13)
* “But we you people, the sheep of your pasture, will give thanks to you forever; from generation to generation we will recount your praise.” (Psalm 79:13)
* “Sing aloud to God our strength; should for joy to the God of Jacob! Raise a song; sound the tambourine, the sweet lyre with the harp.” (Psalm 81:1-12)
* “How lovely is your dwelling place, O Lord of hosts! My soul longs, yes, faints for the courts of the Lord; my heart and flesh sing for joy to the living God.” (Psalm 84:1-2)
* “Restore us again, O God of our salvation, and put away your indignation toward us! Will you be angry with us forever? Will you prolong your anger to all generations? Will you not revive us again, that your people may rejoice in you? Show us your steadfast love, O Lord, and grant us your salvation.” (Psalm 85:4-7)
* “But you, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness. Turn to me and be gracious to me; give your strength to your servant. . . .” (Psalm 86:15-16)

Psalm 78, as Schreiner rightly notes: “reviews Israel’s history from the exodus to the time of David. The theme is God’s faithfulness and Israel’s unfaithfulness. Despite the Lord’s stunning power in liberating them from Egypt and his faithfulness in satisfying their needs in the wilderness, Israel rebelled against him continually. But the final word of the psalm is God’s faithfulness.”[[34]](#footnote-34) The Lord’s faithfulness is his selection of the tribe of Judah, the selection of David, and ultimately the fulfillment of “his promise to shepherd and reign over his people with a new David.”[[35]](#footnote-35)

Like the last psalm of Book II, the last psalm of Book III, points to the fulfillment of the Lord’s redemptive promises through his promises to David of a son who will be an eternal king over an eternal kingdom: “I have made a covenant with my chosen one; I have sworn to David my servant: ‘I will establish your offspring forever, and build your throne for all generations.” (Psalm 89:3-4) The Lord says in Psalm 89:23 that he “will crush his foes before him and strike down those who hate him.” This, no doubt, points back to Genesis 3:15 and the promise that the offspring of the woman would crush the head of the serpent. The promised son of David is the promised offspring of the woman that will crush the head of the serpent and restore all that was lost in the fall.

Like Book I and II, Book III ends with a word of praise: “Blessed by the Lord forever! Amen and Amen.” (Psalm 89:52) As we leave Book III and enter Book IV, we transition from a season of discouragement in the exile and the absence of a Davidic king to a stirring of a present hope in the covenant people of the Lord based upon his past faithfulness – particularly in the lives of Moses and David.

* + 1. *Book IV (Psalm 90-106): Present Hope Based Upon Past Faithfulness*

As noted above, Book IV focuses on developing a present hope within the covenant people of the Lord based upon the Lord’s past faithfulness – particularly in the life of Moses and David. It is fitting then, that the only psalm of Moses, Psalm 90, begins Book IV. Moses begins the shift in tone by noting the eternal breadth of the Lord’s reign over all things: “Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. Before the mountains were brought forth, or ever you had formed the earth and the world, from everlasting to everlasting you are God. . . . For a thousand years in your sight are but as yesterday when it is past, or as a watch in the night.” (Psalm 90:1-2, 4)

The call for a present hope in the Lord is based specifically on the following past acts of the Lord on behalf of his covenant people:

* “Of old you laid the foundation of the earth, and the heavens are the work of your hands.” (Psalm 102:25)
* “Moses and Aaron were among his priests, Samuel also was among those who called upon his name. They called to the Lord, and he answered them. In the pillar of the cloud he spoke to them; they kept is testimonies and the statute that he gave them.” (Psalm 99:6-7)
* “The Lord works righteousness and justice for all who are oppressed. He made known his ways to Moses, his acts to the people of Israel. The Lord is merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. He will not always childe, nor will he keep his anger forever. He does not deal with us according to our sins, nor repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his steadfast love toward those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far does he remove our transgressions from us.” (Psalm 103:6-8)
* “He remembers his covenant forever, the word that he commanded, for a thousand generations, the covenant that he made with Abraham, his sworn promise to Isaac, which he confirmed to Jacob as a statute, to Israel as an everlasting covenant. . . .” (Psalm 105:8-10)
* The entire history of Israel is recounted in Psalm 105 from the promise to Abraham, the sojourning of the patriarchs, the preservation of the patriarchs through Joseph in Egypt, the slavery of the people of Israel in Egypt, the deliverance of Israel through the ministry of Moses, and Israel’s taking of the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. (Psalm 105:8-46)

The hope that is triggered by the Lord’s past faithfulness repeatedly leads the Lord’s covenant people to praise:

* “Oh come, let us worship and bow down; let us kneel before the Lord, our Maker! For he is our God, and we are the people of his pasture, and the sheep of his hand.” (Psalm 95:6-7)
* “Oh sing to the Lord a new song; sing to the Lord, all the earth! Sing to the Lord, bless his name; tell of his salvation from day to day. Declare his glory among the nations, his marvelous works among all the peoples! For great is the Lord, and greatly to be praised; he is to be feared above all gods.” (Psalm 96:1-4)
* “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit, who crowns you with steadfast love and mercy, who satisfies you with good so that your youth is renewed like the eagle’s.” (Psalm 103:2-5)

The last psalm of Book IV, Psalm 106, highlights the repeated failures of the people of Israel for the purpose of emphasizing “the mercy of God, how he delivered his people again and again.”[[36]](#footnote-36) As the Lord has dealt mercifully with his covenant people in the past despite their rebellion, so the psalmist believes the Lord will deal with his covenant people at present: “Save us, O Lord our God, and gather us from among the nations, that we may give thanks to your holy name and glory in your praise.” (Psalm 106:47)

Like Book I, II, and III, Book IV ends with a word of praise: “Blessed be the Lord, the God of Israel, from everlasting to everlasting! And let all the people say, ‘Amen!’ Praise the Lord!” (Psalm 106:48) As we noted, Book IV focused upon developing present hope upon the Lord’s past faithfulness. The psalmist pointed back to the Lord’s faithfulness through the act of creation, the ministries of Moses and Aaron, the giving of the Abrahamic covenant, the exodus from Egypt, and the taking of the Promised Land under the ministry and leadership of Joshua.

The covenant people’s hope based upon the Lord’s past faithfulness, again and again, led the Lord’s covenant people to profound expressions of faith and worship. The theme of worship is continued in the final book, Book V, as the focus is centered upon the praise of the Lord’s covenant people centered upon the Lord’s future and complete fulfillment of all of his redemptive promises.[[37]](#footnote-37)

* + 1. *Book V (Psalm 107-150): Praise Based Upon Future Fulfillment*

Book V serves as a fitting end to the book of Psalms as a whole with the focus being the praise of the Lord’s covenant people centered upon the Lord’s future and complete fulfillment of all of his redemptive promises. As the Lord’s covenant people wait upon the ultimate fulfillment of his covenant promises, they are to be a worshiping people!

The first psalm in Book V, Psalm 107, issues a call to praise the Lord based upon his deliverance of his people: “Oh give thanks to the Lord, for he is good, for his steadfast love endures forever! Let the redeemed of the Lord say so, whom he has redeemed from trouble and gathered in from the lands, form the east and from the west, from the north and from the south.” (Psalm 107:1-3) The psalmist is “emphasizing the return from exile, God’s people being fathered from every nation.”[[38]](#footnote-38) The psalmist recounts the Lord’s deliverance of his people from:

* desert places where they experienced hunger and thirst;
* darkness and bondage because of their rebellion against the Lord;
* affliction, trouble, and distress because of their foolish ways; and
* peril at sea.

As Schreiner rightly notes: “The variety of examples instructs Israel that when they cry to Yahweh, he will recue them.”[[39]](#footnote-39) The psalmists concludes the psalm with an encouragement to receive such instruction: “Whoever is wise, let him attend to these things; let them consider the steadfast love of the Lord.” (Psalm 107:43)

Throughout the rest of Book V, we see the repeated consideration of the steadfast love of the Lord and celebration of a future deliverance and fulfillment of the Lord’s redemptive promises:

* “Be exalted, of God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth! That your beloved ones may be delivered, give salvation by your right hand and answer me!” (Psalm 108:5-6)
* “With my mouth I will give great thanks to the Lord; I will praise him in the midst of the throng. For he stands at the right hand of the needy one, to save him from those who condemn his soul to death.” (Psalm 109:30-31)
* “He sent redemption to his people; he has commanded his covenant forever. Holy and awesome is his name!” (Psalm 111:9)
* “The Lord has remembered us; he will bless us; he will bless the house of Israel; he will bless the house of Aaron; he will bless those who fear the Lord, both the small and the great.” (Psalm 115:12-13)
* “I lift up my eyes to the hills. From where does my help come? My help comes from the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” (Psalm 121:1-2)
* “To you I lift up my eyes, O you who are enthroned in the heavens! Behold, as the eyes of servants look to the hand of their master, as the eyes of a maidservant to the hand of her mistress, so our eyes look the Lord our God till he has mercy upon us.” (Psalm 123:1-2)
* “Our help is in the name of the Lord, who made heaven and earth.” (Psalm 124:8)
* “Restore our fortunes, O Lord, like streams in the Negeb! Those who sow in tears shall reap with shouts of joy! He who goes out weeping, bearing the seed for sowing, shall come home with shouts of joy, brining his sheaves with him.” (Psalm 126:4-6)
* “O Israel, hope in the Lord! For with the Lord there is steadfast love, and with him is plentiful redemption. And he will redeem Israel from all his iniquities.” (Psalm 130:7-8)
* “Your name, O Lord, endures forever, your renown, O Lord, throughout all ages. For the Lord will vindicate his people and have compassion on his servants.” (Psalm 135:13-14)
* “Though I walk in the midst of trouble, you preserve my life; you stretch out your hand against the wrath of my enemies, and your right hand delivers me. The Lord will fulfill his purpose for me; your steadfast love, O Lord, endures forever. Do not forsake the work of your hands.” (Psalm 138:7-8)
* “Your kingdom is an everlasting kingdom, and your dominion endures throughout all generations.” (Psalm 145:13)
* “The Lord will reign forever, your God, O Zion, to all generations. Praise the Lord!” (Psalm 146:10)

In Psalm 132:13-18, we are reminded that the future and complete fulfillment of all the Lord’s redemptive promises will come about through the Lord’s covenant with David. For, the Lord “will make a horn to sprout for David; I have prepared a lamp for my anointed.” (Psalm 132:17) Schreiner rightly notes: “Israel’s hope for forgiveness of sins and future restoration comes from the covenant made with David, where the Lord promised him an eternal dynasty . . . Ultimately, Jesus is the ‘horn’ that will ‘sprout for David’ . . . so that the promises made to David become a reality through him. The praise that marks Book 5 is due to the promise that Yahweh will fulfill his covenant with David for the sake of the whole world.”[[40]](#footnote-40)

Psalm 119 is the longest chapter in the Bible and “is a sustained meditation upon the joy of keeping God’s law and a prayer that the psalmist will be empowered to do so.”[[41]](#footnote-41) We have seen that the Lord’s people are to be a worshiping people as they wait upon the future and complete fulfillment of all of his redemptive promises. Here we see that they are also to be an obedient people. As they live lives of grateful obedience in the expectation of future fulfillment, the Lord’s covenant people will:

* experience the blessing and delight of his presence;
* keep their way pure;
* be granted understanding and strength;
* experience the Lord’s leading;
* experience the Lord’s steadfast love and salvation;
* find comfort;
* know the Lord as their portion;
* protection from their enemies;
* become wise;
* experience the nearness of the Lord; and
* know the hope of the Lord’s salvation.

Book V concludes the book of Psalms as a whole with a string of praise. The last three psalms, Psalm 148, 149, and 150 repeatedly call the Lord’s covenant people to praise him, with the conclusion of the book calling everything that has breath to praise the Lord: “Let everything that has breath praise the Lord! Praise the Lord!” (Psalm 150:6)

* 1. **Role of the Book of Psalms in Old Testament Canon**

The Old Testament from Genesis to Esther tells the story of the nation of Israel as a whole, while the book of Psalms focuses in on the “individuals and the highs and lows of individual experience.”[[42]](#footnote-42) The book of Psalms has been described as the hymnal of the nation of Israel. In the narrative books of the Old Testament we see the story of the nation of Israel. In the book of Psalms we hear their praise and lament as they lean into the Lord through every season of life and in every stage of their history.

The book of Psalms also recounts Israel’s history and the Lord’s faithfulness throughout their entire history – despite their unfaithfulness as his covenant people. The focus of Israel’s history begins with David’s reign and points forward, once again, to the future son of David who will serve as the eternal king over the eternal kingdom in and through which all of the promised restoration will come. So, the book of Psalms restates the promises of the Davidic Covenant and reminds the Lord’s covenant people that his promises remain for them and will be fulfilled as they continue to seek and pursue him in the midst of their present reality – whatever that may be.

* 1. **How Book of Psalms Points to Jesus Christ**

As we noted above, the general flow of the book of Psalms is a poetic retelling the story of the Old Testament from the reign of King David to the anticipated reign of the promised son of David who will be an eternal king over an eternal kingdom in and through which all of the promised restoration will come. As we have noted at several points to this point of our examination of the Old Testament, the first verse of the New Testament, Matthew 1:1, makes it clear that Jesus Christ is the promised son of David who will be the eternal king over an eternal kingdom: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David, the son of Abraham.” The New Testament, in great detail, illustrates how Jesus is the promised son of David, what it means to live in the eternal kingdom in the period between Jesus’ resurrection which inaugurated the eternal kingdom of restoration and his return which will consummate the eternal kingdom of restoration, and then gives us a glimpse in the book of Revelation what the consummated kingdom of restoration will look like.[[43]](#footnote-43)

The remainder of this section will highlight several (though not all!) psalms that particularly point to Jesus as the promised son of David which are quoted in the New Testament:[[44]](#footnote-44)

* *Christ’s Sonship*

Psalm 2:7 speaks of Jesus when it says: “You are my Son; today I have begotten you.” The Father speaks these words over Jesus when he is baptized by John the Baptist Matthew 3:17: “This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased” and these words are once again spoken of Jesus as the author of Hebrews compares him to the Angels: “For to which of the angels did God ever say, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you’? (Hebrews 1:5)

* *Christ’s Obedience*

The author of Hebrews quoted Psalm 40:6-8 to speak of Christ’s perfect obedience and his once-for-all sacrifice for the atonement of sin in Hebrews 10:5-7: “Sacrifices and offerings you have not desired, but a body have you prepared for me; in burnt offerings and sin offerings you have taken no pleasure. Then I said, ‘Behold, I have come to do you will, O God, as it is written of me in the scroll of the book.’”

* *Christ’s Betrayal*

Psalm 41:9 spoke of Judas’ betrayal of Jesus “Even my close friend in whom I trusted, who ate my bread, has lifted his heel against me” which is painfully recorded in Luke 22:47-48: “While he was still speaking, there came a crowd, and the man called Judas, one of the twelve, was leading them. He drew near to Jesus to kiss him, but Jesus said to him, ‘Judas, would you betray the Son of Man with a kiss?’”

* *Christ’s Sufferings*

Psalm 69:4 spoke of Jesus and is cited in John 15:25: “But the word that is written in their Law must be fulfilled: ‘They hated me without a cause.’” Psalm 69:9 likewise spoke of Jesus’ sufferings and is quoted in Romans 15:3: “For Christ did not please himself, but as it is written, ‘The reproaches of those who reproached you fell on me.’”

* *Christ’s Death*

Jesus quotes Psalm 22:1 from the cross in the height of his agony: “My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?” (Matthew 27:46) But, of course, the Father did not ultimately reject Jesus upon that brutal Roman cross. For, the resurrection proved the Father’s love and acceptance of the Son!

* *Christ’s Resurrection*

Psalm 2:7 and 16:10 speak of Christ’s resurrection from the dead and are quoted in Acts 13:30-35: “But God raised him from the dead . . . . And we bring you the good news that what God promised to the fathers, this he has fulfilled to us their children by raising Jesus, and also it is written in the second Psalm, ‘You are my Son, today I have begotten you.’ And as for the fact that he raised him from the dead, no more to return to corruption, he has spoken in this way, ‘I will give you the holy and sure blessings of David.’ Therefore he says also in another psalm, ‘You will not let your Holy One see corruption.’”

* *Christ’s Ascension*

Paul, in Ephesians 4:8-10, quotes Psalm 68:18 to speak of Christ’s ascension: “Therefore it says, ‘When he ascended on high he led a host of captives, and he gave gifts to men.’ (In saying, ‘He ascended,’ what does it mean but that he had also descended into the lower regions, the earth? He who descended is the one who also ascended far above all the heavens, that he might fill all things.)

* *Christ’s Exaltation*

The author of Hebrews, in Hebrews 2:6-9, quotes Psalm 8:5-6 to speak of Christ’s exaltation: “It has been testified somewhere, ‘What is man, that you are mindful of him or the son of man, that you care for him? You made him for a little while lower than the angels; you have crowned him with glory and honor, putting everything in subjection under his feet.’ Now in putting everything in subjection to him, he left nothing outside his control. At present, we do not yet see everything in subjection to him. But we see him who for a little while was made lower than the angels, namely Jesus, crowned with glory and honor because of the suffering of death, so that by the grace of God he might taste death for everyone.”

* *Christ’s Deity*

The author of Hebrews, in Hebrews 1:8-9, quoted Psalm 45:6-7 to speak of Christ’s deity: “But of the Son he says, ‘Your throne, O God, is forever and ever, the scepter of uprightness is the scepter of your kingdom. You have loved righteousness and hated wickedness; therefore God, your God, has anointed you with the oil of gladness beyond your companions.’”

* *Christ’s Lordship*

Luke, in Acts 2:32-36 quotes Psalm 110:1 to speak of Christ’s lordship: “This Jesus God raised up, and of that we all are witnesses. Being therefore exalted at the right hand of God, and having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured out this that you yourselves are seeing and hearing. For David did not ascend into the heavens, but he himself says, ‘The Lord said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’ Let all the house of Israel therefore know for certain that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified.’”

* *Christ’s Supremacy*

Jesus, in Matthew 21:42, quoted Psalm 118:22-23, to speak of his supremacy: “Jesus said to them, ‘Have you never read in the Scriptures: ‘The stone that the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; this was the Lord’s doing, and it is marvelous in our eyes’?

These passages set forth above represent only a small sampling of the utilization of the Psalms in the New Testament to speak of Jesus Christ. But, even in this small sampling, we have seen the Psalms speak directly to Christ’s sonship, obedience, betrayal, sufferings, death, resurrection, ascension, exaltation, deity, lordship, and supremacy! This reality reminds us once again of Jesus’ words to his disciples in Luke 24:44-45: “Then he said to them, ‘These are my words that I spoke to you while I was still with you, that everything written about me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled.’ Then he opened their minds to understand the Scriptures.” If we read the Psalms without seeing how they point to the person and work of Jesus Christ, we have tragically missed the point.

1. **Proverbs** (31 chapters – takes about 1 ½ hours to read for the average person)
   1. **Overall Message of the Book of Proverbs & Key Texts**

The overall message of the book of Proverbs is that, as the Lord’s covenant people, we should walk in the fear of the Lord; that is to say that we should walk in wisdom. We should acknowledge the Lord’s sovereignty, holiness, and goodness in every aspect of our lives. We have seen this through the Law that the Lord gave his covenant people, but we see this once again, and perhaps in a more exhaustive way, in the book of Proverbs.

The book of Proverbs can be discussed within the context of a three-fold structure: (1) The Path of Wisdom and Folly Set Forth And Contrasted (1-9), (2) The Path of Wisdom Applied to the Various Contexts of Life (10-31:9), and (3) The Path of Wisdom Illustrated Through a Virtuous Woman (31:10-31). This structure will guide our examination of the book.

* + 1. *The Path of Wisdom and Folly Set Forth and Contrasted (Proverbs 1-9)*

The purpose of the book of Proverbs is set forth in Proverbs 1:2-6. The book has been written so that the covenant people of the Lord can:

know wisdom and instruction,

understand words of insight,

receive instruction in wise dealing, righteousness, justice, and equity, and

be prudent rather than simple.

Proverbs 1:7 makes it clear that the purpose of the book can only be achieved in the people who fear the Lord: “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge . . . .” What is the fear of the Lord? Schreiner helpfully provides the following definition: “The fear of the Lord means that he is supreme in one’s life, that all of life is ordered by one’s relationship with him.”[[45]](#footnote-45) Clary similarly defines the fear of the Lord: “To fear the Lord is to see the Lord for who he is and everything is in the light of that reality.”[[46]](#footnote-46) It should also be noted that “[t]he word ‘beginning’ here does not bear the idea of a starting point that is left behind. Instead, the fear of the Lord is the origin and fountainhead for all wisdom, and one who pursues wisdom never leaves such fear behind.”[[47]](#footnote-47)

Proverbs 1-9 clearly set forth the two alternative paths before each member of the Lord’s covenant people: the path of wisdom and the path of folly. The path of wisdom is the path traveled by the line of restoration. The path of folly is the path traveled by the line of rebellion. The ultimate destination of these alternative paths is also clearly set forth. The path of wisdom leads to *life*. (Proverbs 1:8-9; 1:33; 2:1-22; 3:1-35; 4:1-27; 5:1-19; 6:20-24; 8:1-36). The path of folly leads to *death and destruction* (Proverbs 1:18-19; 1:29-32; 5:20-23; 6:25-35; 7:24-27).

We also learn in these chapters that both paths actively call out and seek more travelers. We hear the cry of wisdom in 1:20-23: “Wisdom cries aloud in the street, in the markets she raises her voice; at the head of the noisy streets she cries out; and the entrance of the city gates she speaks: ‘How long, O simple ones, will you love being simple? How long will scoffers delight in their scoffing and fools hate knowledge? If you turn at my reproof, behold, I will pour out my spirit to you; I will make my words known to you.” Wisdom calls again in Proverbs 9:4-6: “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here! . . . Come, eat of my bread and drink of the wine I have mixed. Leave your simple ways, and live and walk in the way of insight.”

We hear the call of folly through the seductive call of an adulterous woman in Proverbs 9:16-18: “Whoever is simple, let him turn in here! And to him who lacks sense she says, ‘Stolen water is sweet, and bread eaten in secret is pleasant.’ But he does not know that the dead are there, and that her guests are in the depths of Sheol.”

We leave this section of Proverbs with two paths before us – the path of wisdom and the path of folly. We have heard the invitation to both paths and have clearly seen the end of both paths. The path of wisdom, tread upon by the line of restoration leads to life. The path of folly, tread upon by the line of rebellion, leads to death. One treads upon the path of wisdom by walking in the fear of the Lord, that is walking with the Lord as supreme in our life, with no rivals, and ordering every aspect of our lives in view of his supremacy. The natural question then becomes, “How do I live every aspect of my life in light of his supremacy?” The rest of the book helps us answer that question.

* + 1. *The Path of Wisdom Applied to the Various Contexts of Life (Proverbs 10-31:9)*

In Proverbs 10-31:9, we see what it means to walk upon the path of wisdom (to live in the fear of the Lord) in various contexts and challenges of life, including, without limitation:

* *Work* (10:4-5, 26; 12:1, 24, 27; 13:4; 14:23; 16:2; 18:9; 19:15, 24; 20:4, 13; 21:5, 25; 23:4; 24:30-34; 26:13-16; 28:19);
* *Honesty* (11:1; 12:17, 22; 20:10, 23; 22:28);
* *Speech* (10:18-19, 31-32; 11:12-13; 12:18-19; 14:3; 15:1, 23; 16:24; 17:27-28; 20:19; 21:23; 25:11; 29:11, 20);
* *Decision making* (11:14; 12:15; 14:12; 15:22; 19:20; 20:18; 28:26);
* *Loaning money* (11:15; 22:26-27);
* *Goals* (11:23);
* *Giving* (11:24-26; 14:21, 31; 19:17; 21:13; 22:16; 28:27; 29:7);
* *Money* (11:28; 13:11; 13:22; 20:21; 23:4-5; 28:20, 22, 25);
* *Friendship* (13:20; 17:17; 25:17, 19; 27:17);
* *Parenting* (13:24; 19:18; 22:6, 15; 23:13-14; 29:15, 17);
* *Forgiveness* (17:14);
* *Humility* (10:8, 17; 11:2; 12:1; 13:1; 13:10, 18; 15:12, 25, 31-33; 16:18; 18:12; 19:27; 25:6-7; 25:27; 26:12; 27:2; 29:1, 23; 30:32);[[48]](#footnote-48)
* *Contentment* (14:30; 15:16; 16:1; 30:7-9);
* *Drinking alcohol* (20:1; 23:20-21, 29-35; 30:47);
* *Self-control* (21:17; 25:28);
* *Adultery* (22:14; 23:27-28; 30:20);
* *Table manners* (23:1-3, 6-8);
* *Compassion* (even for one’s enemies!) (24:17-18; 25:21-22);
* *Confession* (28:13);

In these chapters, we also learn the following about the Lord:

*He is sovereign over all things*. Proverbs 15:3 provides that “[t]he eyes of the Lord are in every place, keeping watch on the evil and the good.” Proverbs 16:9 provides that “[t]he heart of a man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.” In Proverbs 16:33 we read: “The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord.” Proverbs 19:21 provides that: “Many are the plans in the mind of a man, but it is the purpose of the Lord that will stand.” Proverbs 20:24 says that: “A man’s steps are from the Lord; how then can man understand his way?” Proverbs 21:1 provides that: “The king’s heart is a stream of water in the hand of the Lord; he turns it wherever he will.” Proverbs 21:31 provides: “The horse is made ready for the day of battle, but the victory belongs to the Lord.” Proverbs 29:26 provides that: “Many seek the face of a ruler, but it is from the Lord that a man gets justice.” Schreiner rightly notes:

*He is all*-powerful. Proverbs 18:10 teaches that “[t]he name of the Lord is a strong tower; the righteous man runs into it and is safe.” Proverbs 21:30 provides that: “No wisdom, no understanding, no counsel can avail against the Lord.”

*He is all-wise*. Proverbs 21:2 provides: “Every way of a man is right in his own eyes, but the Lord weighs the heart.” Proverbs 24:12 provides: “If you say, ‘Behold, we did not know this,’ does not he who weighs the heart perceive it? Does not he who keeps watch over your soul know it, and will he not repay man according to his work?” Proverbs 30:5 provides that: “Every word of God proves true; he is a shield to those who take refuge in him.”

* + 1. *The Path of Wisdom Illustrated Through a Virtuous Woman (Proverbs 31:10-31)*

The path of wisdom and follow have now been set before the reader with the path of wisdom applied to the various contexts and challenges of life. Now the author of proverbs illustrates the path of wisdom through the description of a virtuous woman. This woman, commonly referred to as the “Proverbs 31 Woman” lives out in the daily routine of life the principles of wisdom set forth in the book of Proverbs. To observe this woman’s life is to observe what life looks like on the path of wisdom and, to use our terminology, within the line of restoration. This woman of wisdom is:

* More precious than jewels;
* Trustworthy;
* Beneficial to those around her;
* Diligent;
* Strong;
* Discerning;
* Generous;
* Prepared;
* Calm in the midst of trouble;
* Wise counselor;
* Kind;
* Loved and praised by those around her; and
* Characterized ultimately by her fear of the Lord.

The illustration of the life of wisdom is incredibly appealing. It calls to mind life before the fall where everything was as it was supposed to be. With the path of wisdom and folly and their respective ends clearly set forth, the path of wisdom thoroughly applied to the different challenges and contexts of life, and beautifully illustrated – the reader now has all the information he or she needs to align him or herself with one of the paths. Which will it be?

* 1. **Role of the Book of Proverbs in Old Testament Canon**

The book of Proverbs plays an important role in the Old Testament canon, for it tells the covenant people of the Lord how they can live has his covenant people in “the practical realities of human existence” for “life under Yahweh’s lordship is not an abstraction. Fearing the Lord is related to the everyday circumstances of human life.”[[49]](#footnote-49)

The individual proverbs provided in in the book are, in the words of David Platt, “guidelines and not guarantees” for “[t]here is a difference between a Proverb and a promise of God.”[[50]](#footnote-50) As Childs notes: “The significance of the proverb does not lie in its formulation of timeless truths, but in the ability of the wise man to use the proverb in discerning the proper context by which to illuminate the human situation.”[[51]](#footnote-51)

To put it in the terminology that we have been using in our study of the Old Testament, the book of Proverbs gives a detailed description of what it looks like to both align oneself with the line of restoration and the line of rebellion. To walk in wisdom, the fear of the Lord, in the daily decisions and situations of life is to align oneself with the line of restoration. To walk in folly, without the fear of the Lord, in the daily decisions and situations of life is to align oneself with the line of rebellion. The battle between the two lines set forth by Genesis 3:15 is not only played out through wars, kings, and massive judgments upon humanity. It is also played out in the everyday thoughts, words, and actions of ordinary men and women. The book of Proverbs, in essence, poses the question to the covenant people of the Lord: “Which line are you aligning yourself with – not in word but, rather, in deed?”

* 1. **How Book of Proverbs Points to Jesus Christ**

The book of Proverbs points to Jesus Christ for he is the “fullest and final fulfillment” of what is “personified as wisdom in Proverbs.”[[52]](#footnote-52) Paul explicitly makes this point in 1 Corinthians 1:24 and 1:30 in describing Jesus Christ as the “wisdom of God” and in Colossians 2:3 when Paul makes the claim that “all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge” are hidden in Christ. Jesus himself made the same point when he claimed to be superior to Solomon, the one who either wrote or is credited with a good number of the precepts recorded in the book of Proverbs.[[53]](#footnote-53)

Nancy Guthrie helpfully summarizes how the book of Proverbs points to Jesus: “The essence of the wisdom presented in Proverbs became seeable and knowable and touchable when Jesus became flesh. . . . [O]nce we have seen the living wisdom of God in the person of Jesus, it sheds a new light on the wisdom being offered to us, the wisdom speaking to us in Proverbs, and we can never read Proverbs the same way again. . . . Clearly, to listen to wisdom is to hear the word of Christ. To find wisdom is to believe in Chrsit. To be wise is to have the mind of Chirst. . . . To hear wisdom calling is to hear Jesus . . . saying, ‘Come to me, all who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest’ (Matt. 11:28)”[[54]](#footnote-54)

1. **Ecclesiastes** (12 chapters – takes about 30 minutes to read for the average person)
   1. **Overall Message of the Book of Ecclesiastes & Key Texts**

The overall message of the book of Ecclesiastes is that apart from the knowledge and the fear of the Lord, everything in this world that offers hope, life, and meaning will at one point or another fail us. Our jobs, spouses, successes, etc, will all leave us empty if we are pursuing them as our ultimate pursuit and end of lives. The only ultimate pursuit and end of life that will bring life, meaning, fulfillment, and purpose is to know and worship the Lord. In other words, if we neglect the Lord in our pursuit of other things, in the end nothing will have meaning and we will experience great loss and emptiness. However, if our ultimate pursuit is to know and worship the Lord, then everything in life will spring forth with deep and profound meaning and we will experience great abundance and fulfillment as we live life as it is meant to be lived.

The book of Ecclesiastes can be roughly divided into two parts: (1) the vanity of human labor (1-11) and (2) the way of true wisdom (12).[[55]](#footnote-55)

* + 1. *The Vanity of Life Under the Sun (1-11)*

The book of Ecclesiastes does not start on an optimistic tone, to say the least! The reader, somewhat shockingly, reads the following as he or she begins the book: “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. What does a man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?” (Ecclesiastes 1:2-3) As Schreiner notes: “The word ‘vanity’ . . . occurs thirty-seven times in the book, signifying the futility and meaninglessness of human existence.”[[56]](#footnote-56)

Solomon, who is believed to have written the book of Ecclesiastes, claims to have seen everything that is done under the sun and offers this summary of his observations: “all is vanity and a striving after the wind.” (Ecclesiastes 1:14) Everything is included within his broad description of vanity – human labor, the pursuit of wisdom, madness, folly, and every sort of human pleasure.

Human labor is vanity because there is nothing new under the sun (1:9-10), what is gained from one’s toil is left to others who may be fools (2:18-21), one’s labor doesn’t allow rest day or night (2:22-23), all labor is birthed from man’s envy of his neighbor (4:4), money derived from one’s labor will not bring satisfaction (5:10), and the one who labors will leave the world as he came in – naked and without anything (5:15-16). In light of the vanity of labor, one should “eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil” because such enjoyment is from the Lord. (2:24-26) However, a qualification is needed here for the modern reader who doesn’t need much encouragement to justify a hedonistic existence. Schreiner provides us with a helpful qualification: “The Preacher is not counseling readers here to live an unrestrained, hedonistic life; rather, he is saying that human beings must live one day at a time and enjoy each day for the pleasures it brings. . . .God has so designed life that human beings see the glory and beauty of God in the world he created. But life in the world also eludes human comprehension, such that there is no evident pattern or plan in history. Vanity and futility and absurdity characterize human life. Instead of trying to figure out how everything fits together, human beings should take pleasure in God’s gifts. There is a humility in accepting each day from God’s hand and thanking him for the joys that he grants.”[[57]](#footnote-57)

Just as toil was vanity for Solomon, so was the pursuit of wisdom. Solomon admitted that wisdom is to be preferred to folly as light is to be preferred over darkness, but he also realized that being wise does not solve all of life’s problems or prevent the inevitability of death. As Schreiner notes: “Those who are wise realize that the advantage of being wide on earth is short-lived, for both the wise and fools die and are forgotten (2:15-17).”[[58]](#footnote-58)

The inability to control life and death is captured well by the famous poem on time in Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 (think The Byrds’ version of Pete Seeger’s *Turn! Turn! Turn!*). These often quoted verses show that there is a time to be born, to die, to plant, to harvest, to kill, to heal, to break, to build, to weep, to laugh, to mourn, to dance, to cast out, to gather, to embrace, to keep your distance, to seek, to lose, to keep, to give away, to tear, to sew, to be silent, to speak, to love, to hate, to fight, and to fight for peace. While these verses do make for a pretty good song, what they are ultimately teaching is that “[h]uman beings do not manage their lives; life manages them. . . . human beings must respond to life as it occurs [and] are fundamentally helpless to change the world.”[[59]](#footnote-59) While that may sound a bit depressing to some, it should birth a sense of relief into our hearts. We are not God. We are limited creatures who are meant to live in the fear of the Lord and worship him! We can not dictate most of the circumstances in our lives, but we can love and obey the Lord in the midst of them!

Solomon’s claim that all of life in vanity taken out of the context of the Old Testament as a whole can, no doubt, lead to all sorts of unsound conclusions “from existentialism to pessimism.”[[60]](#footnote-60) However, such statements must be viewed in light of the Old Testament as a whole and recurring theme throughout the entire book of Ecclesiastes that meaning can only be found as one walks in the fear the Lord and keeps his commandments.[[61]](#footnote-61)

The theme of walking in the fear of the Lord is highlighted in Ecclesiastes 5:1-7, where Solomon instructs his readers to “[g]uard your steps when you go to the house of God” and to “let your words be few.” (5:1-2) Solomon also urges his readers to fulfill the vows that they make to the Lord in a timely manner because “God is the one you must fear.” (5:4-7) We have seen the theme of the fear of the Lord previously in the wisdom books: “The fear of the Lord means that he is supreme in one’s life, that all of life is ordered by one’s relationship with him.”[[62]](#footnote-62)

The theme of walking in the fear of the Lord is continued in 8:12-13: “Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be will with those who fear God, because they fear before him. But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.” As Schreiner notes: “Ultimately, one’s fear of God will be rewarded, even though one cannot see how this is so during this futile life under the sun.”[[63]](#footnote-63) Schreiner continues: “Life is baffling and beyond human understanding, but the mysteries of existence should not lead people to atheism, agnosticism, or despair.”[[64]](#footnote-64) This, however, is what often happens. There are many who have rejected the notion of God because of the existence of evil and suffering. These are difficult questions that are beyond our ability to fully comprehend, but rather than leading us away from the Lord they should lead us to fear and awe of the Lord for whom these issues are not a mystery and who reigns over all things, both great and small.

* + 1. *The Way of True Wisdom (12)*

The end of the matter is set forth in the last chapter of the book. It is only through the words of Chapter 12 that we can properly understand what has come before. Schreiner notes that “the conclusion of the book functions as the hermeneutical lens by which the whole of the book should be read.”[[65]](#footnote-65) In Ecclesiastes 12:1-8, Solomon urges the young to remember their Creator before it is too late. And, in the last two verses of the book, its meaning is fully expressed: “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14)

* 1. **Role of the Book of Ecclesiastes in Old Testament Canon**

The contribution of the book of Ecclesiastes is similar to the contribution made by the book of Job. Once again, the Lord’s covenant people are reminded that life does not follow a formula that we can understand and manipulate. For, all of life falls under the sovereignty of an all-knowing, all-wise, holy, good, loving, and just God whose ways are above our ways and whose thoughts are above our thoughts.

Ecclesiastes, like Job, points the reader to the reality beyond the reality that we see and perceive. There is more to life than we can understand or perceive. Schreiner notes: “[T]here is no wisdom available that will unlock all of life’s secrets. God rules over all, but much is hidden from the gaze of human beings.”[[66]](#footnote-66) But, that doesn’t mean that we should despair and live as we wish. Rather, it means that we should: “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13) For the Lord is sovereign over all that is beyond our understanding and he alone is worthy of our life, love, worship, and faith. Schreiner summarizes the message of the book as follows: “Instead of attempting to unravel the puzzles of human existence by trying to discern why one thing happens rather than another, human beings must give themselves entirely to God. They must live under his lordship. And when God grants joy and food, then one should give thanks to him and enjoy his gifts.”[[67]](#footnote-67)

* 1. **How Book of Ecclesiastes Points to Jesus Christ**

Schreiner helpfully notes how the book of Ecclesiastes points to the person of Jesus Christ: “The NT acknowledges that we live in a fallen and frustrating world (see Rom. 8:18-25). The creation is subject to futility, but Jesus Christ has come and inaugurated the kingdom, with the promise that the fullness of the kingdom will arrive. A new creation has dawned and will be consummated. Human beings show their fear of God (see 2 Cor. 5:11-21) by being reconciled to God through Jesus Christ. Through Christ the new creation has arrived (2: Cor. 5:17; Gal. 6:15), and the ‘new heavens and a new earth’ are coming ‘in which righteousness dwells’ (2 Pet. 3:13)”[[68]](#footnote-68)

Remember that the story of the Old Testament is one of the progressive fulfillment of the Lord’s redemptive promises. The fall recorded in Genesis 3 unleashed chaos on, and injected disorder within, all of creation. The book of Ecclesiastes captures this chaos and disorder within the context of human existence in a profound way. However, things will not always be this way. Chaos and disorder will not always be the mark of human existence, for the Lord made a promise to restore all things that were lost by the Fall. This restoration will ultimately be fulfilled in the person and work of Jesus Christ, the promised son of David who will be an eternal king over an eternal kingdom. So the book of Ecclesiastes points to the person and work of Jesus Christ by emphasizing the need for his coming and the need for the inauguration and consummation of his eternal kingdom through which all the promised restoration will come!

1. **Song of Solomon/Song of Songs** (8 chapters – takes about 16 minutes to read for the average person)
   1. **Overall Message of the Book of Song of Solomon & Key Texts**

The overall message of the book of Song of Solomon (Song of Songs) is that sex within the context of marriage is a beautiful thing and a wonderful gift from the Lord, which points to the redeeming nature of marital love, and then further to the redeeming nature of the Lord’s love for his people.

With each layer of meaning in mind, the words of the book capture a depth of meaning that should stir the heart. For example, Solomon’s words to his new bride in Chapter 4 are not only spoken from a man to a woman, but also, point us to the Lord’s love for his covenant people: “You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you” (4:7) and “You have captivated my heart, my sister, my bride; you have captivated my heart with one glance of your eyes . . . .” (4:9) Our relationship with the Lord, of course is not sexual in nature. However, the sexual relationship is the most intimate relationship possible between humans when set within the context of marriage and our relationship with the Lord is even more intimate than that. There is a depth of intimacy with the Lord that surpasses the greatest level of intimacy enjoyed between human beings.

The potent nature and value of love is spelled out well in Song of Solomon 8:6-7: “[L]ove is strong as death . . . . Many waters cannot quench love, neither can floods drown it. If a man offered for love all the wealth of his house, he would be utterly despised.” Schreiner notes: “Nothing can dampen or destroy love, for those who love are willing to surrender their lives for the sake of the beloved. Love clearly has a spiritual character that forges a bond with the beloved. Love fortifies a person to endure suffering for the sake of the beloved.”[[69]](#footnote-69) Garrett adds: “When people experience love, joy, freedom, or intimacy on any level, they are experiencing something that redeems human nature. Knowing God is therefore the ultimate experience of redemption; every other redemptive experience is real but limited, like a foreshadow.”[[70]](#footnote-70) Garrett’s words capture, in my opinion, the essence of the book as well as the human experience in a deeply profound way.

* 1. **Role of Song of Solomon in Old Testament Canon**

Schreiner notes that the book of Song of Solomon contributes to the Old Testament canon by containing “ a theology of love.”[[71]](#footnote-71) This theology of love is captured well by Garrett’s quote and Song of Solomon 8:6-7 which are both set forth above. The book is about the love between a husband and a wife and the blessing of sexual union enjoyed within that covenant relationship. And, the redeeming nature of such marital love points to the Lord’s love for his covenant people.

* 1. **How the Book of Song of Solomon Points to Jesus Christ**

The book of Song of Solomon points to Christ as it helps explain the depth of his redeeming love for the Church. Paul describes the church as the bride of Christ in Ephesians 5:22-23. John, in the book of Revelation saw the marriage supper of the Lamb between Christ and his bride, the church. Again, the church does not have a sexual relationship with Jesus, but the intimacy that exists between Christ and the church is more intimate than a sexual relationship, which is the most intimate relationship that the human mind can comprehend. Schreiner helps us here: “The relationship between the king and his wife, so beautifully described in Song of Songs, points us to something greater, something that outlasts the short bloom of youth. Here is a love that will never die, a covenant that will not be severed by death or by unfaithfulness. The whispers or shouts of Eden in marital love find their consummation in delights that will far exceed marital bliss-in the loving relationship between Christ and the church.”[[72]](#footnote-72)

1. See Job 5:13 and 1 Corinthians 3:19. [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 243. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. See, also Job 21:7-15. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Schreiner, The King in His Bauty, 238. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. See, e.g., Job 7:21; 9:2. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. See, e.g., Job 9:21-24. “The shocking feature here is that Job questions God’s justice.” Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 238 & n.7. [↑](#footnote-ref-6)
7. Job 10:1. [↑](#footnote-ref-7)
8. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 240. [↑](#footnote-ref-8)
9. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 242. [↑](#footnote-ref-9)
10. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-10)
11. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-11)
12. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 244. [↑](#footnote-ref-12)
13. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-13)
14. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 245. [↑](#footnote-ref-14)
15. The following is simply a sampling of the questions that the Lord poses to Job. [↑](#footnote-ref-15)
16. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-16)
17. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 246. [↑](#footnote-ref-17)
18. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 248 (quoting Garrett, Job, 92). [↑](#footnote-ref-18)
19. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 234. [↑](#footnote-ref-19)
20. Revelation 21:4. [↑](#footnote-ref-20)
21. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 249. [↑](#footnote-ref-21)
22. Sailhamer, NIV Compact Commentary, 315. [↑](#footnote-ref-22)
23. David Platt, Radical Material for the Old Testament, Psalms portion. [↑](#footnote-ref-23)
24. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 252, 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-24)
25. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 252, 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-25)
26. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 252. [↑](#footnote-ref-26)
27. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 252. [↑](#footnote-ref-27)
28. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 252. [↑](#footnote-ref-28)
29. See 2 Samuel 7:14-16. [↑](#footnote-ref-29)
30. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 253. [↑](#footnote-ref-30)
31. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-31)
32. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-32)
33. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 265. [↑](#footnote-ref-33)
34. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 266. [↑](#footnote-ref-34)
35. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 266-67. [↑](#footnote-ref-35)
36. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-36)
37. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-37)
38. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-38)
39. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 272. [↑](#footnote-ref-39)
40. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 276. [↑](#footnote-ref-40)
41. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 274. [↑](#footnote-ref-41)
42. Dever, The Message of the Old Testament, 484. [↑](#footnote-ref-42)
43. See, particularly Revelation 21-22. [↑](#footnote-ref-43)
44. Gleason L. Archer, A Survey of Old Testament Introduction, 500. Remember, all of the Old Testament points to the person of Jesus Christ. See, generally, Luke 24. [↑](#footnote-ref-44)
45. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 282. [↑](#footnote-ref-45)
46. Jared Clary, Sermon Series on Proverbs, Norris Ferry Community Church, Summer 2014. [↑](#footnote-ref-46)
47. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 284. [↑](#footnote-ref-47)
48. Schreiner helpfully adds the following comment regarding the need for humility: “The importance of listening and learning is apparent in the introductory discourse chapter . . . Those who become wise are humble and teachable.” Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 288. [↑](#footnote-ref-48)
49. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 299. [↑](#footnote-ref-49)
50. David Platt, Radical Material on Old Testament. [↑](#footnote-ref-50)
51. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 290 (quoting Childs, Old Testament as Scripture, 557). [↑](#footnote-ref-51)
52. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 299. [↑](#footnote-ref-52)
53. Matthew 12:42; see, also Luke 11:31. The author of Luke in Luke 2:40 and 2:52 makes the point of commenting that Jesus was filled with wisdom and increased in wisdom as he grew from a child into a man. [↑](#footnote-ref-53)
54. Nancy Guthrie, The Wisdom of God: Seeing Jesus in the Psalms and Wisdom Books, 205. [↑](#footnote-ref-54)
55. This rough outline was adopted from Dr. Constable’s outline on www. Soniclight.com/constable/pdf/ecclesiastes.pdf (last viewed 11.15.14) [↑](#footnote-ref-55)
56. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 303. [↑](#footnote-ref-56)
57. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 309-10. [↑](#footnote-ref-57)
58. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 306. [↑](#footnote-ref-58)
59. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 307. [↑](#footnote-ref-59)
60. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 301. [↑](#footnote-ref-60)
61. See Ecclesiastes 3:14, 3:17, 5:1-7, 7:1-6 7:20-22, 25-29, 8:12-13, 10:2-3, 12-16; 12:13-14. [↑](#footnote-ref-61)
62. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 282. [↑](#footnote-ref-62)
63. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-63)
64. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 308. [↑](#footnote-ref-64)
65. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 301. [↑](#footnote-ref-65)
66. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-66)
67. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-67)
68. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 312. [↑](#footnote-ref-68)
69. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 316. [↑](#footnote-ref-69)
70. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 316. [↑](#footnote-ref-70)
71. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 316. [↑](#footnote-ref-71)
72. Schreiner, The King in His Beauty, 318. [↑](#footnote-ref-72)