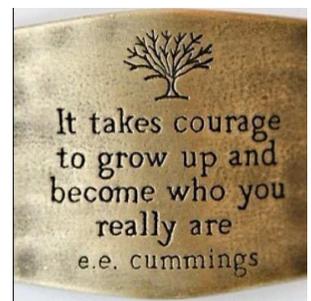


The Bible in a Nutshell: The Books of Wisdom

“No man was ever wise by chance” –Seneca

“Wise men speak because they have something to say;
fools because they have to say something.” –Plato



There are five books commonly referred to as the books of wisdom in the bible:

1. Psalms—(In Hebrew, the book is called “*Tehillim*”—means “Praises”. We get the word Psalm from Greek, “*psalmoi*”, meaning “music”) The Book of Psalms contains 150 poems or songs (many of these were set to music—some of the psalms list the tune that was to accompany the poetry). Many of these were either written by, or attributed to the life of, King David. You can pretty easily match a psalm of David to the life events he experienced in the histories. The book of Psalms is generally broken into five groupings:

- ◆ Book 1 (Psalms 1–41)
- ◆ Book 2 (Psalms 42–72)
- ◆ Book 3 (Psalms 73–89)
- ◆ Book 4 (Psalms 90–106)
- ◆ Book 5 (Psalms 107–150)

Psalms are used all the time in the liturgy, and have been turned into many songs over the years. Probably the most famous psalm is Psalm 23, appearing in pop culture everywhere from *The Twilight Zone*, *X-Men*, *Metallica* songs, etc. Psalm 23 is probably the most famous Psalm.

2. Proverbs--(English) Proverbs is a collection of wise sayings. Most of them are only a single line or two, the text rarely gets any longer than that. The Proverbs were collected together by King Solomon, who was renowned for his wisdom. Solomon’s many wives, and the trouble they caused him with God (eventually leading to the splitting of Israel, ordained by God as a punishment to Solomon), gives us some context for some of the proverbs and why they would have been important to Solomon, especially those about having a wandering eye. Solomon was the author of some of the proverbs, while others were collected from other cultures in the area.
3. Ecclesiastes—(Hebrew—“*Koheleth* “, Latin translation as “*Ecclesiastes* “, meaning “Teacher”) Definitely the most unusual book of the Bible. The teacher sets forth his wisdom on the meaning and purpose of life. Unlike much of the Bible, it is often pessimistic rather than inspirational. However, there are many who appreciate its candor and realism. It deals with the frustrating aspects of life, deep philosophical observations, and the question of justice in life. American novelist Thomas Wolfe wrote of it: “[O]f all I have ever seen or learned, that book seems to me the noblest, the wisest, and the most powerful expression of man's life upon this earth — and also the highest flower of poetry, eloquence, and truth. I am not given to dogmatic judgments in the matter of literary creation, but if I had to make one I could say that Ecclesiastes is the greatest single piece of writing I have ever known, and the wisdom expressed in it the most lasting and profound.”
4. Job—(Hebrew—the name of the titular character) A long narrative story, revolving around the question, “Why do decent people suffer?” Many find aspects of this book troubling, since we often think of God as being the dispenser of justice and the righter of all wrongs. Much of the meat of the story revolves around Job’s friends (a loose term if there ever was one) trying to get Job to confess that he must have some hidden sin in order to have been punished in such a manner. This is the only explicit reference to Satan in the Old Testament—who, in this story, is numbered among the heavenly host and doing God’s will as he inflicts suffering on Job. Also troubling is the fact that God DOES inflict

Job's suffering. God answers Job, but at the same time, God's answer does not always satisfy most people, or they at least have a hard time accepting it as in his answer, God refuses to explain anything of his ways. The Book of Job is one of the most influential works in literature. Kafka, Milton, Dostoyevsky and many others have been influenced by it.

5. Song of Solomon—(Also known as “Song of Songs”. Largely attributed to King Solomon) Another unique book of the Bible, Song of Solomon contains no reference to God, the covenant, or to any known laws. Rather, Song of Solomon explores the concept of love-romantic love between a man and a woman. Placed in its proper context, it exemplifies the idea of what an ideal marriage should be, especially the idea that a man and a woman “cleave together as one flesh”. It explores the reality of the romantic attraction between two people, in a way that is both holy and respectful. Consider the following quotes:

- ◆ “I have found the one whom my soul loves.” (3:4)
- ◆ “You are altogether beautiful, my darling, there is no flaw in you.” (4:7)
- ◆ “This is my beloved and this is my friend.”
- ◆ “I am my lovers, and my lover is mine.” (6:3)
- ◆ “Many waters cannot quench love, nor can rivers drown it.” (8:7)

“Promise me, O women of Jerusalem, not to awaken love until the time is right.”
—Song of Solomon, 8:4

One of the early church fathers, Origen, interpreted this passage to be allegorical of God's love for us.

Psalm 23 King James Version (KJV)

23 The LORD is my shepherd; I shall not want.

² He maketh me to lie down in green pastures: he leadeth me beside the still waters.

³ He restoreth my soul: he leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name's sake.

⁴ Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.

⁵ Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over.

⁶ Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the LORD for ever.