

## Bible - Chapter 3

# Poetry

## Overview Review

1. The Law
2. Books of History
3. Books of Poetry
  - a. Books categorized as **Poetry** are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon
  - b. Books contain songs and poems, lots of figurative language and emotion
  - c. Timeframe is not specified, but roughly concurrent with History
  - d. Note: Segments of Poetry can be found in many other books as well
4. Books of Prophecy
5. Gospels
6. Acts and Letters

**Where are we?** We've already breezed through conservatively 4,000 years of the OT story including Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob/Israel, Moses, Joshua, Saul, David, Solomon and a few prophets. God has promised Abraham, Isaac and Jacob *land*, lots of *offspring* and *blessing* for all nations through them. Even as God partially fulfilled that first covenant, He began another cycle of promise and limited fulfillment with David: a *house* (dynasty), a *kingdom* (people ruled by a king) and a *throne* (the authority to rule)...*forever*. Though God was faithful, however, the people repeatedly broke the covenant God made through Moses, thus earning the Israelite's exile from the land. But even during their disobedience, God promised that a remnant would return, and they did.

The Law and the books of History are the black outline that defines the picture. The books of Poetry and Prophecy will fill in the color and depth. We've been observing God's *doings*. Now we will explore *who He is* with all His unexpected nuances. Consider these next two chapters a deeper glimpse into God's character.

This week is a break from the long readings so take the time to read slowly and let your heart be drawn into the poets' expression of emotion. We will also get our first big dose of *figurative language*. What we've read so far has been story-telling (narrative) and prose. For the most part, it has been plain language. We will continue to understand literally what we can, but, as in all poetry, sometimes the author reaches beyond the confines of literal language and employs figures of speech and imagery to convey his message.

As a reminder, **pray** then consider the following questions each day. Record your response to Question 4:

1. What happens? (major characters, events, places)
2. What does it say about God? About Jesus?
3. What questions does it raise? (Write down at least 1.)
4. How should I respond? (Write down at least one practical, tangible adjustment to your life/thinking.)

**What is Hebrew poetry?** In rhythm and rhyme and meter we find  
English poetry's rules defined  
Or -of course- a poem might be... f r e e form

But the OT wasn't written in English; almost all of it was written in Hebrew. And Hebrew poetry was defined by *repetition*. Sometimes the second line simply restated the first, sometimes it built slightly on the first and sometimes it contrasted with the first. Sometimes a third line was added for even more emphases. Interestingly, if you knew your book would be widely translated and you wanted it to include poetry, wouldn't it make sense to use a language where your poetry could be most easily translated and keep its poetic properties? Repetition is unique in its translate-ability. If I'm not mistaken, that little detail has God's fingerprints all over it.

**Have we encountered any poetry already in the books we've read?** Glimpses of poetry appear as early as Genesis when God responds to Adam's sin.<sup>1</sup> Moses sings to the Lord after crossing the Red Sea.<sup>2</sup> Deborah sings in response to God's deliverance from the Canaanites.<sup>3</sup> When God answers Hannah's prayer for a son, she fulfills her vow to dedicate Samuel to God with a poem of praise.<sup>4</sup> Not only are many of the Psalms written by David, but History also records some of his songs: a lament for Saul and Jonathon<sup>5</sup> and a song of thanksgiving when the ark comes to Jerusalem.<sup>6</sup> The books we are delving into now are nearly all poetry.

**Was Job a real person and if so, when did he live?** Ezekiel and James<sup>7</sup> seemed to think Job was a real person, so I take their word for it, though it is hard to place him on the timeline despite the timelessness of the truths his book contains. Based on the culture depicted in the book, he is thought to be a peer of the patriarchs. Job 1-2 sets the stage with a conversation between God and Satan, followed by long poems of debate between Job and his friends. In the end God speaks out of a whirlwind, setting Job and his friends straight with his description of His boundless majesty and power. In response, Job acknowledges his rightful, humble place before God. Though Job never learns why all these things happen to him, he does gain a much fuller experience of God.

**What are the Psalms?** "Psalm" means *song*. The book of **Psalms** is a collection of 150 songs, laments, and praises written by a variety of authors such as David (who wrote 73 psalms), Solomon (2), sons of Korah (12), Asaph (12), Heman, Ethan, and Moses.<sup>8</sup> Korah was a Levite<sup>9</sup> (a type of priest) and contemporary of Moses. Asaph was the minister of music in the time of King David.<sup>10</sup> Heman and Ethan wrote at the same time as Asaph and shortly thereafter.<sup>11</sup>

The Psalms are organized in five "books" and can be categorized any number of ways. One way classifies them as laments/petitions, thanksgiving/praises, psalms of trust in God, instructional psalms of wisdom, hymns about the enthronement of Yahweh and songs about Jerusalem. Some psalms also contain Messianic prophesy.<sup>12</sup> Some psalms are tied to historical events, like David's Psalm 51 where he repents over his sin with Bathsheba.

It has also been said that all the psalms are either about Jesus or He could have spoken them. As you read them, ask yourself, "*Where is Jesus in this psalm?*"

There are many favorite and well-known psalms. For example, Psalm 1 compares a righteous man to a tree planted by streams of water. "*The Lord is my Shepherd...*" is Psalm 23. Psalm 46:10 is the oft quoted "*Be still and know that I am God.*" Psalm 139 speaks of God's complete knowledge of and love for us individually. Other psalms have been remade into songs of today (or recent yesterday!): *Unto Thee, Oh Lord* (Psalm 25); *As the Deer* (Psalm 42) and *Make a Joyful Noise* (Psalm 100). The two-verse Psalm 117 is the shortest chapter in the Bible. Psalm 118 is the middle chapter of the Bible. Psalm 119 is the longest chapter, with 176 verses, separated into sets of 8 verses, all praising God's laws and decrees. Each set of 8 begins with a Hebrew letter, starting at the beginning of the alphabet and continuing to its end (which is a poetic form called an "acrostic").

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<sup>1</sup> Genesis 3:14-19

<sup>2</sup> Exodus 15:1-18

<sup>3</sup> Judges 5

<sup>4</sup> 1 Samuel 2:1-10

<sup>5</sup> 2 Samuel 1:18-27

<sup>6</sup> 1 Chronicles 16:8-34

<sup>7</sup> Ezekiel 14:14 and 20, James 5:11

<sup>8</sup> Moses wrote Psalm 90

<sup>9</sup> Numbers 26:8-11; his sons wrote Psalms 42-49, 84, 85, 87 and 88

<sup>10</sup> 1 Chronicles 15:19 and 16:5; Asaph wrote Psalms 50 and 73-83

<sup>11</sup> 1 Kings 4:31 and 1 Chronicles 15:19

<sup>12</sup> Psalms 2, 8, 16, 22, 40, 45, 72, 110 and 118

**What questions do you have?**

Read...	Summarize...	Notes, comments, questions
<b>1. Job's story</b>		
<i>Job 1-2</i>		Summarize Job's story
<i>Job 3</i>		Have you ever felt like Job?
<b>Date:</b>	<b>Key Verse:</b>	
<b>Take away:</b>		
<b>2. God's response to Job</b>		
<i>Job 38-42</i>		When Job gets a clearer picture of <i>Who God is</i> , what is his response?
<b>Date:</b>	<b>Key Verse:</b>	
<b>Take away:</b>		
<b>3. Psalms, Part 1</b>		
<i>Psalms 1</i>		An <i>instructional</i> psalm.
<i>Psalms 42-43</i>		A psalm of <i>lament</i> .
<i>Psalms 117</i>		The shortest chapter in the Bible. A psalm of <i>praise</i> .
<b>Date:</b>	<b>Key Verse:</b>	
<b>Take away:</b>		
<b>4. Psalms, Part 2</b>		
<i>Ps 119:1-16</i>		The longest chapter in the Bible. What is the subject of every verse?
<i>Psalms 139</i>		A favorite of many people.
<i>Psalms 140</i>		An <i>imprecatory</i> psalm asking for God to judge the wicked.
<b>Date:</b>	<b>Key Verse:</b>	
<b>Take away:</b>		

**What is a proverb?** A proverb is a short, wise saying. Mostly attributed to Solomon, the book of **Proverbs** is a collection of proverbs addressing early every subject, including the foundation for all wisdom: “*the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.*”<sup>13</sup> Other commonly known proverbs are, “*trust in the Lord with all your heart and He will make your paths straight,*”<sup>14</sup> and Proverbs 31 about a “wife of noble character”.

As we dive into them, however, we should keep in mind that Proverbs are proverbs, not *promises*. For example, “*Train up a child in the way he should go; even when he is old he will not depart from it,*”<sup>15</sup> does not promise that a child *will not* depart from the way he was raised (clearly we do!), but a principle that training a child will, in most cases, get him going in a general direction.

**What is Ecclesiastes about?** Attributed to Solomon, Ecclesiastes is a fairly depressing book about his unsuccessful attempts to find meaning in life apart from God. “*Meaningless, meaningless*” is repeated often, and could also be translated using *absurd, useless, vain (vanity), frustrating, nonsensical or futile*. One passage made popular by 1960s musical group The Byrds and the Forrest Gump movie soundtrack is Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, “*There is a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven: a time to be born and a time to die...a time to mourn and a time to dance...a time for war and a time for peace.*” Verse 10 continues with the conclusion, “*He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man's heart...*” As in Proverbs, Solomon speaks of many subjects, including work, age, laughter and pleasure. At weddings we may hear, “*Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.*”<sup>16</sup> After considering so many aspects of life, his conclusion of the matter is, “*Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.*”<sup>17</sup>

**Just how risqué is Song of Solomon?** A song of courtship between Solomon and a “Shulammitte” (or dark) woman, Song of Solomon contains scenes of intimacy and passion not typically found in the Bible. In some cases it is sufficiently risqué that translators hesitate to be completely accurate! It is well worth its own study, as long as you make sure you will “*not stir up or awaken love until it pleases.*”<sup>18</sup>

**What questions do you have?**

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<sup>13</sup> Proverbs 9:10

<sup>14</sup> Proverbs 3:5-6

<sup>15</sup> Proverbs 22:6

<sup>16</sup> Ecclesiastes 4:13

<sup>17</sup> Ecclesiastes 12:13

<sup>18</sup> Song of Solomon 2:7, 3:5, 8:4. This is repeated three times. We can conclude then that it is very important to not “awaken love” before the right time.

Read...	Summarize...	Notes, comments, questions
<b>5. Proverbs</b>		
<i>Prov 1</i>		
<i>Prov 3:1-12</i>		
<b>Date:</b>	<b>Key Verse:</b>	
<b>Take away:</b>		
<b>6. Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon</b>		
<i>Eccles 3:1-15</i>		
<i>Eccles 12</i>		
<i>Song 5:10-16</i>		
<i>Song 7:1-9</i>		
<i>Song 8:4</i>		
<b>Date:</b>	<b>Key Verse:</b>	
<b>Take away:</b>		

**Where is Jesus in the books of Poetry? Job** foreshadows how Jesus will also remain faithful to God despite amazing opposition and hardship. It has been observed that every **psalm**, in its fullest sense, is either about Jesus or could be spoken by Him. Jesus' life embodies the wisdom gained from every **proverb**. In contrast to the rampant meaninglessness in the world described in **Ecclesiastes**, Jesus' life of fearing God and keeping His commands<sup>19</sup> afforded Jesus with a life of infinite meaning and worth. **Song of Solomon** lets us experience the intimacy and passion Jesus desires with the Church as a whole, His beloved bride.

**For further study:** Some psalms recount what God has done in the past so that the people might be encouraged and strengthened to continue to trust and obey Him. You try it. Brainstorm what God's done in your life or in those you know personally. Write a poem about it (use whatever literary devices and poetic forms you want) or put to music a psalm that has particular meaning to you.

**Summary:** Review your take-aways from each day during this Section. Are there any themes that stand out? What has God been teaching you or asking you to do or change?

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<sup>19</sup> Ecclesiastes 12:13