



DISCOVERY

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, Psalms

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SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Proverbs 1:1 through 9:18

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge; but fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Proverbs 1:7)

BACKGROUND

The Book of Proverbs is made up of several collections of concise sayings—frequently in couplet form—that contain moral truths and practical instruction for a truly successful, happy life. The first collection is found in Chapters 1–9.

These chapters consist of fatherly advice given by King Solomon to his son and the young men of Israel on the topic of wisdom. Since the proverbs were drawn from the king’s personal experience, this is the most conversational, narrative, and thematic portion of the book. Solomon’s purpose was to guide the youth of Israel into an understanding of why wisdom should be valued and folly despised.

Biblical proverbs are not universal in scope nor applicable in every instance. However, the adages and instruction in these chapters relate to our era, as they have to every generation. All who seek true wisdom can benefit from these spiritual insights which point to the Source, value, and benefits of wisdom, as true wisdom and knowledge come from and represent God.

The introduction to the book appears in verses 1-7 of chapter 1. The purpose is succinctly stated in verse 2: “to know wisdom and instruction.” From 1:8 through 9:18, Solomon developed the superiority of wisdom over foolishness through a series of admonitions related to wise living, and explanations as to what that entails. Since wisdom is a concept not easily captured in words, he frequently employed the technique of showing how a wise person behaves, rather than describing wisdom itself.

QUESTIONS

1. Solomon expressed the major theme of the Book of Proverbs in our focus verse, which states that “the fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge.” The word *beginning* as used here means “the first and controlling principle.” Given that perspective, how would you define or describe the “fear of the LORD”?

2. In the opening statement of Solomon’s discourse (Proverbs 1:1-6), he used a variety of words which are synonymous or closely related to the word “wisdom.” What are some of these words, and why do you think he employed so many different ways of describing wisdom?

3. Proverbs 1:20-33 is the first of many times in the Book of Proverbs where wisdom is personified in feminine terms. In this section, wisdom spoke in the first person and referred to the reader as “my child.” How would you summarize the warning given in these verses?

4. The words “My son...,” which open chapter 2, mark the beginning of a new theme. Verses 1-5 present an if – then form of argument: *If* you meet the conditions (described in verses 1-4), *then* you can be certain of the result (described in verse 5). Briefly state the conditions and the result described in this passage.

5. In chapter 3 Solomon continued to press home the merits of wisdom, outlining six principles for having a good life. Summarize the principles in the following verses:

Proverbs 3:1-2

Proverbs 3:3-4

Proverbs 3:5-6

Proverbs 3:7-8

Proverbs 3:9-10

Proverbs 3:11-12

6. What visual illustration did Solomon use in Proverbs 4:10-19 to portray the importance of wisdom? What specific words contribute to his analogy?

7. Earlier in his discourse on wisdom, Solomon warned of being delivered from an immoral woman (see Proverbs 2:16-20). In chapter 5 verses 5-14 we read of the peril of sexual sin, and in chapters 6 and 7, similar warnings are repeated. Why do you think Solomon repeatedly addressed this topic?

8. Chapter 9, the conclusion of Solomon's wisdom speeches, reviews the major themes already spelled out in the first eight chapters of the book. How does verse 10 of this chapter summarize Solomon's message in these nine introductory chapters to the Book of Proverbs?

CONCLUSION

While wisdom and folly vie for our allegiance, the ultimate choice lies with us. Which call will we answer?

NOTES

DISCOVERY

The Words of the Wise



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Proverbs 22:17 through 24:34

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Remove not the ancient landmark, which thy fathers have set.” (Proverbs 22:28)

BACKGROUND

Our text contains two collections of moral and religious teachings applicable to people of all ages and walks of life: the first and longer collection is found in Proverbs 22:17 through Proverbs 24:22, and the second collection in Proverbs 24:23-34.

The plural form of the word “wise” in the phrase “hear the words of the wise” (Proverbs 22:17) is an indicator that wise men other than King Solomon authored the first section, although he collected the sayings. Proverbs 24:23 marks the start of the second collection with the statement, “These things also belong to the wise” No reference is made to Solomon in either of these collections.

Three groups of teachers comprised the wise men of Israel: the priests, sages, and prophets. Each of these groups had a different purpose. The priests were responsible for instruction regarding the Torah (Israel’s written and oral law), the sages gave counsel, and the prophets proclaimed the words of God. It is the counsel of the sages that is recorded in this section of Proverbs.

This portion of Proverbs more closely resembles the father/son or teacher/student style of teaching in chapters 1-9 than the two-line couplets of the Proverbs 10:1 through 22:16 section covered in the previous lesson. There are frequent calls to attention scattered throughout the text (see Proverbs 22:17; 23:19, 22, 26). Most of the proverbs reflect a tone of admonition which is indicated by imperative verbs and direct address.

QUESTIONS

1. In Proverbs 22:28, our key verse, a prohibition was given regarding moving established landmarks. When the Israelites conquered Canaan, each tribe was given a portion of land with defined boundaries. Prior to that time, Moses had warned the people not to move the landmarks establishing property boundaries once they reached the Promised Land (see Deuteronomy 19:14; 27:17). The landmarks were how each family would maintain possession of the exact property allotted to them. How can the principle in this verse apply to our Christian lives?

2. Proverbs 22:24-25 mentions an “angry” man. How would you define the word *angry* in this context? Why do you think we are told not to spend much time with such people?

3. The wise men of Israel warned against envying sinners. What reason is given (Proverbs 23:17-18)? How can this help shape the focus for our lives?

DISCOVERY

A Collection of Proverbs



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Proverbs 25:1 through 31:31

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.” (Proverbs 28:13)

BACKGROUND

Proverbs 25:1 marks the conclusion of proverbs of the wise men of Israel and the beginning of the third and final section of the Book of Proverbs. According to this verse, the final proverbs authored by Solomon (chapters 25 through 29) were collected and copied by the aides of Hezekiah, King of Judah (715-686 B.C.), who restored the Temple some two hundred years after the time of Solomon. The word translated *copied* in this verse literally means “removed from one document to another,” likely indicating that by the time of Hezekiah, the original documents were in poor condition and needed to be copied in order to preserve the teachings. It is possible that these men also incorporated some of the oral proverbs attributed to Solomon into their collection, along with those that had been written down. Chapter 30 was written by Agur, of whom little is known except that he was a wise teacher who may have come from the kingdom of Massa in northern Arabia. Chapter 31 was written by King Lemuel, who is believed to have been from the kingdom of Massa as well.

This portion of the book contains a special emphasis on wisdom for leaders: it stresses the king’s role and covers topics associated with royal responsibility and appropriate behavior of officials. Rather than reminding leaders what good conduct entails, many of these proverbs instruct the court in what behaviors to encourage in their leaders. Relationships with others is another common thread that runs throughout these chapters, with insight offered regarding one’s association not only with rulers, but with fools, scoundrels, the poor, the wicked, and the righteous.

Chapters 25 through 29 vary somewhat in style and form from the portions of the book attributed to Solomon. These proverbs are arranged more frequently by topic; at times several sequential verses may address the same subject. While chapters 30 and 31 were authored by individuals other than Solomon, it is significant that their words were considered

worthy of inclusion in this collection. The Book of Proverbs ends with the beautiful portrait of a virtuous wife and mother written in the style of an acrostic poem—each of the twenty-two stanzas begins with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet.

SUGGESTED RESPONSE TO QUESTIONS

1. What advice is given in Proverbs 25:6-7, and how does it apply to us today?

2. Proverbs 25:11-12; 27:5-6; and 28:23 refer to the benefits of wise counsel and encouragement. Give an example of a time when the good advice of a godly friend helped you or someone you know avoid making a harmful mistake.

3. The counsel given in Proverbs 25:21 is straightforward: we are to treat our enemies with kindness by meeting their basic needs of food and water. Bible scholars differ somewhat in their explanations of how doing so will “heap coals of fire” on the heads of our adversaries (verse 22). It may indicate that kindness will melt hardened hearts or angry feelings. Others suggest that kindness will shame our enemies into contrition and repentance. However the original meaning is explained, Solomon was indicating that the most effective response to animosity is to do good in return. Why is this response so effective?

4. Proverbs 26:13-16 contains a series of four warnings regarding indolence. What descriptive word picture of a lazy person is given in Proverbs 26:14? What principle is developed in these four verses?

5. We are warned in Proverbs 27:1 against assertively stating what we will do in the future. How can realizing we have no guarantee of tomorrow help us have a proper respect and humility before God?

6. Solomon has much to say about fools. According to Proverbs 28:26, what causes a person to become a fool? How can we avoid that and be wise?

7. In Proverbs 31 we find a beautiful tribute to a godly woman. Outer beauty is not mentioned as being important, but inner beauty is highly commended. While godly women of our day will not necessarily perform every activity in this description, they will exemplify the character from which these activities originated. Given that the Book of Proverbs is a challenge to seek and find true wisdom, why do you think a composite picture of virtuous womanhood is included in this final chapter?

CONCLUSION

A person who heeds the wisdom offered in the Book of Proverbs will have a successful and fulfilling life.

NOTES

DISCOVERY

The Book of Ecclesiastes



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Ecclesiastes 1:1 through 12:14

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

BACKGROUND

The Book of Ecclesiastes is a series of instructions and eye-witness observations given by “the Preacher,” to the young men of Israel. Although the author never identified himself by name, Jewish tradition records that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes during the last years of his life, probably sometime between 955 and 931 B.C. The views expressed are obviously from an individual who has spent years accumulating experiences and perspectives.

Solomon enjoyed periods of unsurpassed wisdom and immense wealth during his lifetime, and was able to gratify every personal whim and desire. However, in spite of his unlimited advantages, Solomon’s message could be summed up by the Hebrew word *hebel*, translated in various Biblical passages as *vanity*, *futility*, *meaninglessness*, *mystery*, or *enigma*. Experience had taught him that wisdom, wealth, achievement, and pleasure were not sufficient foundations upon which to build one’s life. The summary statements “All is vanity” and “This also is vanity” are repeated over and over, and a tone of disappointment and futility is apparent in all twelve chapters.

Solomon’s primary purpose in writing the book seems to have been to share his observations and ultimate conclusion with those who still had life before them. While Solomon encouraged the young to enjoy material advantages, he pointed them to the importance of committing their lives to their Creator during their youth, concluding that doing so was the only path to meaningful fulfillment in life.

Though Ecclesiastes was written thousands of years ago, it presents a question that individuals of each generation must face: what is the meaning of life? Solomon did not suggest that life has no purpose and is ultimately without profit. Rather, while he observed the futility of man’s attempts to fill the emptiness of life without God, he asserted that God’s presence was to be recognized and reckoned with at every turn during the brief days of man’s sojourn under the sun. The heart of Solomon’s advice is found

in the conclusion of the book: “Fear God and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

QUESTIONS

1. Solomon had wealth and power, accomplishment and honor, fame and pleasure, and was deemed the wisest man in all the world (see 1 Kings 4:29-34). Yet, in Ecclesiastes 1:2-3, he stated that all is vanity. Today, mankind still strives for attainments in terms of wealth, success, and pleasure. Why do you think people fail to find satisfaction even when they achieve these goals?

2. In Ecclesiastes 3:1-8, Solomon addressed the subject of time, opening this portion of text with the statement, “To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven.” The word translated *season* in this verse means “appointed time.” God has an appointed time and order for the events of our lives. While we participate in the specific activities listed, our life experiences are known and allowed by Him. What are the benefits of accepting and appreciating God’s perfect timing? What is the danger in failing to do so?

3. In Ecclesiastes 4:8, Solomon contemplated the perils of isolation, and stated in verse 9 that “two are better than one.” In verses 9 through 12, what does Solomon say are the benefits of companionship? How might these benefits be experienced within the family of God?

4. Vows were a common part of Israel’s religious practice during the time of Solomon. In Ecclesiastes 5, Solomon addressed making vows or promises to God. What specific warnings did he give regarding this practice? Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

5. At times in life it will seem that evil prevails, and the wicked get away with unrestrained wrongdoing. Solomon reflected on this in his day as well. However, in Ecclesiastes 8, he asserted his faith in the ultimate justice of God. How would you summarize the principle Solomon stated in verses 11-13 of this chapter?

6. After considering the uncertainties of the future and the certainty of death, in Ecclesiastes 9:7-9 Solomon observed that there are good things in life, and recommended that his hearers make the most of what they can understand and enjoy. He followed that with the directive found in verse 10. What was his instruction, and how might it apply to our Christian walk?

7. Chapter 10 of Ecclesiastes begins a series of proverbs in which Solomon sought to provide some of the wisdom he wanted people to hear. There is no one theme in this compilation of practical advice, which continues through the concluding chapters. Solomon spoke of fools and folly, relationships with rulers, care in conduct, sharpness and strength, wisdom with words, indolence and industry, money and might. What lesson can we learn from the proverb given in Ecclesiastes 10:10?

8. Solomon had set out to try all that life had to offer, and the book’s final verses offer a summation of his thoughts. At the close of his attempt to point the young to effective and successful paths in life, what did Solomon conclude was the duty of man? Ecclesiastes 12:13

CONCLUSION

Those who have a relationship with God and are living in obedience to Him have the promise of someday finding complete fulfillment and life eternal.

NOTES



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Song of Solomon 1:1 through 8:14

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“He brought me to the banqueting house, and his banner over me was love.” Song of Solomon 2:4

BACKGROUND

The Song of Solomon is a poetic work with romantic love as its theme. Perhaps the most enigmatic book in the Bible, it contains no direct reference to God or religion. However, since we know that all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable for us (see 2 Timothy 3:16), this book’s inclusion in the Word of God is no accident.

Commentators offer a wide variety of interpretations of the Song of Solomon. It has been viewed as an allegory, a typification of the love of Christ for the Church, a collection of Hebrew love lyrics, and a factual narrative. (See the Song of Solomon Overview for a more detailed description of the various interpretations.)

Along with many holiness scholars, we have chosen to regard the book as a factual narrative. Adam Clarke suggests that the plot concerns Solomon and his bride, who was the daughter of Pharaoh; this interpretation provides a framework for the passages which present intimate details of the physical relationship between a husband and his wife. Another prominent holiness commentary views the narrative as a description of Solomon’s love for a Shulamite maiden who had already given her heart to a young shepherd. In this approach, the intimate passages are part of the Shulamite’s dreams of her beloved. This approach is the one used in the outline presented in *Daybreak* and *Discovery*. However, in view of the wide range of explanations of this book, we do not take a fixed position as to its interpretation.

Understanding the book is made even more complex due to the absence of indicators within the text as to who is speaking. Depending upon whom the passage is ascribed to, the interpretation of many passages can be quite diverse. In addition, the extravagant language and imagery within the Song of Solomon comes from another culture and era, and agricultural and botanical comparisons are frequent. Overall, ancient Eastern phraseology can be challenging for contemporary minds to grasp.

Difficulties notwithstanding, the Song of Solomon offers a beautifully descriptive celebration

of love, marriage, and the physical relationship between a man and a woman. In our society, human sexuality frequently is exploited in books, movies, and advertising. Sexual relationships are regarded as temporary and are often based on personal gratification. By contrast, the relationship portrayed in the Song of Solomon is one of fidelity, self-giving, and bonding. There is much to be learned and understood in a study of this book.

QUESTIONS

1. There are many comparisons in the Song of Solomon which describe love, including those in chapter 1. To begin our overview of this book, how would you summarize the nature of love within the context of God’s plan for marriage?

2. In verse 3 of chapter 1, the Shulamite refers to her beloved, saying, “Because of the savour of thy good ointments thy name is as ointment poured forth.” Like many statements in the Song of Solomon, her words could be interpreted in a number of ways. What message or attitude of heart do you think she might have been conveying?

3. Many of the passages in Song of Solomon employ images and descriptions that were extravagantly complimentary. What are some of the word pictures given in Song of Solomon 1:9-17; 2:1-3? What part do words of praise and appreciation play in building a successful relationship?

4. While many of the verbal exchanges in the Song of Solomon allude to physical intimacy, a contrasting message occurs in Song of Solomon 3:5. What behavior does this passage enjoin?

5. In Song of Solomon 4:12, Solomon referred to the Shulamite maiden as “a garden enclosed,” and “a spring shut up, a fountain sealed.” Bible scholars agree that this passage was an affirmation of the maiden’s purity. While virginity is considered out-of-date in today’s culture, it has always been God’s plan for those who are unmarried. What impact can moral integrity have when it comes to our Christian testimony?

6. In response to the question posed in Song of Solomon 5:9, “What is thy beloved more than another beloved?” the Shulamite described the man she loved. She ended that description by saying, “This is my beloved, and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem” (Song of Solomon 5:16). Why is friendship such an important element in a courtship and then in a healthy marriage?

7. In chapter 5, the Shulamite maiden stated, “I am my beloved’s, and my beloved is mine.” How does this statement, which emphasizes belonging to one another, contrast with the “put yourself first” mindset so prevalent in our day?

8. What characteristics of love did the Shulamite maiden describe in Song of Solomon 8:6-7?

9. Many commentators compare the love relationship described in the Song of Solomon to the much deeper love relationship that exists between Christ and His Bride. Throughout the Song of Solomon, we see verses that refer to the fact that those in love desire to be together. What do these passages teach us about the appropriate attitude of the Bride toward Christ the Bridegroom’s ultimate return?

CONCLUSION

The Song of Solomon is a beautiful picture of love, and it can teach us much about the fulfillment and joy that marriage can bring.

NOTES

DISCOVERY

Book I of The Psalms



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Psalms 1:1 through 41:13

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“The LORD is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him.” (Psalm 28:7)

BACKGROUND

The Book of Psalms contains 150 chapters which are divided into five sections, or books. This lesson focuses on Book I, which encompasses Psalms 1-41. All the psalms in this section are attributed to David except three: Psalms 1, 10, and 33.

Book I was probably the first official psalter of Israel (the compendium of the nation’s lyrical songs, hymns, and prayers). The other sections, added later, were written over about one thousand years between the time of Moses (approximately 1520 B.C.) until after the return of the Southern Kingdom from Babylonian captivity (approximately 445 B.C.). In the records of David’s era found in the Chronicles, there is frequent mention of sacred music and song being part of Israel’s worship. (For example, see 2 Chronicles 7:6 and 35:15.) Bible scholars agree that most of the psalms likely were sung for some period of time before they were added into the psalter.

Most of the psalms in Book I are personal in nature. They are presented in no particular order. While some relate to specific events in the life of David, even those are not arranged in a chronological progression.

Psalm 1 offers a prelude to the whole collection in Book I. It may have been composed for that purpose, but whether or not that is the case, the first psalm does provide a foundation for all the psalms that follow.

God’s provision of a Savior for His people is a recurring theme throughout the Book of Psalms, and many instances are found in this section. Psalm 2 portrays the Messiah’s triumph and kingdom; this psalm is quoted or alluded to in the New Testament at least eighteen times—more than any other in this section. Psalm 16:8-11 foreshadows Christ’s death and resurrection. Psalm 22 alludes to the suffering Savior on the Cross and presents detailed prophecies of the crucifixion, all of which were fulfilled perfectly. Psalm 34 prophesies that the Messiah’s bones would not be broken, and Psalm 40 relates that He came to do His Father’s will. (While Psalm 23, “The Shepherd

Psalm,” is a part of Book I, it will be studied as a separate lesson.)

Jewish tradition correlates the five sections of the Book of Psalms with the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible, which were authored by Moses), so Book I is called the “Genesis” section. The divine name mainly used within this section is “Jehovah” (LORD).

QUESTIONS

1. Although Psalm 1 may or may not have been specifically written as an introduction to the whole collection of psalms, it sets the tone for them. What is the primary contrast developed in this psalm?

2. Several psalms in Book I begin with the author conveying distress and helplessness, and yet end on a positive note of confident joy and victory. Sometimes this change takes place between one verse and the next! For example, the transition occurs at verse 8 in Psalm 6, at verse 5 in Psalm 13, and at verse 6 in Psalm 28. Why do you think the psalmist’s perspective shifted in these examples?

3. Psalm 7 is a song of lament written by David regarding those who had falsely accused him. While the identity of Cush the Benjamite (named in the title) cannot be assuredly stated, he probably was a cohort of Saul who made slanderous accusations against David. How did the psalmist respond to these falsehoods? What can we learn from how he handled the situation?

4. In Psalm 19:7-9, six different words or short phrases are used to refer to the whole body of Scriptural truth. These six words are followed by six descriptors (adjectives). What are the six words and their corresponding adjectives?

5. Psalm 22, which is sometimes referred to as “The Crucifixion Psalm,” is an example of a Messianic psalm. In it, David prophetically described the Messiah’s death on the Cross. When Jesus was on the Cross, He spoke the words of verse 1 (see Mark 15:34). What are some other verses in this psalm that refer to Christ the Sin-bearer as He suffered upon the Cross?

6. In Psalm 26:2, David asked the Lord to examine him, and to try (examine or investigate) his “reins” (innermost parts; affections, motives, thoughts) and his heart. Why should we follow the psalmist’s example and ask God to search our hearts?

7. Psalm 38 bears the superscription “A Psalm of David, to bring to remembrance,” and is classified as a penitential psalm. According to verses 3-4, what was the cause of David’s obvious physical, emotional, and spiritual sufferings? In his desperate state, what does verse 18 tell us he resolved to do?

8. The timeless principles recorded in the Psalms are why people in every era have turned to this book for comfort and encouragement. Careful reading reminds us how near the Lord really is, and how quickly He meets us when we reach out to Him. What verse in Book I particularly spoke to you, and why?

CONCLUSION

The Psalms are beautiful because they are so personal. Every man, woman, and child can relate to them in some degree, and find comfort in them. While the Psalms are the experiences of humanity expressed in writing, we also see in them how man is affected by a holy God.

NOTES

DISCOVERY

The Shepherd's Psalm



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Psalm 23:1-6

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want.”
(Psalm 23:1)

BACKGROUND

Psalm 23, frequently referred to as “The Shepherd Psalm,” is one of the most well-known passages in all of Scripture. Bible scholars and believers through the ages have acclaimed its inspiration, literary beauty, and depth of spiritual insight, viewing it as unexcelled in religious literature. Authored by David, this psalm evidences both the psalmist’s early vocation as a shepherd and his close personal relationship with God.

There is no indicator of exactly when in David’s life the psalm was composed. Christian writer F. B. Meyer wrote, “There is no question as to who wrote it—David’s autograph is on every verse. But when and where did it first utter itself upon the ear of man? Was it sung first amid the hills of Bethlehem, as the sheep were grazing over the wolds, dotting them like chalk-stones? Or was it poured first upon the ear of the moody king, whose furrowed brow made so great a contrast to the fresh and lovely face of the shepherd lad, who was ‘of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to?’ It may have been. But there is a strength, a maturity, a depth which are not wholly compatible with tender youth, and seem rather to betoken the touch of the man who has learned good by knowing evil, and who, amid the many varied experiences of human life, has fully tested the shepherd graces of the Lord of whom he sings.”¹

One outstanding feature of this psalm is the skillful use of contrasted imagery. David’s words describe both pastoral peace and passage through peril, the potential of evil and the prospect of good. Through these six verses, the concept of the complete supply of every need is developed. The psalmist concludes his beautiful meditation with the thought that after a lifetime filled with goodness and mercy, he will dwell forever in the presence of God.

Three thousand years have passed since the sweet singer of Israel first sang this psalm about the shepherd care of God. However, it is still traditionally sung by Jews in Hebrew at their Sabbath meal on Saturday afternoon.

QUESTIONS

1. The first words of this beautiful psalm are “The LORD is my shepherd.” The word translated “LORD” in this passage refers to the self-existent nature of God, the great I AM who is unchangeable and all-powerful. How do you think this understanding of God’s nature enabled the psalmist to state the remainder of that verse, “I shall not want” (suffer deprivation), with such profound assurance?

2. In verse 2, David said that his Shepherd “maketh me to lie down in green pastures” and “leadeth me beside the still waters.” Personalize this portion of the psalm, and write a brief description of how the Good Shepherd accomplishes this in your life.

3. The psalmist went on to assert, “He restoreth my soul” (verse 3). One meaning of the word translated *restore* is “to refresh.” We are well acquainted with the need for regular restoration and refreshment of our physical bodies. In this verse, however, David said that his *soul* was restored—a statement that points to spiritual restoration and refreshment. How does God provide for that need in our lives?

4. In the second part of verse 3, the psalmist stated, “He leadeth me in the paths of righteousness for his name’s sake.” Two individuals are mentioned in this verse: “He” and “me.” The role of the Shepherd is stated— He leads. What action is required of us, as sheep of the Good Shepherd? What steps can we take to make sure we do our part successfully?

5. Verse 4 is probably one of the most familiar in all of Scripture. Why was the psalmist able to face the prospect of walking through the valley of the shadow of death with such assurance?

6. In David’s day, the shepherd’s rod and staff referred to in verse 4 served multiple functions. It could be used to defend the sheep from predators, guide the flock by gentle nudges, extricate wandering animals from peril, or correct a wayward sheep. Given those uses, why do you think the psalmist referred to the rod as a source of “comfort”?

7. In verse 5, the setting of this psalm transitions from the pasture to the home, and from the Shepherd to the Divine Host who presides at a feast where David is an honored guest. (Anointing a guest with oil was done at banquets in David’s day as a mark of hospitality and honor.) This verse contains the psalm’s only reference to the enemies who arrayed

themselves against David at various times in his life. The psalmist seems to be saying, “I am not only Jehovah’s sheep, but also His beloved companion and guest, and that fact is apparent even to my opponents.” Based on this word picture, what conclusion can we draw about what our attitude should be toward those who oppose us?

8. David closed his beautiful psalm by stating that his cup was running over—an expressive metaphor describing God’s fullness and blessing—and then declaring that the goodness and mercy of God would follow him “all the days of my life.” The word *all* in that phrase is fully encompassing. Consider what you know of events in David’s life. What were some of the types of “days” he experienced? What does this teach us about God’s presence in our daily lives?

CONCLUSION

When considering how simply Psalm 23 shows God’s care, protection, and love for us, it is no mystery that it is one of the most frequently recited, referenced, and memorized groups of verses in all of Scripture.

NOTES

DISCOVERY

Book II of The Psalms



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Psalms 42:1 through 72:20

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore will not we fear, though the earth be removed, and though the mountains be carried into the midst of the sea.” (Psalm 46:1-2)

BACKGROUND

Psalm 42 begins the second book (or subdivision) of the Book of Psalms, a collection of thirty-one chapters which ends with Psalm 72. Bible scholars think that Book II was compiled primarily during the reign of Solomon (970 B.C. to 931 B.C.), and possibly was added to the official worship collection during the reign of Hezekiah or Josiah.

David wrote the vast majority of psalms included in Book I, and eighteen in this second section are credited to him. One is attributed to Solomon, and the remaining psalms in this group are credited to the “sons of Korah,” who were Temple musicians and assistants.

These psalms were used in the Tabernacle and Temple services. In some cases, portions of the titles relate to how they were presented musically. For example, the word *Shoshannim* (a word that literally means “lilies”), which appears in the titles of Psalms 45, 60, and 69, may have referred to a specific melody, to a lily-shaped straight trumpet, or to a six-stringed instrument typically used to accompany the song. The word *Alamoth*, in the superscription of Psalm 46, can be translated as “young woman,” and probably indicates that the psalm was to be sung by a high voice or played upon a high-pitched instrument. Psalm 55 is designated as a *Maschil* (an “instructional” song) to be played by the *Neginoth* or “stringed instruments.”

With Jewish tradition correlating the five sections of the Book of Psalms to the first five books of the Bible, this grouping is called the “Exodus” section. Just as Exodus describes the bondage and deliverance of Israel, many of these psalms describe the nation as ruined and then calling out to God for deliverance. Psalm 42 sets the scene by crying out for God’s presence in a dry wilderness experience; many of the following psalms relate how God is able to rescue His people.

The divine name predominantly used in Book II is *El* or *Elohim* (God).

QUESTIONS

1. Psalm 42 may have been written by David during his flight from Absalom, when he took refuge in Mahanaim (see 2 Samuel 17:24). Whatever the exact setting, the psalmist’s circumstances clearly prevented his attendance at public worship, and he had a strong desire to feel the presence of God among those with whom he once had worshipped. In verses 1-2, what metaphor or word picture did David use to describe his longing for God?

2. While Psalm 45 is a wedding song (“a song of loves”) which was composed to celebrate the king’s wedding, it is also Messianic in scope as it includes a prophetic allusion to the identity of the King in verses 6-8. Given that, who does the bride represent, and what is the bride instructed to do?

3. Psalm 46 is an expression of confidence in God after a miraculous deliverance. It may have been composed following Israel’s defeat of Assyria (see 2 Kings 19:35-36). Three times the author referred to a “refuge” (verses 1, 7, and 11). We may never face a great invading army, but we may well face life circumstances that cause us to long for a place of refuge. What might some of those circumstances be? How will looking to God as our refuge give us comfort in such times?

4. One of the clearest views in the Old Testament of sin and its remedy is found in Psalm 51. In it, we read of David's response after Nathan the prophet confronted him regarding his sin with Bathsheba and his subsequent murder of Bathsheba's husband. What steps did David take, and what attitude of heart did he exhibit that eventually brought about restoration?

5. David wrote Psalm 55, a psalm of lament, during the time when his son Absalom was attempting to take his throne. Verses 12-14 reveal that David's pain was profound because he had been betrayed by a confidant and fellow-worshiper of God. This was likely Ahithophel, David's trusted counselor, who secretly advised Absalom regarding David's overthrow (see 2 Samuel 15:12). According to verse 22, what is the appropriate action when we suffer hurt or betrayal?

6. Many of the psalms offer praise to God for His mighty works in nature. That is true of Psalm 65, a composition of David. Addressed to the chief Musician, this song was probably sung during harvest time. Looking at verses 6-13, in what specific aspects of nature did God reveal His awesome power?

7. The short hymn of praise found in Psalm 67 is separated into three parts by the refrain, "Let all the people praise thee." The first section, verses 1-2, asks God to grant favor to Israel so surrounding nations would come to know His "saving health" (or salvation). The second part looks to the future, calling the nations of the earth to be glad because God will "judge the people righteously, and govern the nations upon earth" (verse 4). In the third section, which begins with verse 7, the psalmist continues the thought by stating that "all the ends of the earth shall fear him." When will this amazing event occur?

8. Psalm 71 records the recollections and prayers of an aged man who had experienced God's sustaining help in years gone by, and who was entreating God for continuing help in the twilight years of life. In the first section of the psalm, verses 1-8, the psalmist combined a cry to God with an affirmation of trust and remembrance of how God had been a strong refuge in all of his life. According to verse 14, what was his goal in his remaining time on earth?

CONCLUSION

Although David went through difficult times, he found refuge in God and was able to rejoice in the God of his salvation. The same can be true of us.

NOTES

DISCOVERY

Book III of The Psalms



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Psalms 73:1 through 89:52

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“For the LORD God is a sun and shield: the LORD will give grace and glory: no good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.” (Psalm 84:11)

BACKGROUND

Book III consists of Psalms 73 through 89. The majority of them (Psalms 73 through 83) are attributed to Asaph, a priest from the tribe of Levi who served in Jerusalem as the chief worship leader during David’s reign, throughout the reign of Solomon, and into the reign of Rehoboam. He probably composed much of the music for David’s psalms; Ezra 2:41 identifies him as the ancestor of the Temple singers. According to Bible scholars, during David’s time several “guilds” were established to train musicians to carry on the musical traditions established by Asaph and others. Of the remaining psalms in this section, three are attributed to the “sons of Korah” (likely a family of Temple singers), David wrote Psalm 86, Heman the Ezraite wrote Psalm 88, and Ethan the Ezraite wrote Psalm 89.

The psalms in this section have been classified in various ways but some of the common groupings are: alphabetic or acrostic psalms, hallelujah psalms, historical psalms, imprecatory (invoking vengeance) psalms, Messianic psalms, penitential psalms, songs of ascent or degrees (sung by pilgrims on the way to Jerusalem), psalms of lament, and psalms of thanksgiving. Each of the major classifications is represented in this collection except for penitential.

As stated in previous lessons, Jewish tradition compares the five sections of the Book of Psalms to the first five books of the Bible. Book III has clear similarities to Leviticus in theme and scope. The purpose of Leviticus was to guide the people in their relationship with a holy God, and many of the psalms in this book focus on worship of God, His sovereignty, and His faithfulness.

The divine title primarily used in this section is *El* or *Elohim* (God), the first name for God used in Scripture (Genesis 1:1).

QUESTIONS

1. Psalm 73 opens with Asaph’s comments on a perplexing subject which is also addressed in Psalms 37 and 49 and the Book of Job: How can our all-powerful God be good and yet allow the righteous to suffer while

the wicked seem to prosper? According to verses 16-17, what caused Asaph to change his viewpoint?

2. Psalm 75:2, 7 and Psalm 82:1, 8 refer to God in His capacity as the Sovereign Judge. What one word do you think best describes the nature of God’s judgment? In what ways does knowledge of God’s ultimate judgment affect us as believers?

3. In Psalm 78, Asaph pleaded with the people to pay close attention as he recounted Israel’s history and made known the “dark sayings” (parables) of ancient wisdom imparted by Israel’s forefathers. He stressed that each generation must pass on God’s commandments to the next generation. Based on verses 6-8, list at least three reasons why this should be done.

4. Psalms 74 and 79 are companion psalms which lament the destruction of Jerusalem. They reflect the horror the inhabitants of Israel felt as their territorial integrity was violated and their holy places desecrated. According to Psalm 74:1 and Psalm 79:8-9, what did the writer do in the midst of such devastation, loss, and outrage? What can we learn from this about how to handle our times of trial?

DISCOVERY

Book IV of The Psalms



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Psalms 90:1 through 106:48

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“As for man, his days are as grass: as a flower of the field, so he flourisheth. For the wind passeth over it, and it is gone; and the place thereof shall know it no more. But the mercy of the LORD is from everlasting to everlasting upon them that fear him, and his righteousness unto children’s children.”

(Psalm 103:15-17)

BACKGROUND

Psalm 90 begins Book IV of the Psalms, which continues through Psalm 106 and includes both the royal praise psalms (95-100) and the historical psalms (104-106), as well as others. This cluster of seventeen psalms is the shortest of the five sections in the Book of Psalms. Collected about two to three hundred years after the first three books, it probably was added during the time when Israel returned to the land under Ezra (458 B.C.) and Nehemiah (445 B.C.). Only seven psalms in the group are titled, and all are anonymous except for Psalm 90 (ascribed to Moses) and Psalms 101 and 103, which were written by David.

According to its superscription, Psalm 90—the first psalm in this section—is a prayer of Moses. This makes it the oldest in the entire Book of Psalms, as none of the other psalms were written prior to the time of David. It is the only psalm ascribed to the great leader of Israel who delivered God’s chosen people from bondage in Egypt. Since the psalm is primarily a plea for God to restore the Israelites to favor, it likely was composed as the forty years of wandering in the wilderness came to a close. The psalm emphasizes the brevity of human life, and for that reason, it is often included in funeral programs.

Psalms 93 through 99 are considered by Bible scholars to be prophetic, foretelling some of the works of the coming Messiah.

According to the Jewish tradition, this fourth book compares to Moses’ fourth book, the Book of Numbers. These psalms frequently highlight Israel’s failure and time spent in the wilderness, echoing the theme of the Book of Numbers. The Book of Numbers deals with Israel’s relationship to other nations, and Book IV also alludes to God’s Kingdom in relation to other nations. The most frequently used name for God in this section is *Jehovah* (LORD).

QUESTIONS

1. In Psalm 90:12, we are admonished to “number our days.” What do you think this phrase means, and what will numbering our days accomplish?

2. Psalm 91 gives many wonderful promises to those who dwell “in the secret place of the most High” (verse 1). Define this secret place in your own words.

3. Psalm 95:7-11 is a warning not to harden our hearts as the Children of Israel did in the wilderness. How would you describe a hard heart? How can we avoid this condition?

4. There are many ways we can praise and honor God. What method of glorifying God is identified in Psalm 96:3? What are some other ways we can glorify Him?



The Great Psalm

SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Psalm 119:1-176

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“For ever, O LORD, thy word is settled in heaven. Thy faithfulness is unto all generations: thou hast established the earth, and it abideth.”
(Psalm 119:89-90)

BACKGROUND

Psalm 119, often referred to as “The Great Psalm,” is the longest chapter in the Bible; it contains 176 verses. The author is unknown, but most Bible scholars credit it either to David or the prophet Jeremiah, based upon textual references to kings, reproach, enemies, etc. Dating the psalm’s composition to the time of the Babylonian captivity would point toward Jeremiah as the author; however, the context allows for an earlier date as well, making David’s authorship a possibility that must also be considered.

In the original Hebrew, Psalm 119 is presented in the form of an acrostic, or alphabetical writing. While it is one of several acrostics in the Book of Psalms (others are Psalms 9 and 10 combined, along with Psalms 25, 34, 37, 111, 112, and 145), this is the longest and most intricate of these compositions. There are twenty-two letters in the Hebrew alphabet, and Psalm 119 is divided into twenty-two, eight-verse sections. Each of these twenty-two sections is prefaced with a successive letter of the Hebrew alphabet. In the original Hebrew, that letter begins the first word of each of the eight verses within the section.

The clear theme of Psalm 119 is the Law of the Lord and its vital ministry in the spiritual life of believers. The word translated *law* is *torah*—a word which has a much broader meaning in Hebrew than in English. It refers to the will of God as it was made known to Israel, and has the sense of “teaching” or “instruction.” A unique feature of this psalm is that all but a very few of the verses contain at least one reference to the Law of the Lord. The multifaceted manner in which the truths regarding God’s instruction are presented reflects the importance of integrating Scripture into every part of life and community.

QUESTIONS

1. What words describing the Law of the Lord are used in the first section, titled Aleph? (Psalm 119:1-8)

2. In Psalm 119:2, the psalmist stated that those who seek God with their “whole heart” will be blessed. Contemporary thinking views the heart as the seat of emotions. However, in the Bible the word *heart* is a far more comprehensive term which encompasses three key aspects of who we are: the intellect, the emotions, and the will. Given that description, what do you think embracing the Word with our “whole heart” might look like in everyday life?

3. In Psalm 119:11, the psalmist stated, “Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.” How will hiding the Word in our hearts help us not to sin?

4. During the period of history when the psalms were composed, history and religious traditions were passed on orally. For this reason, devotional truths were often presented through music (as with many of the psalms) or as an acrostic (as with Psalm 119), as these methods promoted memorization and retention of God’s Word among the Hebrew people. What are some strategies that can help us memorize passages from the Bible?

DISCOVERY

Book V of The Psalms



SOURCE FOR QUESTIONS

Psalms 107:1 through 150:6

KEY VERSE FOR MEMORIZATION

“Let them praise the name of the LORD: for his name alone is excellent; his glory is above the earth and heaven.” (Psalm 148:13)

BACKGROUND

Psalms 107 through 150 make up the fifth and final section of the Book of Psalms. Many of the forty-four psalms in Book V are thought to have been written after the Babylonian exile; Bible scholars concur that the final psalms may have been written more than a thousand years later than the earliest one.

Most of the psalms in this part of the Book of Psalms are considered liturgical in nature, meaning they were designed for use in public worship. Fifteen of them are ascribed to David, one to Solomon, and the rest remain anonymous.

The longest chapter in the Bible, Psalm 119, is in this grouping, as is the shortest chapter, Psalm 117. Psalm 117 is also the middle chapter of the entire Bible, the very center of 1,189 chapters spanning Genesis 1 through Revelation 22. Of the 31,173 verses contained in the Bible, Psalm 118:8 is the middle verse.

According to Jewish tradition, Book V relates to the Book of Deuteronomy since it speaks of a new beginning in the Promised Land. These psalms express the thoughts, prayers, and experiences of the captives at their return to Jerusalem. *Jehovah* is used as the divine name in this last section of the Book of Psalms.

QUESTIONS

1. Book V begins with Psalm 107, which centers on divine intervention in the affairs of men. Verses 4 through 32 give four examples of troubles in which man could find himself: homelessness and wandering (verse 4), imprisonment (verse 10), life-threatening affliction (verses 17-18), and physical peril (verses 25-27). How did the individuals react in each situation, and what did God do in response?

2. Psalm 110 is one of the most outstanding Messianic and prophetic passages in the Old Testament, and is quoted more often in the New Testament than any other psalm. What roles of the Messiah are alluded to in verses 2, 4, 5, and 6?

3. Psalms 113-118 are liturgical or Hallel (praise) psalms that were a part of the great annual festivals of Israel. These particular psalms were also sung in the home during the Passover meal. Psalm 113 opens with the Hebrew word *hallelu-Yah*, which means “Praise the Lord!” God is to be praised because of His glory, greatness, and mercy. What groups of people are especially noted in Psalm 113:7-9 as being the recipients of God’s mercy? What principle(s) does this teach us?

4. Bible scholars indicate that Psalm 118 was sung by the restored exiles when they laid the foundation of the second Temple in Jerusalem (see Ezra 3:10-11). It is also thought to have been among the concluding hymns sung at Christ’s last supper with His disciples, before He went into the Garden of Gethsemane to pray. In verses 5-13, the psalmist focused on his trust in God. What examples did he give of ways the Lord had sustained him? In verses 8-9, what conclusion did he draw regarding the security God offers?

