

The Poetical books - Psalms to Ecclesiastes:

Tonight's question: Who are the authors of these 3 books and of all the Psalms, what is your favourite one and why? (If you have a favourite part of Proverbs or Ecclesiastes that is fine as well!)?

The second division in this "experience section" of Old Testament are the books of Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The Book of Job was about the **needs of the spirit of man** - in other words the "poetry of the spirit" and is about the protest of the spirit of man in the face of suffering.

In this group of 3 books we have the "songs of the soul." The soul of man is made up of three aspects or parts: the **emotions**, the **intelligence** and the **will**.

- The book of **Psalms** records the *emotional* responses to man's soul to circumstances.
- The book of **Proverbs** is man's *intelligence* at work recording the experiences of life.
- In the book of **Ecclesiastes** the *will* of man is expressed.

Psalms is the book where every *emotional* experience of life is reflected. Psalms is intended to express every possible aspect of human emotion.

Psalms is itself divided into **five** books. Each book of Psalms ends with the words "Amen" except the last book, which ends with the words "Praise the Lord!" [**Check Psalm 41, Psalm 72, Psalm 89 and Psalm 106**]

In what section of the Bible do you find 5 steps or sections?

- If **Genesis** is the book of human need, then the first book of Psalms - **Psalms 1 to 41** - would have the great expressions of the need of the human heart. A good example of this is of course **Psalm 23 (Verses 1-3)** which shows the need of the heart for a shepherd.
- The book of **Exodus** is the book of grace, God's response to the need of the human heart. The second book of Psalms runs from **Psalms 42 to 72** - and shows us God's redeeming grace. [**Read Psalm 46:1-3**]
- **Leviticus** is the book of worship, where man is told how to live in close fellowship with a living God. **Psalms 73-89** are the third book of Psalms. These Psalms show reverence and express the majesty of God. If you have a desire worship God then the Psalms will give expression to that need. [**Read Psalm 76:4-9**]
- **Numbers** is the book of wandering, of the desert experience or the "ups and downs" of living. The fourth book of Psalms - **Psalms 90 - 106** shows alternate victory and defeat of life. [**Read Psalm 97:12 for joy, and Psalm 102:1-3 for the opposite experience**]
- **Deuteronomy**, the final book of the Pentateuch, is a book of helplessness and dependent obedience. The fifth book of Psalms - **Psalms 107 to Psalm 150** - shows us of humble obedience and praise. [**Psalm 139:23-24 is a perfect example**]

So there are the five books of Psalms and all the expressions of the heart are found reflected in the Psalms.

Proverbs is the next "*experience*" book. It is the expression of the *intelligence* of man guided by divine wisdom. It is a very simple book and begins with a introduction explaining why it was written. **[Read Proverbs 1:1-6]** Then the verse after that, shows us the secret of it all **[Read Proverbs 1:7]**

Proverbs is a series of discourses on wisdom given by a father to a son. *Ten times* in this section the following words are used: "*Hear, my son...*"

The proverbs begin with:

- The child in the home...
- Then the young man in the busy streets of the city...
 - The proverbs teach him how to choose and make friends...
 - then show him some of the perils which are at work to destroy his life...
 - and to help him to discover some of the forces which will make him strong.

There are two collections of Proverbs: **Chapters 10 to 24** and **Chapters 25 to 31**. **Chapters 25 to 31** are the proverbs of Solomon which were copied by the scribes of King Hezekiah. The last chapter of Proverbs is one of the most magnificent descriptions of a perfect wife.

The Book of **Ecclesiastes** - which means "*The Preacher*" is the protest of man's *will* against the monotony and emptiness of life. In this book Solomon, the writer, deliberately sets out to answer these questions:

- *Can life be satisfying apart from God?*
- *Can the things found under the sun satisfy the human heart?*

Ecclesiastes starts off by investigating *knowledge*, and Solomon concludes that the result was nothing but emptiness - vanity. Solomon then tries *pleasure*, and again says the result was all vanity. Then Solomon tried *wealth*, and he found that great amounts of money gave a man no more than poverty - it was all emptiness and vanity. Then he tried *philosophy* as a means of facing life with its various problems, seeking answers to the mystery of death, and the inexplicable tragedies of sin. His whole conclusion was, "*It is all vanity.*"

[Read Ecclesiastes 11:9] This remarkable statement is addressed particularly to young people and should be a warning for us all. Solomon's final conclusion is in **Ecclesiastes 12:13**.

Most of the translations translate this statement as being "*the whole duty of man.*", but the word *duty* is not in the original Hebrew. Actually the proper translation is "*This is the whole of man*". *In other words, there is nothing which makes man complete except God.*

Song of Solomon is the last of the poetical or "*experience*" books. This is the least

understood and most neglected of all the books of the Bible - probably because it is the expression of the ideal for the *human body - the poetry of the physical body*. It is book about the perfection of bodily grace and love. Therefore it has been regarded by a lot of Christians as shameful - as the human body is thought to be shameful. *The human body is not shameful - it is only its abuse which is shameful*. So the Song of Solomon declares that the purest expression of love - if it is really pure - is bodily. He is declaring God's intention, that there is no more beautiful sight to a man than the beautiful body of a woman, and there is no higher expression of handsomeness to a woman, than the body of a man.

So this is why this book is so difficult to read, because it seems to be a reflection of the sordid, pornographic literature of our day. But as we read it through, we catch a very definite note of purity and wholesomeness about it. It puts bodily life in proper perspective.

The story of the book is the story of young maiden whose family has a farm in the north country of Israel. She has two brothers and two sisters, and tends the flocks and works in the vineyard. One day she looks up to see a handsome stranger, a shepherd, staring at her. She is a bit disturbed by his gaze, but he says to her, "You are all fair, my love; there is no flaw in you." They establish a friendship, and they become very close. Then he suddenly leaves, but before he goes he promises that he will return.

She thinks about him constantly and dreams of him and longs for him. Then one day there is a great commotion on the farm. She looks out, and there is the royal carriage of the king and to the amazement of everyone, the king sends his riders to her house with the message that he desires to see her. She comes out, shy and afraid, and is brought to the royal carriage. When she looks inside she sees that the king is none other than her shepherd lover. He takes her away to the palace, and they "live happily ever after".

In the Song of Solomon you should be able to see something familiar: *the wonderful story of God's redeeming grace to man*. We are that maiden, and Jesus is the great King who has come down - in disguise - to show His love for us and has gone away, but He will come again for His Bride. Until Jesus returns we experience the expectation of His coming and a yearning for His presence. **[Read Ephesians 5:25-27]**

Next time we will start to look at the first of the "prophetic" books of the Bible. In the prophetic books we will discover the mighty promises of God. Your home work is to answer the question: What is a promise?