

Lesson 5

Poetical Books and Gospels

Now that you are familiar with the history of the Old Testament, the rest of the books are easier to understand. At the end of the Old Testament are the books of prophecy — books that proclaim God's message to an erring people along with books that foretell the future. All of these books are named for their author, except for Lamentations, which was written by Jeremiah. In your last lesson, you learned where these books fit into the history of Israel.

In between the historical books and the prophetic books are the poetical books. They are written in the poetry of the day, which was more concerned with the rhyming of thought than the rhyming of words. You must understand that the poetical books were not designed to tell an orderly story (although Job does), but to express the emotions and understanding of particular people at particular times.

The Poetical Books

The Poetical Books comprise Job, Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes. The book of Job (pronounced with a long "o" sound) is perhaps the oldest of all the Old Testament books. It addresses the age-old question, "Why do bad things happen to good people?" In Job's day (possibly around the time just after Jacob and Esau), the only answer to that question was, "Because the good people aren't really good." They believed that all hardship was the result of sin and that the truly righteous would receive only blessing from the hand of God.

Read Job 1:1-2:13 and 42:7-17. Who caused Job's suffering? Why did God allow him to suffer?

The Psalms ("songs") have various authors, but most were written by David, both before and after he became king over Israel. While many express praise to God for His faithfulness, others request vengeance on enemies and vindication for self. We must remember that the psalms are sincere expressions from the hearts of those who loved

God and hated all who were opposed to Him. They were not meant to be doctrinal statements. Read the following psalms and write down the theme of each.

Psalm 1

Psalm 8

Psalm 23

Psalm 46

Psalm 51

Psalm 91

Psalm 100

Psalm 139

Psalm 150

The book of Proverbs is a collection of tidbits of wisdom, mostly from Solomon, the third king of Israel (David's son). Many of the proverbs are generalizations, describing what the author sees happening in the world around him. Not all proverbs should be taken as invariable truths or promises to be claimed; they merely state what is generally true. Look up some of the following words of wisdom from Proverbs and write down the principle you learn from them.

Proverbs 2:3-5

Proverbs 6:27-28

Proverbs 10:19

Proverbs 15:1

Proverbs 16:3

Proverbs 16:18

Proverbs 20:1

Proverbs 22:1

Proverbs 29:11

Proverbs 31:30

Ecclesiastes was also written by Solomon, but not during the heights of his glory. Near the end of Solomon's life, his many wives led him astray, and he followed after other gods. In this book, Solomon realizes that life "under the sun" (that is, apart from God) is meaningless. Nothing satisfies apart from the Lord.

According to Ecclesiastes 12:13, what was Solomon's conclusion?

The last of the poetical books is Song of Songs, or "The Song of Solomon" as it is commonly titled. The book describes the intimacy of marital love and the absolute devotion necessary to reach such a level of intimacy. Christians through the ages have seen in Song of Songs an illustration of Christ's love for the church, the "bride of Christ" (see Ephesians 5:25-33 and Revelation 19:7 and 21:2).

The Intertestamental Period

Between the Old Testament and the New Testament is a 400-year period often called the "silent years." There were many important developments during this period that paved the way for Christ's coming. As the Old Testament came to a close, the Medo-Persian empire was the dominant world empire. But in 333 B.C., the Persian empire gave way to the Greek empire under Alexander the Great. Alexander's goal was to Hellenize the entire world (to make it conform to Greek culture). Largely due to his attempts, the entire known world became Greek-speaking. Around 250 B.C., the Old Testament was translated into Greek (a book known as the Septuagint). As you may already know, the New Testament was written almost entirely in the Greek language, which would have been understood by almost everyone by the time the New Testament was written.

Eventually Greek rule gave way to the Romans (Palestine, the land of Canaan, was conquered in 63 B.C.). The political unrest and oppression of the Jews that resulted made the people yearn for a deliverer, the Messiah (Hebrew for "the anointed one"; translated as "Christ" in the Greek), who would free them from Roman rule. God used the Romans to pave the way for Jesus Christ through the "Roman Peace," an enforced peace which allowed for free movement within the empire, and through the extensive Roman road system, a network of 250,000 miles of roads that made travel throughout the empire possible.

During the time that the Jews were exiled in Babylon, the synagogue form of worship was developed. Since sacrifices could only be made at the temple in Jerusalem, synagogues were created for preaching and prayer. Wherever the Jews were scattered, this new form of worship went with them. The synagogue form of worship helped preserve Judaism during the turbulent intertestamental period and also created ready-made preaching sites for the apostles in the New Testament.

Along with all these religious and cultural developments during the intertestamental period, there were also some social developments. Pharisees, who reinterpreted the Law to enable the Jews to live out their religion, became the legalists of the day. Their exacting

rules and regulations made religion more a matter of what one did than of the condition of one's heart, causing Jesus to condemn them as hypocrites many times in the Gospels. The Sadducees became the party who controlled the priesthood, the temple and the Sanhedrin (the Jewish ruling council that was developed during this time). Because they denied any teachings not expressly found in the Pentateuch, they were often at odds with the Pharisees.

The Gospels

Matthew, Mark, Luke and John, the first four books of the New Testament, are known as the Gospels, because they tell the "good news" of the life, death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. Each author writes to a different audience with varying purposes, so it is understandable that they do not all record the same events — they write from their own perspectives.

Matthew, the tax collector, wrote to a Jewish audience to try to convince them that Jesus was indeed the Messiah. He quotes the Old Testament or refers to it at least 47 times to show that Jesus was the fulfillment of everything written by the prophets. Mark, on the other hand, was writing to a Roman audience. His writing is action-packed — he only records four parables, but 20 miracles (enough proof to convince any unbelieving Roman). Whereas Matthew paints Jesus as a king, Mark describes Him as a servant. His purpose was to spur Christians on during times of persecution. Luke, a physician and the only Gentile writer of the New Testament, wrote to the Greeks. Since they were lovers of culture and poetry, Luke included several songs in the narrative of the birth of Christ. He also traced Jesus' lineage back to Adam, depicting Jesus as associated with all mankind, not just with the Jews. These first three gospels are called the "Synoptic Gospels" because of their "similar view."

The Gospel of John is altogether different. John, one of Jesus' closest disciples, wrote considerably later than the others and included discourses and events that specifically pointed to the fact that Jesus Christ was the Son of God — that He was, in fact, equal to, and co-eternal with, God. His audience was the whole world.

Look up the following verses and write down the purpose of each of the Gospel authors.

Matthew 5:17

Mark 10:45

Luke 1:1-4

John 20:30-31

Jesus Christ (God in human form) is the focal point of all four Gospels. They tell of His birth, His ministry, His death and His resurrection. According to the following verses, what were some of the events surrounding Jesus' birth and early years?

Luke 1:26-38

Matthew 1:18-25

Luke 2:1-20

Luke 2:21-40

Matthew 2:1-12

Matthew 2:13-23

Luke 2:41-52

According to Matthew 4:13-17, Mark 1:9-11; Luke 3:21 and John 1:31-34, what event marked the beginning of Jesus' public ministry at the age of 30? _____

Jesus' early ministry was primarily centered in the region of Galilee near Capernaum, a sizable town situated on the western side of the Sea of Galilee. Palestine (ancient Canaan) was divided into four regions at this time: Galilee in the north, Samaria in the upper central region, Judea in the area surrounding Jerusalem, and Idumea in the south. In His three and a half years of public ministry, Jesus also taught in the Decapolis and the region of Perea, both located on the eastern side of the Jordan River.

At the onset of His ministry, Jesus called 12 men to follow Him as His apostles ("messengers"). What were their names?

Luke 6:13-16

Look up the following passages and list some of the miracles Jesus performed during His ministry.

John 2:1-11

Matthew 8:5-17

Luke 7:11-17

Mark 4:35-41

Matthew 8:28-34

Luke 8:40-56

John 6:1-15

Matthew 14:24-36

Mark 9:2-8

John 9:1-42

John 11:1-46

Jesus' public ministry was a spectacular one, to say the least. He performed miracles everywhere He went: healing diseases, exorcising demons and even raising the dead. But the purpose of the miracles wasn't to impress the crowds or to amuse them; they were meant to confirm what Jesus said, to authenticate His message. And His teachings were even more amazing than His miracles! In the following verses, who did Jesus claim to be?

John 5:16-18

John 8:54-59; 18:5-6 (compare to Exodus 3:14)

John 10:25-33, 38

Jesus claimed to be equal with God by using the emphatic name that was revealed to Moses at the burning bush, "I Am." John's Gospel records seven "I Am" statements that further describe who this Jesus really was. Write them out below.

John 6:35

John 8:12

John 10:7-9

John 10:11, 14

John 11:25

John 14:6

John 15:1, 5

God's Word tells us that Jesus was God in human flesh. He came to die for the sins of the world — to offer Himself as that final sacrifice of atonement, bringing us back into fellowship with God. Jesus came for the sole purpose of redeeming, or saving, those who were lost. And so, the primary focus of His teaching was the "Kingdom of God," which can be used interchangeably with "salvation" or "eternal life." What did Jesus teach in these verses about the Kingdom of God?

Matthew 12:28b

Luke 17:20-21

Luke 18:17

John 17:3

Jesus often taught in parables, short stories designed to convey a deeper spiritual truth. In teaching about the Kingdom of God, Jesus wanted them to understand that it wasn't an earthly, political kingdom that the Jews needed. He described a different kind of

kingdom — one in which He would reign on the throne of their hearts. For centuries they believed that they would be heirs to the kingdom simply because they were part of the nation of Jews — they were God’s chosen people. Read the following parables. What do they teach about participation in the Kingdom of God?

Matthew 7:21-23

Matthew 21:33-43

Matthew 22:1-14

Matthew 25:1-13

Matthew 25:31-46

The Pharisees thought they had a corner on righteousness and that they, of all people, would surely be welcomed into the Kingdom of God. But Jesus taught that legalistic righteousness was not sufficient. According to Matthew 5:20, what must we do to enter the Kingdom of God?

Matthew 5-7 is known as the “Sermon on the Mount.” In it, Jesus describes the ethical demands of the Kingdom of God. This is the life He expects us to live as Christians. Jot down your insights from the following passages.

Matthew 5:3-12

Matthew 5:13-16

Matthew 5:21-42

Matthew 6:1-18

Matthew 6:19-34

Matthew 7:1-6

Matthew 7:7-29

In lesson 1, you looked up the verses that told of Jesus being the only way to enter the Kingdom of God, the only means of eternal life. There is no other way. It was this message that angered the Jewish leaders because it undermined their authority, prompting them to plot Jesus' death (see John 11:45-53). What had Jesus predicted about His death and resurrection?

John 2:18-22

John 12:23-33

Matthew 12:39-40

Matthew 16:21

Make a list of the events that took place during the week of Jesus' crucifixion.

John 12:1-8

John 12:12-19

Matthew 21:18-22

Mark 11: 15-19

John 12:37-50

Luke 22:1-6

Matthew 26:17-30

John 13:1-30

Luke 22:39-46

Luke 22:47-53

John 18:12-14, 19-24, 28-40

Luke 23:6-12

Matthew 26:57-68

Luke 22:54-62

All four Gospels record Jesus' crucifixion on a Roman cross. Although He was the pure and holy Son of God, He was rejected and killed by His own people. Death by crucifixion was exceptionally cruel and reserved for only the basest of criminals. Jesus' hands and feet were nailed in such a position as to make it almost impossible to breathe. But here, in what seemed like the moment of defeat, was Jesus' finest hour. When He cried out, "It is finished," in John 19:30, He was declaring that He had accomplished the work He came to do. Our sins were paid for! What happened at the moment of Jesus' death?

Matthew 27:51-54

The story of Jesus doesn't end with the crucifixion. If it did, what would be our present state according to 1 Corinthians 15:17?

The Gospels tell us that on the third day (in Jewish reckoning any portion of a day was counted as a day), the stone was rolled to reveal that Christ had risen from the dead. Read the account from each of the Gospels. To whom did Jesus appear after His resurrection?

John 20:10-18

Luke 24:13-35

Luke 24:36-43

John 20:26-29

John 21:1-24

1 Corinthians 15:3-8

What were Jesus' final instructions to His disciples before He was taken back up into heaven?

Matthew 28:16-20

Acts 1:3-9

Jesus' death, resurrection and ascension were not meant to be an ending — they marked the beginning of the Kingdom of God brought down to man. The provision had been made. Soon the power would be imparted to enable those who trusted in Christ to turn the world upside down with the message of the Gospel.