

ROAD TRIP 3



The Ultimate Road Trip Through the Bible

**RON
JONES**



The Ultimate
Road Trip Through
the Bible

ROAD TRIP 3
The Wisdom Books

RON JONES





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ROUTE 66: THE ULTIMATE ROAD TRIP THROUGH THE BIBLE

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Introduction

Welcome to the ultimate road trip through the Bible. Whether you are a seasoned student of the Holy Scriptures or picking up the best-selling book of all time for the first time, get ready for the ride of your life. As your driver along the biblical Route 66, I promise to watch my speed and obey most traffic laws. However, on this first road trip, be prepared. We will certainly encounter some road construction along the ancient paths.

The Bible is a collection of holy writ and divine books—sixty-six of them! There are thirty-nine books in the Old Testament and twenty-seven books in the New Testament. However, the Book of books is one story with one main character, the Christ who was to come in the Old Testament and the Christ who came, Jesus, in the New Testament. Therefore, along Route 66, I will make the Christ connection in each Old Testament book and point you to the Jesus juncture in each New Testament book. The Bible is all about Jesus Christ, God's one and only Son and our redeemer.

For a book that was written over the span of sixteen hundred years by forty different authors on three continents and in three different languages, the Bible possesses an amazing continuity. It is one of the arguments made for the Bible's divine inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16-17; 2 Peter 1:21). The human authors God chose to pen the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments vary significantly in their background, culture, education, occupation, social status, and ability. They were farmers, fishermen, priests, physicians, politicians, kings, and shepherds. God even used a tax collector to write a biography of his Son, Jesus.

Introduction

If you enjoy literature, you will love the Bible. Holy Scripture contains every form of literature known in academia, including poetry, proverb, history, narrative, law, biography, parable, prophetic, apocalyptic, gospel, and letter. Many colleges and universities offer a literature course on the Bible. What other book on the planet inspires people to study it for its literary genius alone?

God used visions and dreams, angels, clay tablets, burning bushes, face-to-face encounters, the spoken and written word, even the jawbone of a donkey to communicate with those He created in His image. He did so because He loves us and desires a relationship with us.

How does one explain how so many people over a long period of time could write about God, history, religious life, and more, and yet do so in perfect editorial harmony, each adding to the overall story? There is only one plausible explanation. The superintending mind of God inspired the writing of these books across many centuries and pieced them together like a jigsaw puzzle.

A well-respected Bible scholar named Norman Geisler writes, “Note the amazing unity. These sixty-six books unfold one continuous drama of redemption, paradise lost to paradise regained, creation to the consummation of all things. There is one central theme, the person of Jesus Christ. . . . There is one message: Humankind’s problem is sin, and the solution is salvation through Christ.”¹

Introduction

The Wisdom Books

Our third road trip along the biblical Route 66 focuses on five Old Testament Wisdom Books, which include Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. More than mere knowledge, wisdom is the ability to apply truth skillfully to life. Thus, Job is God's wisdom during times of pain and suffering. Psalms is God's wisdom for our vertical relationship with God, while Proverbs is divine wisdom for the life we live horizontally. Ecclesiastes is God's wisdom about the ultimate meaning of life. Finally, the Song of Solomon is God's wisdom about love, marriage, sex, and romantic relationships. This small library of divine wisdom is a treasury worth reading repeatedly.

As useful as this travel guide might be, my words are no replacement for reading the Bible itself. My prayer is that you will fall in love with the Bible as much as I have. More so, I pray that you will deeply desire a relationship with its Author. He wrote you a love letter with more than six hundred thousand words because He loves you more than you can imagine.

Are you ready to continue traveling on Route 66? Climb in, buckle up, and enjoy the ride on the ultimate road trip through the Bible.

DR. RON JONES

Virginia Beach, Virginia

July 2021

Job

WHY DO THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFER?

On November 5, 2006, a car was traveling recklessly near Lynchburg, Virginia. Simultaneously, Andy and Linda Barrick were driving home from church with their two children, Jen and Josh, when the drunk driver of the speeding car struck them head-on. Each member of the Barrick family sustained life-threatening injuries. Fifteen-year-old Jen was not expected to live through the night. However, God miraculously intervened. With traumatic brain injuries and multiple skull fractures, Jen lay in a coma for five weeks before she woke up and began her long recovery process.²

How can a loving God allow people that He created to endure suffering? That is a question for the ages. The problem of pain and suffering in the world presents an irreconcilable challenge to many people's faith. For some, this problem is personal not philosophical. Does the reality of pain and suffering stand in the way of your faith in God? If it does, you are not alone.



The Man from Uz

Welcome to the Old Testament book of Job. It should not surprise us that one of the Bible's oldest books addresses an age-old question about suffering. Job tells the story of a wealthy man who likely lived during the patriarchal period of Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and Joseph in the land of Uz, southeast of the Dead Sea (Lamentations 4:21). In a cosmic contest between God and Satan, Job loses his wealth, health, and family (1-2).

After Job affirms his faith in God (1:21, 2:9-10), he sits with his three friends—Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar—while they take turns debating the reasons why Job is suffering (3-38). A young man named Elihu joins in the conversation in chapter 32. Finally, God breaks His silence and answers Job out of the whirlwind, “Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge? Dress for action like a man; I will question you, and you make it known to me” (38:2-3). For the next several chapters, God takes Job on a tour of the universe and puts his human suffering into divine perspective (38-42).

While the problem of pain and suffering affects the world broadly, the book of Job answers the narrower question, “Why do the *righteous* suffer?” In other words, why do bad things happen to God's people? Job was a good man who received the Lord's highest commendation. God asks Satan, “Have you considered my servant Job? There is no one on earth like him; he is blameless and upright, a man who fears God and shuns evil” (1:8). Of all people,

CHRIST CONNECTION

Job proclaims, “My redeemer lives” (19:25), which points to Jesus Christ who is our risen Redeemer, Advocate, and Mediator.

BIG IDEA

Suffering requires the patience of faith.

MEMORY VERSE

“Though he slay me, I will hope in him; yet I will argue my ways to his face.”

JOB 13:15

AUTHOR and DATE

Uncertain
Uncertain



why would Job suffer?

Sin and the fallen world in which we live answers the broader question about pain and suffering. Suffering was never part of God's original plan. He is not a sadistic deity who enjoys inflicting pain on those created in His image. He is our heavenly Father, not a little boy who fries ants on the sidewalk with his magnifying glass. Nor is God the evil boy in the movie *Toy Story* who does horrid things to his toys.

However, God created us with free will. He knows that we will suffer the consequences of our poor moral choices and that such sinful choices have a ripple effect. One person's sinful choice affects another, and so on. Imagine billions of sinful people making selfish choices, generation after generation, and you begin to understand why there is so much pain and suffering in the world. Furthermore, in a fallen world, the whole creation groans (Romans 8:22). Even nature is hostile in a world broken by sin. As Milton said, we live in paradise lost, not paradise.

The skeptic still concludes that if God is powerful enough to prevent suffering but does not, then He must not care. Or, if God wants to prevent pain but cannot, then He is not all-powerful. The book of Job presents an alternative, a God who is both all-powerful and immensely compassionate but who allows suffering for His wise purposes, which mere humans with limited knowledge cannot comprehend.

The Accuser of the Saints

The book of Job opens with Satan, the accuser of the saints, in the presence of God.³ After Satan admits “going to and fro on the earth,” the Lord asks him to consider Job, a righteous man (1:8). Satan challenges the underlying assumption that Job fears God for



all the right reasons. “Does Job fear God for no reason? Have you not put a hedge around him and his house and all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his possessions have increased in the land. But stretch out your hand and touch all that he has, and he will curse you to your face” (1:9-11). God gives Satan the freedom to test Job.

First comes news that the Sabeans and the Chaldeans raided Job’s many livestock. Another reported that fire fell from heaven and burned up Job’s sheep and servants. Still, another brought the worst news Job could ever hear. All ten of Job’s children died in a tornado. How does a man of God respond to such news? Amazingly, the Bible says, “Then Job arose and tore his robe and shaved his head and fell on the ground and worshiped. And he said, ‘Naked I came from my mother’s womb, and naked shall I return. The Lord gave, and the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.’ In all this Job did not sin or charge God with wrong” (1:20-22).

Job’s terrible, horrible, no good, very bad day gets worse. Chapter 2 reveals a second interaction between God and Satan where the devil ups the ante. “‘Skin for skin! All that a man has he will give for his life. But stretch out your hand and touch his bone and his flesh, and he will curse you to your face.’ And the Lord said to Satan, “Behold, he is in your hand; only spare his life” (2:4-6). This time, Satan attacks Job “with loathsome sores from the sole of his foot to the crown of his head” (2:7). Job’s wife sees her pathetic husband scraping his sores and says, “‘Do you still hold fast your integrity? Curse God and die.’ But he said to her, ‘You speak as one of the foolish women would speak. Shall we receive good from God, and shall we not receive evil?’ In all this Job did not sin with his lips” (2:9-10). However, Job did curse the day he was born (3:1-26). Can you blame him?



The Consolation of Job's Friends

Seven characters appear in the book of Job: Job, Eliphaz the Temanite, Bildad the Shuhite, Zophar the Naamathite, Elihu, God, and Satan. The bulk of the book (3-37) contains counsel from three older men who heard of Job's troubles and traveled from a distance to console him (2:11-13). Although well-intended, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar sound like know-it-all's who lack compassion and empathy. Like Job, they are limited in their knowledge about life and theology. Moreover, their dogmatic rhetoric suggests they are blind to God's ways.

Job's friends have much in common, including a narrow theology that believes all calamity results from personal sin. In that way, they remind me of the disciples who asked Jesus, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?" (John 9:2). Like a trio of tenors in perfect harmony, Job's friends sing the same sorry song. Then, quickly, their consolation turns into polite contention. Sometimes their words are like arrows piercing Job's heart.

While similar in their philosophy of pain and suffering, each of Job's friends proposes their own unique angle on Job's angst. Following Job's initial lament (3:1-26), Eliphaz speaks first, perhaps because he is the oldest and perceived to be the wisest.⁴ Not surprisingly, he relies heavily on his personal life experience, using phrases like "as I have seen" and "as for me."

For example, with an air of politeness, Eliphaz quips, "As I have seen, those who plow iniquity and sow trouble reap the same" (4:8). In other words, "Job, you got yourself into this mess!" From his personal school of hard knocks, Eliphaz also shared, "Man is born for trouble as the sparks fly upward" (5:7). He is full of pithy phrases that post well on social media but lack theological depth. Besides, someone should tell Eliphaz that too much reliance on one's personal



life experience ignores the fact that everyone's experience is limited.

Bildad's bloviated speeches appear in chapters 8, 18, and 25. He is more direct and less courteous than Eliphaz. He begins, "How long will you say these things, and the words of your mouth be a great wind?" (8:1). Specifically speaking, "Job, you are a giant windbag full of words you should keep to yourself!" Who needs a friend like Bildad?

Unlike Eliphaz, Bildad relies upon long-established and inherited ways of thinking. Tradition and customs compel him. For example, he implores Job, "For inquire, please, of bygone ages, and consider what the fathers have searched out. For we are but of yesterday and know nothing, for our days on earth are a shadow. Will they not teach you and tell you and utter words out of their understanding?" (8:8-10). Bildad appears to draw from the writings of ancient sages from the east, quoting them at length in 18:5-21.

Bildad would have found ease and comfort in the company of the Pharisees, whom Jesus crisscrossed by taking aim at the traditions of the elders (Matthew 15:8-9). Job discovered there is nothing worse than being lectured by a Pharisee like Bildad.

Zophar speaks last among the trio of Job's friends.⁵ His words have a shaper edge. He begins rudely, "Should a multitude of words go unanswered, and a man full of talk be judged right? Should your babble silence men, and when you mock, shall no one shame you?" (11:2-3)

Zophar is the guy who doesn't know what he doesn't know, but he is absolutely sure that everything he knows is correct. For example, he says to Job, "Know then that God exacts from you less than your guilt deserves" (11:6a) and "Do you not know this from of old, since man was placed on earth (20:4). In other words, "Job, everybody knows this except you!" Zophar leaves no room for discussion, or another's opinion. Words like rigid, narrow, bigot,



dogmatist, radical, fanatic, and intolerant describe Zophar. He is a true believer but of things he knows nothing about.

A break occurs in chapter 32 when Elihu enters the dialogue. Elihu is a young man who offers the perspective of someone with less life experience than Eliphaz. However, he speaks with more passion and rage than either Bildad or Zophar. He is angry at Job for justifying himself, and he resents how the elder statesmen left the matter of Job's suffering unresolved, although they declared Job was wrong (32:1-5). Elihu's discourse fills up six chapters, which is why some people view him as bigheaded, verbose, and full of hot air.

However, despite his bombastic nature, Elihu does lift the conversation about suffering to a level higher than his contemporaries did. He does not have the mind of God on the matter, but he does speak about the need for humility (35:13, 37:14-24) and patience (35:15) when tested by life's trials.

The Voice from the Whirlwind

If one can endure the rhetorical ramblings of Job's friends plus Elihu, chapters 38-42 arrive as a whiff of spring air. Finally, God speaks. However, when God speaks, He does so like a tornado rolling across the Texas Panhandle. He basically tells Job to sit down, shut up, and listen. If the book of Job was a collection of mere human reasonings on suffering instead of divine revelation, we should expect God to answer all of Job's questions. However, He does the opposite.

During the next four chapters (129 verses), God questions Job, starting with, "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth? Tell me, if you have understanding. Who determined its measurements—surely you know! Or who stretched the line upon it? On what were its bases sunk, or who laid its cornerstone, when the



morning stars sang together and all the sons of God shouted for joy?” (38:4-7). Simply put, “Job, you don’t know what you don’t know!”

That was enough to put Job back on his heels. But God was just getting started. He goes on to take Job on a tour through all of creation, each time posing questions for Job to consider. No answers. Just questions. Almost like a prosecuting attorney, the Lord God of heaven and earth leads Job to the appropriate conclusion through a carefully crafted rhetorical inquisition without ever revealing to him what was happening behind the scenes. The wager between God and Satan remained a mystery to Job. Otherwise, the need for faith would be negated, and that is the whole point of the book.

The space between our limited human knowledge and God’s infinite wisdom leaves room for faith, which God highly values (Hebrews 11:6). If Job knew what God knew, there would be no need for faith. If Job knew that he would be twice blessed after he endured many trials and that he would live for another one hundred and forty years, he would not learn to trust God during the hard times (42:10-17).

So, what’s the big idea we learn from this ancient book of wisdom? The big idea is also the big conclusion to Job’s story: Suffering requires humility and the patience of faith (42:1-6). Have you heard of the patience of Job? (James 5:10-11) If you lack both humility and patience during suffering, consider Job. Better yet, look to Jesus on the cross. Our Savior understands suffering fully.

Jen Barrick also provides an encouraging example. When she awakened from her coma after five weeks, she did not remember that two plus two equals four. She did not remember that she had a brother. However, she remembered the lyrics to every praise song she had learned and the words to every Bible verse she had hidden in her heart. Jen has suffered greatly, but she says, “I will never doubt my Lord and my Savior. He is the one healing me daily.”⁶



Job

WHY DO THE RIGHTEOUS SUFFER?

OUTLINE	1-2	3-37	38-42
FOCUS	What's Up?	What Say You?	What Say God?
PEOPLE	God and Satan	Job and Friends	God and Job
KEY VERSE	1:21	13:15	38:2



Psalms

ANCIENT SONGS THAT SHAPE THE HEART

No book in the Bible is more beloved than Psalms, which is the largest book in God's word with one hundred and fifty chapters. When read with both the head and heart, Psalms helps us connect with the passion of God and our own human emotions. For example, when you do not know how to pray or express yourself to God, reach for a fitting psalm and pray it back to the Lord. Psalms is truly a rest stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible and a place to fuel up your soul.

What is a psalm? A psalm is a prayer or poem put to music as a spiritual song or hymn. The sacred collection of psalms in the Old Testament is God's playlist of greatest hits. The first hymnal or songbook the Early Church ever used was the book of Psalms. It took nearly one thousand years of Israel's history to write and compile the psalms (1410-430 B.C.), penned by numerous human authors under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Those authors include King David (73 psalms), a worship leader in Jerusalem named Asaph (12 psalms), other worship leaders known as the sons of Korah (12 psalms), and one psalm written by Moses, Ethan, and Heman. We do not know who wrote the remaining fifty



Psalms

ANCIENT SONGS THAT SHAPE THE HEART

psalms.

King David is the “sweet psalmist of Israel” (2 Samuel 23:1) and the most prolific. For that reason, Charles Hadden Spurgeon referred to Psalms as the treasury of David. A renaissance man, David was a shepherd, monarch, warrior, musician, and poet. If you think David was a softy because he wrote poems and put them to music, think again. This is the same David who slew a giant named Goliath with a sling and stone. David reminds us that psalms are not for sissies!

David wrote his psalms when embattled by his enemies and with his back up against the proverbial wall. He found his strength in the Lord, who sustained him through many dangers, toils, and snares. The psalms are poems put to music, but they are not for chicken-hearted yellow bellies. They are for anyone who wants to connect on a deeper level with God Almighty and more authentically with their own emotions. Warren Wiersbe says, “When you study the Psalms, you move into the holy of holies where the heart communes with God.”⁷

Five groups make up the entire collection of psalms. King David penned most of the psalms in group one (1-41). David and the sons of Korah wrote the psalms in group two (42-72). Asaph gets credit for writing most of the sacred lyrics in group three (73-89). Group four is a collection of psalms written by anonymous authors (90-106). Finally, David and the anonymous authors contribute to group five (107-150). Why is the book of Psalms compiled in this manner? Perhaps because they parallel the

CHRIST CONNECTION

Many Messianic psalms point to Christ, our Savior and Redeemer.

BIG IDEA

Find Christ and yourself in the psalms.

MEMORY VERSE

The Lord says to my lord: “Sit at my right hand until I make your enemies a footstool for your feet.”

PSALM 110:1

AUTHOR AND DATE

David and Others
1410-430 B.C.



Psalms

ANCIENT SONGS THAT SHAPE THE HEART

Pentateuch, Genesis through Deuteronomy. The first five books of the Bible penned by Moses and the five groups of psalms cover similar themes of creation, deliverance, worship, Israel's wilderness wanderings, and covenant commitment.

Types of Psalms

Let's immerse our hearts and minds in the psalms categorically, starting with praise psalms, which is a way of shouting, "Yay, God!" For example, Psalm 19:1 says, "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the sky above proclaims his handiwork." Imagine David gazing into a starry sky at night and becoming so overwhelmed by what he saw that he breaks into spontaneous praise. At the other end of the psalter, David writes, "Praise the Lord! Praise the Lord from the heavens; praise him in the heights! Praise him, all his angels; praise him, all his hosts!" (Psalm 148:1-2).

Moreover, Psalm 100:4 tells us to "enter ... his courts with praise." As a young boy, the church I attended took this to heart by singing the doxology at the start of each worship service:

Praise God from whom all blessings flow. Praise Him all creatures here below. Praise Him above ye heavenly hosts. Praise Father, Son, and Holy Ghost. Amen.

C.S. Lewis read Psalms and wondered why the God of the Bible required His people to praise Him. Does the Lord Almighty possess a big ego that requires constant affirmation? That did not seem plausible to the Cambridge intellectual. Lewis concluded that God receives unfiltered praise without it making His head swell in pride and that He is truly worthy of all praise. Besides, directing our praise to God keeps us from thinking more highly of ourselves than



Psalms

ANCIENT SONGS THAT SHAPE THE HEART

we should (Romans 12:3). Thus, it should not surprise us that even the angels of heaven sing repeatedly, “Worthy is the Lamb, who was slain, to receive power and wealth and wisdom and strength and honor and glory and praise!” (Revelation 5:12). If only Lucifer had remained content in the angelic choir.

Another category of psalms invites us to give thanks. For example, Psalm 100 says, “Enter his gates with thanksgiving, and his courts with praise! Give thanks to him; bless his name!” (100:4). If our hearts are not full of praise and thanksgiving when we assemble to worship God, something is not right in us. Elsewhere, Psalm 75:1 says, “We give thanks to you, O God; we give thanks, for your name is near. We recount your wondrous deeds.”

President George Washington made sure America was a nation grateful to the Providence who cares for us. On October 3, 1789, Washington designated November 26 as “A Day of Public Thanksgiving and Prayer.” For Christians, every day should be Thanksgiving Day. The psalms help us verbalize our gratitude to God.

Other psalms fill our hearts and minds with God’s wisdom. I call them “success in life” psalms. Generally speaking, Psalms is part of the Old Testament’s wisdom library, which also includes Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. Examples of wisdom psalms include Psalm 1, which begins, “Blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the wicked, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of scoffers; but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and on his law he meditates day and night” (1:1-2), and Psalm 128, which says, “Blessed is everyone who fears the Lord, who walks in his ways! You shall eat the fruit of the labor of your hands; you shall be blessed, and it shall be well with you” (128:1-2). According to Psalms, fearing the Lord, walking in His ways, and delighting in His word are three keys to the blessed or successful life.



Psalms

ANCIENT SONGS THAT SHAPE THE HEART

Psalms also invites us to express our sorrows and regret through lament. A lament is a desperate cry or petition for help that rises from the depth of one's soul. Lament psalms give voice to the brokenness, loneliness, and grief within us. For example, David cries out in Psalm 13:1-2, "How long, O Lord? Will you forget me forever? How long will you hide your face from me? How long must I take counsel in my soul and have sorrow in my heart all the day? How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?" Likewise, the sons of Korah cry out, "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you in turmoil within me? Hope in God; for I shall again praise him, my salvation and my God. My soul is cast down within me; therefore I remember you from the land of Jordan and of Hermon, from Mount Mizar." (42:5-6).

Most of us do not grieve well. For that reason, lament is glaringly absent in our worship experiences. There is nothing wrong with claiming our victory in Christ, which we often do in worship, but sometimes we need to grieve over sin and give expression to our sorrows. For this reason, nearly one-third of the psalms are laments, allowing us to cry out to God in anguish, knowing that He is our healer, forgiver, comforter, and justifier. Even Solomon said there is "a time to weep" (Ecclesiastes 3:4), and Jesus said, "blessed are those who mourn" (Matthew 5:4).

Another category known as the imprecatory psalms raise more than a little concern. These are the sacred lyrics that invoke judgment and call down curses on God's enemies. It is best to just let one of these fly off the page and speak for itself. For example, in Psalm 140:8-11, David vents, "Grant not, O Lord, the desires of the wicked; do not further their evil plot, or they will be exalted! Selah As for the head of those who surround me, let the mischief of their lips overwhelm them! Let burning coals fall upon them! Let them be cast into fire, into miry pits, no more to rise! Let not the slanderer be



Psalms

ANCIENT SONGS THAT SHAPE THE HEART

established in the land; let evil hunt down the violent man speedily!”

Is David expressing his inappropriate desire for vengeance upon his enemies? Are such imprecations beneath the dignity of God’s people? Should they even be considered prayers? Before you cast judgment on these soulful maledictions, consider Psalm 35:1-6. Before your head explodes by reading this psalm, consider that David is calling upon God to fight his battles for him, knowing that this is the only way to cast aside petty vengeance that might otherwise arise in his heart.

Elsewhere, the imprecatory psalms give voice to a hatred for evil as much as God’s abhors it. In other words, the psalmist takes God’s side against evildoers and calls upon the only One who can vindicate His righteousness and administer justice (Romans 12:19). Though disturbing at first, these unique psalms model for us a right disposition toward wickedness and invite us to see the world as God sees it.

There is more to the beautiful psalms. I love a group of ancient songs that Jewish pilgrims sang while traveling to Jerusalem for their annual religious festivals. We know them as the Songs of Ascent (120-134). They get their name from the elevation one must climb to get to the Holy City, which stands at 2,540 feet above sea level. Today, these fifteen hymns encourage spiritual travelers to climb higher with God through worship, perseverance, joy, family devotion, community, hope, and more.

Christ in the Psalms

I have saved the best of the ancient songs for last. One out of every six are Messianic psalms that point us to Christ. Psalms contains nearly seventy specific references to Christ, the Anointed One, that find their fulfillment in the New Testament, especially in



Psalms

ANCIENT SONGS THAT SHAPE THE HEART

the Gospels and Acts.⁸ Because these Messianic prophecies were written centuries before the life and ministry of Jesus Christ, they strongly support divine inspiration (2 Timothy 3:16).

Specifically, Psalms predicts that God will declare Messiah to be His beloved Son (2:7, Matthew 3:17) and forsake Christ in His darkest hour (22:1, Matthew 27:46). Messiah's enemies will pierce His hands and feet (22:16, John 20:25, 27), falsely accuse Him (35:11, Mark 14:57), scorn and mock Him (22:7-8, Luke 23:35), and gamble for His garments (22:18, Matthew 27:35). Christ will be hated without a cause (35:19, John 15:25) and betrayed by His close friend (41:9, Luke 22:47), whose office will be fulfilled by another (109:8, Acts 1:20).

Psalms also affirms that Messiah will rise from the dead (16:10). Before quoting Psalm 110 on the day of Pentecost, Peter quotes four verses from Psalm 16 and then affirms that the Scriptures speak “about the resurrection of the Christ, that he was not abandoned to Hades, nor did his flesh see corruption. This Jesus God raised up, and of that we are all witnesses” (Acts 2:31-32, 34-35, 13:35-36). From Psalms, Peter also affirms that “that God has made him both Lord and Christ, this Jesus whom you crucified” (Acts 2:36).

The New Testament quotes and alludes to Psalm 110 more than any other, affirming the ascension and coronation of Jesus: “The LORD said to my Lord, ‘Sit at my right hand, until I make your enemies your footstool.’”⁸ Even Jesus quoted Psalm 110 during a prickly moment with the Pharisees when He asked them, “What do you think about the Christ? Whose son is he?” (Matthew 22:42-45). Of course, the Pharisees blundered the answer.

Psalms contains an endless supply of spiritual gold to mine, which is why you just have to read it for yourself. Read five psalms per day, and you can read through the entire book in one month. By doing so, you will learn to express your most heartfelt emotions



Psalms

**ANCIENT SONGS THAT
SHAPE THE HEART**

to God, enjoy a deeper relationship with the Holy Spirit (Ephesians 5:18-19), find yourself in the psalms, and meet Jesus, who is the Christ. Add one chapter per day from the book of Proverbs (our next stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible), and God's wisdom will shape your heart and mind to be like His.

OUTLINE	1-41	42-72	73-89	90-106	107-150
FOCUS	Creation <i>Genesis</i>	Redemption <i>Exodus</i>	Worship <i>Leviticus</i>	Wanderings <i>Numbers</i>	Covenant <i>Deuteronomy</i>
PSALMIST	David	David and Korah	Asaph	Others	David and Others
KEY VERSE	23	51	73	90	139



Proverbs

WISE SAYINGS FOR EVERYDAY LIFE

The Pilgrim's Progress is a classic allegory of the Christian life written by the seventeenth-century puritan preacher named John Bunyan. He wrote the book while in prison for holding religious services without the permission of the established Church of England. The book has been translated into two hundred languages and has never gone out of print.

The main character in the book is a guy named Christian, who felt weighed down by a great burden after reading a book. Allegorically, Christian's great burden represented the knowledge of sin, which he became aware of by reading the Bible. To find relief from his burden, Christian leaves his hometown called, City of Destruction, and sets out on a journey to the Celestial City.

Along his way to the Celestial City (symbolic of heaven), Christian meets a variety of interesting people who befriend him, including Obstinate, Pliable, Mr. Legality, and Civility. A chap named Evangelist tells Christian to lay down his burden at the Wicket Gate, which leads to the King's highway, a straight and narrow passage. On his way to the Wicket Gate, Christian also encounters Mr. Worldly Wiseman, who tries to redirect Christian with his secular ethics and



Proverbs

**WISE SAYINGS FOR
EVERYDAY LIFE**

philosophies.

“Wilt thou hearken to me, if I give thee counsel?” asks Mr. Worldly Wiseman upon meeting Christian.

“If it be good, I will; for I stand in need of good counsel,” Christian replies.

And so, the conversation begins between the two of them. First, Mr. Worldly Wiseman counsels Christian to distance himself from Evangelist by saying, “Avoid him for his counsel. There is not a more dangerous and troublesome way in the world than is that unto which he hath directed thee; and that thou shalt find if thou wilt be ruled by his counsel.”

Sound familiar? Mr. Worldly Wiseman appears in every generation, spewing vociferous warnings about the dangers of listening to Christians and their bigoted beliefs. He specializes in marginalizing and stigmatizing God’s wisdom and then ostracizing those who follow it. The better wisdom says to stay away from Mr. Worldly Wiseman. Fortunately, you will not find a trace of him in the Old Testament book of Proverbs, which is our next stop on the ultimate road trip through the Bible and part of God’s wisdom library.

What is a Proverb?

Proverbs is perfect for on-the-go people because it delivers short, memorable, and digestible sayings like 1:7, which reads, “The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, fools despise wisdom and instruction.” Before we get too deep into the book, what exactly is a proverb?

CHRIST CONNECTION

All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ (Colossians 2:3).

BIG IDEA

Fear the Lord and you will find the right and wise path in life.

MEMORY VERSE

The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction.

PROVERBS 1:7

AUTHOR and DATE

Solomon and Others
950-700 B.C.



Proverbs

**WISE SAYINGS FOR
EVERYDAY LIFE**

Warren Wiersbe says, “Proverbs are pithy statements that summarize in a few choice words practical truth relating to some aspect of everyday life.”¹⁰ The Spanish novelist Cervantes offers a shorter definition: “A proverb is a short sentence based on long experience.” Biblical proverbs are certainly based on the long experience of our creator God, who is eternal.

Many English maxims come to mind that are part of our everyday language, like the ones listed below:

- Two wrongs don’t make a right.
- The pen is mightier than the sword.
- When in Rome, do as the Romans.
- When the going gets tough, the tough get going.
- Birds of a feather flock together.
- Practice makes perfect.
- One man’s trash is another man’s treasure.
- A penny saved is a penny earned.
- Yada! Yada! Yada!

I am not sure the last one in that list is technically a proverb, but I do know this: You will not read a single one of the maxims above in Proverbs or anywhere else in Holy Scripture. What is the difference between the short sayings that are part of our everyday language and the pithy proverbs in the Bible? For starters, the book of Proverbs is part of the inspired canon of Scripture (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Thus, the Bible’s proverbs show us how to relate to God and our fellow human beings in the wisest and most godly manner. All truth is God’s truth, wherever it appears in literature. However, Proverbs should be trusted for its untainted wisdom from above; it is counsel from heaven for conduct on earth.

In the preface to his two-volume commentary on the book of Proverbs, Dr. Bruce Waltke says, “In a world bombarded by inane clichés, trivial catchwords, and godless sound bites, the expression



Proverbs

**WISE SAYINGS FOR
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of true wisdom is in short supply.”¹¹ I agree with Waltke. A case in point is the flea market of empty chatter swirling around in today’s Twittersphere, which values pithiness by requiring tweets not to exceed one hundred and forty characters. However, Proverbs, also famous for its pithy sayings, is a treasure trove of divine wisdom. Unlike most Twitter posts, everything in the book of Proverbs is worth reading.

Furthermore, Proverbs addresses a wide array of topics ranging from marriage and family to finances and friendships. It instructs parents in child-rearing while not shying away from encouraging appropriate discipline in the home. In Proverbs, you will casually meet various people, including the wise, the wicked, the fool, the simple, the scorner, the slothful, and the sluggard. Proverbs instructs the industrious person in how to plan his work and work his plan. In the same breath, it challenges the slothful person to get out of bed and get to work.

Proverbs personifies wisdom as a virtuous woman. Lady Wisdom is at her best when she instructs young men to steer clear “from the smooth tongue of the adulteress” (6:23). Every parent should use Proverbs 5-7 to teach their children about sex. It teaches us to focus on the blessings and curses, not the birds and the bees, when making wise choices about sex.

Proverbs also addresses both positive and negative virtues like honesty and integrity, jealousy and envy, love and hatred, kindness and malice. This book of divine wisdom for everyday life also has a lot to say about what we say. Before reading Proverbs, be forewarned if you use your tongue to gossip, slander, or talk about people behind their back. The fool uses his tongue to tear people down; the wise person uses his tongue to praise God and to build people up.

Are you beginning to understand why Proverbs is one of my favorite books in the Bible? It is chock full of gritty, useful, everyday wisdom from above. Did you know that you can read a chapter a day for thirty-one days and complete the book of Proverbs in one month?



Proverbs

**WISE SAYINGS FOR
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Add five psalms to that daily reading, and you can read through Proverbs and Psalms in a single month, saturating your mind and heart with wisdom from above.

Proverbs contains much more than clever sayings that emerged from human reasoning and life experience. Because God inspired this book and its collection, there is nothing else like it in the libraries of the world.

Why Read Proverbs?

There is much to gain from reading the book of Proverbs. Solomon tells us what to expect in 1:1-7.

The proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king of Israel: To know wisdom and instruction, to understand words of insight, to receive instruction in wise dealing, in righteousness, justice, and equity; to give prudence to the simple, knowledge and discretion to the youth—Let the wise hear and increase in learning, and the one who understands obtain guidance, to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge; fools despise wisdom and instruction.

The words wisdom, instruction, knowledge, understanding, prudence, discretion, and guidance each appear in the book's opening prose. They have similar meanings with slight nuances. However, Solomon wants us to understand that knowledge, education, and the practical skill needed to make consistently good decisions in life are not the same. The latter requires wisdom from above.

We live in the information age. Anyone with a reasonable measure of intelligence, fingertips, and a computer can acquire knowledge. Today, more people achieve advanced education degrees than ever before, some with impressive letters behind their name. But the world is full of educated fools. The only thing worse than an educated fool



Proverbs

**WISE SAYINGS FOR
EVERYDAY LIFE**

is an uneducated fool. The book of Proverbs makes that clear. Let's dig deeper.

Read Proverbs, and you will learn to *practice the art of skillful living*. Solomon says that one purpose of his wise, pithy sayings is “to know wisdom and instruction” (1:2). The Hebrew word translated as “wisdom” is *chokmah*. *Chokmah* refers to more than head or heart knowledge. The word describes anybody who possesses a skill.

For example, a carpenter who is skilled in building and repairing wood structures has *chokmah*. A musician who composes beautiful sounds and tones has *chokmah*. It takes *chokmah* to write words, phrases, and sentences in ways that inspire people. Performing at the highest level of a sport requires athletic *chokmah*. Some people have political *chokmah*; they know how to get elected. Others possess business *chokmah*; they know how to make money. Still, others possess medical *chokmah*; they can heal a broken bone. But when it comes to the art of wise living, not everyone possesses *chokmah*.

It takes *chokmah* to know how to raise a child in the fear of the Lord. It requires *chokmah* to avoid the pitfalls of sexual immorality. Do you need financial *chokmah*, or relationship *chokmah*, or *chokmah* to communicate well with your spouse or children? Proverbs is the place to learn the fine art of skillful living.

Read Proverbs, and you will *develop mental agility*. Solomon goes on to say that the purpose of his collection of proverbs is “to understand words of insight” (1:2) and “to understand a proverb and a saying, the words of the wise and their riddles” (1:6).

Athletic agility is always impressive to me, especially when I witness it in world-class Olympians who compete at the highest level of their sport. Athletic agility is the ability to move your body and change direction easily while maintaining full control. Likewise, mental agility is the ability to think and understand quickly, to discern the difference between wisdom from above and earthly, even demonic, advice. Do you possess mental agility? King Solomon put such his on display when he ruled between two women, both claiming to be the



Proverbs

**WISE SAYINGS FOR
EVERYDAY LIFE**

mother of a baby (1 Kings 3:16-28).

Because Proverbs is God's holy word, you will also *gain moral insight* when you read it. Though written on the human heart by our creator God (Romans 1:18-19), the knowledge of right and wrong seems to be missing in our world. We are living in the times described by Isaiah the prophet who warned, "Woe to those who call evil good and good evil" (Isaiah 4:20).

Today, those who draw clear moral lines and live by biblical standards of morality are belittled by Mr. Worldly Wiseman and his morally relativistic friends. Few possess the kind of clear moral insight needed to address the complicated problems we face in today's world. For this reason, Proverbs should be standard curriculum for education, childrearing, human sexuality, neighbor relations, business practices, and much more.

Read Proverbs, practice the truth you learn, and you will *avoid paying the stupid tax!* Many mistakes in life can be avoided by listening to others who already made those same mistakes and learned from them. Why pay the stupid tax when somebody else has already paid it? Better yet, we can avoid a lot of pain in life by following God's holy wisdom. For this reason, Proverbs draws a strong distinction between wise and foolish people. It makes clear the consequences of making wise and foolish decisions. Even Jesus talked about the wise man who built his house upon the rock and the foolish man who built his house upon shifting sand (Matthew 7:24-27).

By the way, a biblical proverb should be read and interpreted with this understanding: More often than not, this is the way life works. Can you find an exception to the rule? Perhaps. However, the wise person heeds the proverbial advice. The fool, on the other hand, does not and says, "I am the exception to the rule!"

Finally, read Proverbs, and you will *meet Jesus*. Colossians 2:3 speaks of Christ, "in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge." The wisest person on earth is not the one with a Ph.D. in physics or psychology. The wisest person is the one who



Proverbs

**Wise sayings for
Everyday Life**

makes the study of Christ his or her lifetime pursuit and practice. After reading Proverbs, will you listen to Mr. Worldly Wiseman or follow Christ?

OUTLINE	1-9	10-20	21-31
FOCUS	Wisdom for Young People	Wisdom for All People	Wisdom for Kings and Rulers
KEY VERSE	1:7	12:1	31:10



Ecclesiastes

THE ULTIMATE MEANING OF LIFE

Henry Nouwen was a Catholic priest and a thoughtful writer. He taught at Harvard, Yale, and Notre Dame and spent ten years serving the mentally and physically challenged at the L'Arche Daybreak community in Toronto, Canada. While teaching at the Yale Divinity School, Nouwen met and befriended a young student named Fred Bateman, a secular Jew who, when challenged to read the Hebrew Bible, said, "It doesn't speak to me. It is a strange faraway world."

"Well," said Nouwen, "read at least the Book of Qoheleth (Ecclesiastes). The one that opens with the words: 'Vanity of vanities. ... All is vanity.'"

Fred returned the next day and said, "I read it. I never realized that there was a place in the Bible for a skeptic ... one of my type. That's very reassuring!"¹²

Are you a skeptic? Do you wonder if life has any purpose or meaning? Welcome to the book of Ecclesiastes, where artists, scientists, philosophers, monarchs, and theologians in every generation find answers to their questions about the ultimate meaning in life.

Apart from God, the philosopher concludes with circular reasoning, "The meaning of life is to give life meaning." The humanist says, "The meaning of life is that which we choose to give



Ecclesiastes

THE ULTIMATE
MEANING OF LIFE

it.” The agnostic asks with a twinge of skepticism, “Can anybody really know if life has meaning?” Even the British comedy troupe Monty Python tried but failed to answer the question in their movie called *The Meaning of Life*.

Perhaps the wisest man who ever lived can help us. Three thousand years ago, Solomon wrote this about his life: “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity” (1:2). Vanity! Meaningless! Utterly useless! We would not expect to hear a preacher describe life that way. But Solomon, the son of David, did. Why was King Solomon so pessimistic about life? Or was he?

The Old Testament wisdom books are places to rest and fuel up your soul. However, the book of Ecclesiastes seems like a dark detour on the ultimate road trip through the Bible. Solomon takes his readers on a rhetorical road trip through agnosticism (1:13), hedonism (2:24), materialism (3:19-21), pessimism (4:2), and fatalism (7:13). A journey like that will wear out the best of us.

However, it should not surprise us that God gave us a book for skeptics that addresses the ultimate meaning of life, written by a man who tried to find satisfaction in just about everything but God. Solomon was the right man to travel on this journey and report back to us. God had given him unlimited resources to spend on his insatiable desires. Did anything or anyone ultimately satisfy Solomon? Or, like Mick Jagger of the Rolling Stones, did Solomon conclude, “I can’t get no satisfaction”?

Jewish tradition says that Solomon wrote his love Song during his early years, Proverbs during his middle years, and Ecclesiastes

CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus is the “one Shepherd” who can give life meaning (12:11).

BIG IDEA

Life is meaningless apart from God.

MEMORY VERSE

“The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.”

ECCLESIASTES
12:13

AUTHOR AND DATE

Solomon
935 B.C.



during his declining years, expressing an old man's sorrow and regret. Indeed, Solomon did not always practice the wisdom that he possessed by God's grace. Much of Ecclesiastes describes the musings of a desperate man who was out of fellowship with God and who tried to find meaning "under the sun," a humanistic phrase that appears twenty-nine times in the book.

Life Under the Sun

Life is meaningless apart from God. An "under the sun" existence leaves a person empty. It does not take long for Solomon to descend into the Slough of Despond. In the opening prose of Ecclesiastes, the Preacher, as the author calls himself, expresses his weariness with life.¹³ Solomon is bored and unenthused because there is "nothing new under the sun" (1:9). He points to the wind that blows south and then blows north. It blows around the globe and then returns to gust again (1:6). Likewise, "the sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises" (1:5). Generations come and go, "but the earth remains forever" (1:4). "All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full (1:7). On and on goes Solomon, leaving us with the distinct impression that his life lacks fullness and meaning.

Some people find joy and comfort in the predictable rhythms of life, but Solomon does not. Variety is the spice of his life; the absence of it is "vanity!" which is the Preacher's favorite word. Solomon even refers to his pursuit of wisdom as "a striving after the wind" (1:17). We would say, "What a complete waste of time!" By the end of chapter one, Solomon sounds so negative and pessimistic that any one of us would be tempted to remove no-fun Solomon from the party guest list.

Let's dig deeper into Solomon's experience with vanity, starting with *the vanity of wisdom under the sun*. We know Solomon best for his expansive wisdom (1 Kings 3:1-15). However, in time he discovered that all the wisdom in the universe means nothing under the sun. In



chapter two, he writes,

The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them. Then I said in my heart, ‘What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?’ And I said in my heart that this also is vanity. For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool!’ (2:14-16)

In the end, Solomon sees little difference between the wise and the foolish under the sun.

Solomon also muses about *the vanity of self-indulgence under the sun*. He spoiled himself with pleasure (2:1), wine (2:3), and women (2:6). However, none of it ultimately satisfied him. Even laughter left him feeling empty (2:2, 7:6), which makes me think of the tragic death of Robin Williams, one of the most gifted comedians in our lifetime who took his own life. Apparently, Chuckles the Clown was a deeply sad man.

Solomon also experienced *the vanity of work and wealth under the sun*.

I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself. I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees. I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees. I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and province. (2:4-8).

Solomon achieved much during his lifetime and amassed great wealth. He reflected upon his many building projects by using the personal pronoun “I” seven times in five verses. He admits that all the work he did was “for myself” (2:18-23). He lived to get, not to give.



Ecclesiastes

THE ULTIMATE
MEANING OF LIFE

However, when Solomon realized that he would “leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it,” he concluded, “This also is vanity and a great evil.” How depressing to reach the end of one’s life and conclude that all the work you did under the sun was just a pile of vanity projects. In 8:16-17, Solomon describes the workaholic, lumping together the vanity of wisdom and work under the sun.

When I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe the labor that is done on earth—people getting no sleep day or night¹⁷ then I saw all that God has done. No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all their efforts to search it out, no one can discover its meaning. Even if the wise claim they know, they cannot really comprehend it.

As any skeptic might, Solomon also wrestled with the vanity of death under the sun. Consider his musings about the grave.

I said in my heart with regard to the children of man that God is testing them that they may see that they themselves are but beasts. For what happens to the children of man and what happens to the beasts is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and man has no advantage over the beasts, for all is vanity. All go to one place. All are from the dust, and to dust all return. Who knows whether the spirit of man goes upward and the spirit of the beast goes down into the earth? So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him? (3:18-22)

Solomon’s perspective about death under the sun is, frankly, depressing. He sees no life or hope beyond the grave. Our destiny is no different than the beasts; ashes to ashes, dust to dust. The humanistic, atheistic theory of the origin of life called Darwinian evolution reaches the same conclusion: Homo sapiens are no different than the



apes from which they evolved. Thus, the best we can do is to live for the present and glean as much joy from our work as we can. To this point, Solomon also writes, “Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going” (9:10).

Perhaps this is where the Epicureans got their philosophy of life, “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die!” Is this how we are to live? Is Solomon’s assessment of the meaning of life correct?

Time and space do not allow a full treatment of all vanities under the sun. Others that Solomon experienced include the vanity of envy (4:4), the vanity of greed (4:7), the vanity of fame (4:16), the vanity of the love of money (5:10), the vanity of covetousness (6:9), and the vanity of religion (8:10-14).

Life Above the Sun

Fortunately, Solomon does not remain pessimistic about life. The vanity he experienced under the sun pushed him to find ultimate meaning in a relationship with God above the sun. We first catch a glimpse of this in chapter 3, where Solomon acknowledges that life under the sun is short, rhythmic, and calculated with a time and season for everything.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven: a time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted; a time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance. a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing; a time to seek, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep



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**THE ULTIMATE
MEANING OF LIFE**

silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time for war, and a time for peace. 3:1-8

If you are of a certain age, you might start humming a song called “Turn! Turn! Turn! (To Everything There Is a Season)” made popular in 1965 by a folk-rock band called The Byrds. Yes, God “has made everything beautiful in its time,” Solomon goes on to say in 3:11. “Also, he has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.”

In my book *Mysteries of the Afterlife: Exploring Its Amazing Secrets*, I reflect upon Ecclesiastes 3 this way: “Solomon sticks his head ‘above the sun’ long enough to catch a glimpse of God and eternity. Beauty comes in understanding there’s a purpose and meaning to everything under the sun. No matter how random life appears or painful it becomes, God is always up to something good and eternally appropriate for us.”¹⁵ Do you agree? It takes an ‘above the sun’ perspective to embrace that by faith.

Regarding God placing eternity in man’s heart, I go on to write, “From the very beginning, God planned that you and I would live forever with him. He put eternity in our hearts to remind us of that and to create in us a thirst for the transcendent. The meaninglessness of life evaporates when we know we are part of God’s eternal plan, and we allow that to become our focus. [A]s Augustine of Hippo famously said, ‘Thou hast made us for thyself, O Lord, and our heart is restless until it finds its rest in thee.’”¹⁶

Because eternity resides in our hearts, we cannot live under the sun and find true meaning in our daily existence. The shout in our spirit says, “There must be more to our existence!” and there is. I find eternity in our hearts speaking the loudest when we stand graveside, mourning the death of a friend or loved one while facing our own frail mortality.

What more can we say of Solomon’s conclusion? Solomon summarized wisdom at the start of Proverbs by saying, “The fear



Ecclesiastes

**THE ULTIMATE
MEANING OF LIFE**

of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom” (1:7). However, Israel’s most glorious king summarized the meaning of life at the end of Ecclesiastes by saying, “The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (12:13).

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon travels eleven long and sometimes despairing chapters to get to his conclusion about life. According to the Preacher, the fear of God—the kind of deep awe and respect for Him that leads to obedience—is the way to gain wisdom and discover the meaning of life. In other words, life has meaning only in relation to the Giver of life.

According to Solomon, the best time to make this important discovery is when you are young. At the beginning of his conclusion, he writes, “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near of which you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’” (12:1). Did you know that most people who come to faith in Jesus Christ and become one of His disciples do so before they leave adolescence and before skepticism grows deep roots?

Whatever your age, Ecclesiastes sets the whole duty of man before you. If you seek God who is above the sun, you will find Him and discover the ultimate meaning of your life.

OUTLINE	1:1-11	1:12 - 11:10	12
FOCUS	Vanity!	Life Under the Sun	Life Above the Sun
KEY VERSE	1:2	1:14	12:13



Song of Solomon

THE SECRETS OF A SATISFYING MARRIAGE

Some people have strange ideas about marriage. I heard about a woman who wanted to marry four different men during her lifetime. Fortunately, one husband at a time was enough. Still, she firmly believed that it would take four diverse men to meet her various needs over time, starting with a banker. After the banker, she wanted to marry a movie star and then a preacher. In the final stage of her life, she planned to marry an undertaker. Her friend thought her desire was strange and asked why. The woman answered, “That’s simple. One for the money, two for the show, three to get ready, and four to go!”

All kidding aside, from the beginning, marriage was God’s idea, and His thoughts about marriage have not changed. Anthropologists want us to believe that marriage is a cultural construct and, thus, our ideas about it should be fluid. On the contrary, marriage arises from the Bible’s creation story. God is serious about the special union He created between one man and one woman for one lifetime. Therefore, don’t mess with marriage! “Don’t mess with Texas!” is an anti-littering sign placed on highways throughout the Lonestar state. Likewise, “Don’t mess with marriage!” is an appropriate sign to imagine posted in the Garden of Eden and on freeways throughout



Song of Solomon

**THE SECRETS OF A
SATISFYING MARRIAGE**

the ultimate road trip through the Bible.

Furthermore, the mysterious union called marriage is generally a picture of God's love for His people and specifically a gospel portrait of Christ's love for His church. No wonder the devil attacks marriage as frequently as he does.

We find marriage imagery throughout the Bible. For example, the Lord God Almighty refers to His chosen people as "Israel, my bride" (Jeremiah 2:2, 31:4) and to His New Testament church as the "bride of Christ" (Ephesians 5 and Revelation 21). At the end of the age, the marriage supper of the Lamb reminds us of God's deep love for the world (Revelation 19:6-9, John 3:16). In the book of Hosea, impassioned emotions flow from the Almighty's heart like the mighty Mississippi River. God sounds like a jilted lover, expressing His raw affections when His bride, Israel, engages in spiritual prostitution by chasing after pagan gods. The prophet Hosea relentlessly pursues Gomer, his wayward wife, to illustrate the Lord's undying commitment to His willful bride.

There's more. The Bible presents a treasury of marital wisdom called the Song of Solomon, where God puts His love for Israel on intimate display and reveals the secrets of a satisfying marriage through the beautiful union of Solomon and Shulamith. It should not surprise us that God wrote a practical handbook on love, marriage, sex, and relationships because He is the most romantic person in the universe. All along the ultimate road trip to the Bible, God passionately pursues a relationship with those He created in His image.

Because honesty is at the core of any successful and satisfying relationship, I must acknowledge that Solomon did not live up to

CHRIST CONNECTION

Jesus Christ is the lover of our souls.

BIG IDEA

God loves you and has a beautiful plan for your marriage.

MEMORY VERSE

"Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave."

SONG OF
SOLOMON 8:6

AUTHOR AND DATE

Solomon
965 B.C.



the high and holy expectations of his own love song. As time went on, Israel's wisest and most glorious king acted foolishly. He built a household of seven hundred wives and three hundred concubines. Nehemiah 13:26 asks, "Did not Solomon king of Israel sin on account of such women? Among the many nations there was no king like him, and he was beloved by his God, and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless, foreign women made even him to sin."

Does Solomon's sinful behavior negate the truth he wrote about in his love song? There is not a chance of that because the Song of Solomon is holy Scripture inspired by God (2 Timothy 3:16-17). Besides, the Bible is full of imperfect people whom God used to carry out His perfect plans. That gives me hope, and it is one thing I love about God's word. However, did Solomon's sin with women yield painful consequences? It sure did. Just as God warned, Solomon's foreign wives eventually led the king's heart astray to follow their foreign gods. This angered the Lord, and He tore the kingdom of Israel from Solomon by dividing it into the Northern and Southern Kingdoms (1 Kings 11:9-13).

Let's dig deeper into Solomon's love song, which contains eight chapters of beautiful Hebrew poetry. The Song of Solomon expresses the fine art of attraction and courtship (1-2), commitment and intimacy (3-4), conflict and resolution (5-6), romance and faithfulness (7-8). It starts with a kiss and ends by proclaiming love is as strong as death.

Attraction and Courtship

Solomon's love song begins with Shulamith speaking first. This should not surprise us because women are far more intuitive about relationships than men are. Women are like radar. They can detect when something is right or wrong in a relationship. Men are more like torpedoes. We fire and explode, hoping that something good will happen.



Song of Solomon

**THE SECRETS OF a
SATISFYING MARRIAGE**

Shulamith's attraction to Solomon makes her desire his kiss. "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth" (1:2a). She is also optimistic about their relationship, saying his love is "more delightful than wine" (1:2b). Some relationships fizzle and go flat like soda pop; others, like fine wine, get better over time. When Cathryn and I counsel married couples, we always start by affirming their marriage, even if it is strained. They need to hear somebody say, "We believe in your marriage! Like fine wine, the best and most delicious days are ahead of you." Those are not empty words. We believe they are true because we have seen God repair broken marriages.

Shulamith also expresses her deep insecurities that are rooted in her appearance, an absentee father, abusive brothers, and her fear of Solomon's inattentiveness (1:5-8). Solomon responds with tenderness and sensitivity. He opens his world to her, compliments her, tells her how special she is, and acknowledges the little things she does to make herself pretty (1:8-11). Three cheers for Solomon, who uses his words to build his future wife's self-esteem.

Chapters 1- 2 reveal the true nature of love, using poetic language to describe it as fragrant (1:12-13), tender (1:14), refreshing (1:14), and expressive (1:15). Also, true love dreams (1:16-17), protects (2:3-4), waits (2:5-7), and is rare (2:1-3).

Solomon and Shulamith also enjoy a Hebrew date in the countryside. He takes the initiative by asking her out and planning the date, as a man should. She describes him pursuing her like a gazelle, "leaping over the mountains, bounding over the hills." He casts a compelling vision and invites her on an adventure by saying, "Arise, my love, my beautiful one, and come along" (2:8-10). Springtime is in the air, the time for lovers and beautiful fragrances (2:11-13). On their date, they talk to each other (2:14), resolve their conflicts (2:15), and discipline their physical desires for each other (2:16-17). In all, chapters 1-2 show us how a bachelor should date a bachelorette.



Commitment and Intimacy

Chapters 3-4 address what a man needs from a woman and what a woman needs from a man, affirming much of what best-selling author Willard Harley says in his book, *His Needs, Her Needs*. As chapter 3 begins, Shulamith has clearly met the man of her dreams, and she wants to marry Solomon. However, as the wedding day approaches, her Hebrew feet grow cold. Deep insecurities flood her heart in a dream on the night before the wedding. The details of her dream reveal that she needs a man who is her soul mate and one who makes her feel secure. She also needs a strong and faithful man who is her spiritual leader, one who gives her his best (3:1-11). Before her dream turns into a nightmare, she awakens to the realization that Solomon is still that man.

Solomon and Shulamith get married in chapter 4. The Bible invites us to the glorious wedding and then gives us a front-row seat to the wedding night, making this the most read chapter in the Bible by most teenagers. Before you think such eroticism is inappropriate, remember this: Marriage and sexual intimacy between a husband and wife is God's idea. There is no shame in what God created and sanctioned when experienced in its proper marital context. The marriage bed should be celebrated, honored, and kept pure (Hebrews 13:4). On their wedding night, Solomon appreciates his wife's beauty (4:1-6), affirms her value (4:7), and acknowledges her fears (4:8). Understanding her husband's needs, Shulamith loves Solomon erotically (4:9-11), exclusively (4:12-16), and willingly (4:17-5:1).

Conflict and Resolution

Twenty-five percent of the editorial space in the Song of Solomon addresses conflict and resolution in marriage. In chapter 6, Solomon and Shulamith return from their blissful honeymoon and experience



a bedroom brawl. That tells us conflict in marriage is inevitable. Dennis and Barbara Rainey of Family Life Ministries write, “Start with two selfish people with different backgrounds and personalities. Now add some bad habits and interesting idiosyncrasies, throw in a bunch of expectations, and then turn up the heat a little with the daily trials of life. Guess what? You are bound to have conflict. It’s unavoidable.”¹⁷

Solomon’s love song is a reminder that marital conflict leads to either greater oneness or greater isolation. It all depends on how couples handle the conflict. While marital conflict is inevitable, resolving it is not, which is why couples must do so biblically. Solomon and Shulamith travel the better path toward reconciliation, modeling how it is always best to resolve a conflict than dissolve a relationship. To resolve their marital conflict, they defeat selfishness (5:2-3), avoid retaliation (5:4-5), pursue peace and reconciliation (5:6-8), remember why they chose each other (5:10-16), seek wise counsel (6:1), and renew their marriage covenant (6:2-13).

Somebody once told Cathryn and me to remember and rehearse this during a heated marital conflict: “My mate is not my enemy!” In effect, this is what Shulamith does in 5:16, “This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.” She remembers that she married her best friend, and their spat grieves her heart.

Romance and Faithfulness

In chapter 7, Solomon and Shulamith put the sizzle back into their marriage. Making up is always more fun than breaking up. From them, we learn ten characteristics of marriages that sizzle rather than fizzle, including words of affirmation (Proverbs 25:11), servant leadership (7:1), mutual trust (7:1), healthy self-esteem (7:1-2), sexual playfulness (7:3), purity (7:4), unconditional support (7:4), mutual honor (7:5), common desire (7:6-8), and creativity (7:7-13).



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That brings us to chapter 8, where making love last forever is the theme. Among other things, enduring love requires a strong commitment between two people where they both agree; divorce is not an option! Shulamith says, “Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave” (8:6).

In ancient times, a king would use his seal to secure documents and other important communications. The king’s seal was not to be broken. Shulamith wants her love to be the seal on Solomon’s heart and then on his arm. In other words, she wants him to show his unbreakable commitment to their marriage both privately and publicly. Then she interjects the twin ideas of death and jealousy into their marriage, which are normally thought of as relationship killers. However, just as the grave is unrelenting and does not give back the dead, she is unwilling to give up on their marriage, and she wants Solomon to share the sentiment. Also, Shulamith desires from Solomon a jealousy that protects what is precious about their union.¹⁸

A further study of chapter 8 reveals that married couples who make love last forever also possess enduring passion (8:1-4), shared identity and destiny (8:5), resilience (8:7), moral discipline (8:8-10), and selflessness (8:11-13). They cherish each other like a treasure (8:7).

SOS is the International Morse Code distress signal. When your ship or boat, for example, is in trouble, you send an SOS signal. Some say SOS stands for “save our souls” or “save our ship.” Is your marriage in trouble? Are you sending out a marital SOS signal? God’s response is found in the Song of Solomon or SOS. Read it today. Even if your marriage is not in trouble, it needs an occasional tune-up. Reflecting upon God’s truth in the Song of Solomon is the perfect place on the ultimate road trip through the Bible to refresh and fuel up your marriage.



Song of Solomon

**THE SECRETS OF a
SATISFYING MARRIAGE**

OUTLINE	1-2	3-4	5-6	7-8
FOCUS	Attraction and Courtship	Commitment and Intimacy	Conflict and Resolution	Romance and Faithfulness
KEY VERSE	1:2	4:1	5:16	8:6



Small Group Discussion Questions



JOB

1. Read Job 19:24-25 and Hebrews 4:15. How does the book of Job point us to Christ?
 2. What is your big takeaway from the consolation Job received from his friends?
 3. Did God answer Job's questions? If yes, how? If no, why?
 4. Reflect on what He says to Job starting in chapter 38. What is your big takeaway?
 5. Read James 5:10-11. Why is Job famous for his patience?
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PSALMS

1. How does Psalms connect us to Christ?
2. What does Psalms teach us about prayer?
3. Why does God want us to praise Him? How do the psalms help us worship Him?
4. How has God used the book of Psalms to help you grow spiritually?
5. What is your favorite psalm and why?

Small Group Discussion Questions



PROVERBS

1. Where do you hear the voice of Mr. Worldly Wiseman today?
 2. Read Proverbs 1:7. What does the fear of the Lord have to do with getting wisdom?
 3. What is the difference between wisdom and knowledge?
 4. What is the Christ connection in Proverbs?
 5. List four benefits of reading Proverbs daily.
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ECCLESIASTES

1. Reflect on Ecclesiastes 1:2. What about your life make you skeptical and pessimistic?
2. In Ecclesiastes, what is the difference between life under the sun and life above the sun?
3. How would you convince a skeptic to live a life of faith in God?
4. Read Ecclesiastes 12:13. What is Solomon's conclusion about the ultimate meaning of life?
5. Read Ecclesiastes 12:1. When does Solomon say we should begin living life above the sun and why?

Small Group Discussion Questions



SONG OF SOLOMON

1. What does the Song of Solomon teach about God's love for us?
2. Read Song of Solomon 1:12-2:7. What is true love?
3. Read Nehemiah 13:26. How can we reconcile Solomon's many women with what he writes in his love song?
4. What did you learn about resolving marital conflict from Song of Solomon 5-6?
5. What positive changes will you make in your marriage after reading the Song of Solomon?

- ¹ Norman Geisler, *The Baker Encyclopedia of Christian Apologetics*, pg. 94.

- ² Hope Out Loud, accessed on May 24, 2021, <https://hopeoutloud.com/our-story/>

- ³ This scene sheds some light on the activity of Satan in the world today. (1) God does not grant Satan access as much as the Almighty holds the devil accountable. Satan must appear before God. (2) Satan comes to accuse the righteous (Revelation 12:10). (3) Though Satan masterminds evil in the world, he does nothing without Divine permission. (4) Satan appears after “going to and fro on the earth” (Job 1:7), suggesting that he is not omnipresent. Nor is the devil omniscient or omnipotent.

- ⁴ Eliphaz the Temanite was one of Job’s three friends. Chapters 4-5, 15, and 22 in the book of Job record his speeches.

- ⁵ Zophar speaks in chapters 11 and 20, although some scholars believe 27:7-28:28 should be attributed to him. Otherwise, Zophar only speaks twice. Elihu interrupts his third speech.

- ⁶ Hope Out Loud, *ibid*.

- ⁷ Warren Wiersbe, *Find Yourself in the Psalms*, p. 10.

- ⁸ “Which psalms predict the coming of Jesus Christ?” Got Questions, accessed on June 9, 2021, <https://www.gotquestions.org/Psalms-Jesus-Christ.html>

- ⁹ See Matthew 22:41-46, Mark 12:35-37, Luke 20:40-44

- ¹⁰ Warren Wiersbe, *Be Skillful*, p. 14.

- ¹¹ Bruce Waltke, *The Book of Proverbs*, Chapters 1-15, p. 21.

- ¹² Henry J.M. Nouwen, *Life of the Beloved*, p. 18-19.

- ¹³ *Qoheleth*, the Hebrew title of the book, is a rare term and found only in the book of Ecclesiastes (1:1, 2, 12, 7:27, 12:8-10). It comes from a word which means “to convoke an assembly, to assemble.” It refers to one who addresses an assembly, like a preacher.”

- ¹⁴ The word “vanity” appears nineteen times in Ecclesiastes to describe how empty life is under the sun and without a relationship with the Lord.
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- ¹⁵ Ron Jones, *Mysteries of the Afterlife: Exploring Its Amazing Secrets*, p. 24.
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- ¹⁶ IBID, p. 25-26
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- ¹⁷ Dennis and Barbara Rainey, Six Steps for Resolving Conflict in Marriage, <http://www.familylife.com/articles/topics/marriage/staying-married/resolving-conflict/6-steps-for-resolving-conflict-in-marriage>, accessed on March 27, 2017.
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- ¹⁸ In *The Book of Romance*, Tommy Nelson explains, “Godly jealousy does not result in smothering another person or manipulating him, limiting his freedom or imposing false guilt upon him. Godly jealousy means that you do your utmost to keep your spouse’s attention focused on you. In as many ways as possible, you protect your spouse from any temptation to be unfaithful.”

About the Author



RON JONES is a pastor, author, discipleship coach, and radio Bible teacher. For more than two decades, he has devoted his life to leading and preaching in the local church. He currently serves as lead pastor of Atlantic Shores Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia, where he delivers his Bible teaching for everyday life.

Ron's ministry extends beyond the local church he serves through a daily radio broadcast heard around the world called Something Good with Dr. Ron Jones. Something Good Radio and Television exists to share the gospel of Jesus Christ, make disciples, and strengthen the body of Christ through life-changing Bible teaching.

A lifelong learner, Dr. Jones earned degrees from Purdue University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He is the author of *Mysteries of the Afterlife: Exploring Its Amazing Secrets* (Harvest House Publishers, Eugene, OR) and multiple eBooks.

Through Something Good Travel, Ron and his wife Cathryn lead spiritual tours to biblical sites in Israel, Italy, Greece, Turkey, Egypt, and Jordan. They have been married for 26 years and live five minutes from their happy place, the beach. They have two adult children.

ROUTE 66

The Ultimate Road Trip Through the Bible

The Bible is the best-selling book of all time, but it can also be intimidating to read because it contains more than 600,000 words divided into 66 distinct books written by 40 authors in three original languages over 1600 years. But how does it all fit together? In Route 66, Dr. Ron Jones takes us on the ultimate road trip through the Bible, pointing us to Jesus from Genesis to Revelation.

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Road Trip 2: The Old Testament Historical Books

Road Trip 3: The Wisdom Books

Road Trip 4: The Major Prophets

Road Trip 5: The Minor Prophets

Road Trip 6: The Gospels and the Early Church

Road Trip 7: The Pauline Epistles

Road Trip 8: The General Epistles and Revelation

Ron Jones is the lead pastor of Atlantic Shores Baptist Church in Virginia Beach, Virginia and Bible teacher on Something Good Radio and Television. A lifelong learner, Dr. Jones earned degrees from Purdue University, Dallas Theological Seminary, and The Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He lives in Virginia Beach with his wife Cathryn. They have two adult children.

