

JOB

Timeline: We know that Job was a real person (Ezekiel 14:14, 20; James 5:11), who lived in a real place that was far from Israel (Uz). There is no clear historical setting for the book, but this might be intentional considering the fact that the problem of suffering is timeless and universal.

Purpose: The book of Job seeks to equip readers to think theologically about the suffering in this world. It does this by recording lengthy dialogues between multiple characters who grapple with a few big questions: Is God just? Does He rule the universe according to justice? And if so, how does one explain Job's suffering? Each character presents a different perspective, and then God shows up and deconstructs every human perspective by revealing how limited it is.

Perspective A: Job's three friends (Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar) argue that God is just, and that He always rules according to justice, therefore they conclude that Job must have done something to deserve what He is getting.

Perspective B: Job mostly rejects the theology of his 3 "friends." He knows his suffering is not a result of his sin. But Job is still infected with the over simplified theology to a degree. According to his theology, someone needs to be blamed. And at some points throughout the book he concludes that the only possible explanation is that God is to blame (see 19:6-7).

Perspective C: The fourth "friend" (Elihu) shows up in chapters 32-37 to rebuke the 3 friends and offer a more sophisticated reason for why Job is suffering. He suggests that God might not be punishing Job for past sins, but rather warning him and protecting him from future sins.

God's Perspective: God shows up in 38-41 and completely obliterates the simplistic theology of the friends, as if the God who orchestrates the universe can be put in a box. And He reveals to Job that he made conclusions about Him based on very limited evidence. Thus readers are encouraged to conclude that the reasons for suffering might not always be answered in this life, but God can be absolutely trusted to always do what is right.

PROVERBS

The Purpose of Wisdom: Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon are known as Wisdom Literature. The wisdom books do not appear to advance the storyline of Scripture, as they do not explicitly focus on the covenants or the coming Messiah. But taking a step back allows us to see how they fit perfectly into God's plan for redemptive history. God created the world, chose Israel, and sent Jesus for one primary purpose: His glory (Isaiah 43:7). Every other reason is secondary. God created man in His image so that He could populate the earth with His

image bearers, and thus bring glory to Himself. When man marred His image with sin God elected to choose one people and give them His law so that they could be a Kingdom of Priests (Exodus 19:6), mediating the glory of God to the world by becoming a holy nation through obedience to His law (Deuteronomy 4:5-8). And the purpose of wisdom literature serves towards this end; for people who fear the Lord, trust Him in the midst of suffering, and live according to the wisdom of His moral design for the universe will live a life that is glorifying to God.

How to Read Proverbs: A proverb is a short saying that offers some type of wisdom. It is not a promise, guarantee, or formula; rather it is based on probability according to the created order. While Proverbs is full of wisdom that promotes a life that leads to blessing, it is important to read it with the balancing perspectives of Job and Ecclesiastes. Yes, in general a life that fears the Lord and obeys His law leads to blessing. However, life is not always that simple (see Job).

Structure: Chapters 1-9 consist of 10 speeches from a father to a son and 4 poems from lady wisdom. Ch. 10-29 string together hundreds of proverbs that apply the wisdom of fearing the Lord to every aspect of life. Chapters 30-31 conclude with poems about the ideal proverb reader.

RUTH

Timeline: The events of Ruth took place a few generations before King David, during the time that the Judges ruled (approximately 1,100 B.C.).

Main Message: The author of Ruth demonstrates how God orchestrates the seemingly mundane events in life to weave them into His overarching purposes for redemptive history. For Ruth was a gentile widow who was graciously redeemed, became the great grandmother of King David, and foreshadowed the future Davidic King whose reign would bless Jews *and* Gentiles like Ruth.

SONG OF SOLOMON

Overall Message: The Song of Solomon (could have been written by Solomon, about Solomon, or simply in the wisdom tradition of Solomon) is a collection of love poems. The poems oscillate back and forth from the perspective of a woman and her beloved. The end of the book seems to suggest that the purpose is to communicate that sexual love is a divine gift that is to be cherished and stewarded. For love is like fire: it can give life or destroy it.

Interpretation: The interpretation of the Song of Solomon has prompted more debate and gained less consensus than any other book in the Bible. Jewish tradition has interpreted it as an allegory depicting God's love for Israel. Christians have historically interpreted it as an allegory of Christ's love for the Church. Recent scholarly arguments have suggested that it is simply meant to depict the divine gift of sexual love. A combination of all three interpretations is plausible. There are echoes of the garden of Eden throughout. This seems to suggest that the book depicts what relationships would be like unhindered by sin, what is still made somewhat possible because of the power of love, and what believers have to look forward to because of the coming Kingdom.