



Jewish Study Bible, p. 1275: The vague term *Kethuvim*, “Writings”, reflects the variety of material collected in this canonical division, ranging from historical works (eg, Chronicles), prayers (Psalms), wisdom works (eg, Job), and apocalyptic prophecy (the second half of Daniel). It is likely that the various books now in this section entered the canon for quite different reasons: Psalms was used for prayers, the Song of Songs was probably first canonized as an ancient erotic poem used in wedding ceremonies, while the books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes may have been placed together in the canon because all three belong to a category of writing known as wisdom literature. Most likely the books now in Kethuvim came together and were viewed as authoritative and ultimately canonized toward the end of the Second Temple period, after the canonical section *Nevi'im* was closed, and thus the books now comprising Kethuvim were assembled together, despite their differences, into a single group.

The books of the Writings:

- Psalms
- Proverbs
- Job
- The Five Scrolls
 - Song of Songs
 - Ruth
 - Lamentations
 - Ecclesiastes
 - Esther
- Daniel
- Ezra
- Nehemiah
- First Chronicles
- Second Chronicles

Dating the books of the Writings

- Psalms 800-400 BCE
- Daniel 2nd c. BCE
- Ecclesiastes 2nd c. BCE
- Ruth after 538 BCE





Wisdom

“In its broadest sense, wisdom... denotes any expertise or skill (eg, a professional sailor [Ezek.27.8] or mourner [Jer. 9.17]). Among the sages, however, wisdom came to denote expertise in life based on careful observation of God’s created and moral order. Thus, wisdom had primary concern for practical success in everyday life, a goal at the heart of proverbs (1.2-4).” (*The New Interpreter’s Bible One Volume Commentary*)

- Wisdom books do not focus on the nation Israel or on God’s intervention in history.
- They do not mention the covenant.
- Instead, the focus on universal human concerns, esp to the maintenance of ordered relationships that leads both to human success and to divine approval.

Proverbs is as close as biblical literature comes to Greek philosophy. It includes many observations of natural phenomena.

Observations of nature in Wisdom material

“Yes, God is great—beyond our knowledge!
The number of his years is unsearchable.

²⁷ He draws up drops of water;
they distill the rain into its mist,

²⁸ which the clouds pour down
and shower on humankind abundantly.

²⁹ Who can understand the spreading of the clouds,
the thunderings of his pavilion?

³⁰ See how he scattered his lightning about him;
he has covered the depths of the sea.

³¹ It is by these that he judges the nations
and supplies food in abundance.

³² With his hands he covers the lightning,
and directs it against its target.

³³ His thunder announces the coming storm,
the cattle also, concerning the storm's approach. (Job 36.27-33)

Psalm 19.1-6 (a “wisdom psalm”)

The heavens declare the glory of God;
the sky displays his handiwork.

² Day after day it speaks out;
night after night it reveals his greatness.

³ There is no actual speech or word,
nor is its voice literally heard.

⁴ Yet its voice echoes throughout the earth;
its words carry to the distant horizon.

In the sky he has pitched a tent for the sun.

⁵ Like a bridegroom it emerges from its chamber;
like a strong man it enjoys running its course.

⁶ It emerges from the distant horizon,
and goes from one end of the sky to the other;
nothing can escape its heat.



Proverbs

The proverbs of Solomon son of David, king of Israel:

- ² For learning about wisdom and instruction,
for understanding words of insight,
- ³ for gaining instruction in wise dealing,
righteousness, justice, and equity;
- ⁴ to teach shrewdness to the simple,
knowledge and prudence to the young—
- ⁵ let the wise, too, hear and gain in learning
and the discerning acquire skill,
- ⁶ to understand a proverb and a figure,
the words of the wise and their riddles.
- ⁷ The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge;
fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Wisdom
(cont.)

The one who conducts himself in integrity will
live securely,
but the one who behaves perversely will be found
out. (Prov. 10.9)

Proverbs makes assertions that equate righteous behavior with long life and success, and it seems unaware of gray areas. Cf. Job.



The appeal of “Lady Wisdom”

Does not wisdom call
and understanding raise her voice?
² On the heights, beside the way,
at the crossroads she takes her stand;
³ beside the gates in front of the town,
at the entrance of the portals she
cries out:
⁴ “To you, O people, I call,
and my cry is to all who live.
⁵ O simple ones, learn prudence;
acquire intelligence, you who lack it.
⁶ Hear, for I will speak noble things,
and from my lips will come what is
right,
⁷ for my mouth will utter truth;
wickedness is an abomination to my
lips. (Prov. 1.1-7)

Lady Wisdom's appeal (Prov. 8) compared to the Logos hymn in John 1.1-18

"The LORD created me at the beginning of his work,
the first of his acts of long ago.
²³ Ages ago I was set up,
at the first, before the beginning of the earth.
²⁴ When there were no depths I was brought forth,
when there were no springs abounding with water.
²⁵ Before the mountains had been shaped,
before the hills, I was brought forth,
²⁶ when he had not yet made earth and fields
or the world's first bits of soil.
²⁷ When he established the heavens, I was there;
when he drew a circle on the face of the deep,
²⁸ when he made firm the skies above,
when he established the fountains of the deep,
²⁹ when he assigned to the sea its limit,
so that the waters might not transgress his command,

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God,
and the Word was God.
² He was in the beginning with God.
³ All things came into being through him,
and without him not one thing came into being.
What has come into being ⁴ in him was life,
and the life was the light of all people.
⁵ The light shines in the darkness,
and the darkness did not overtake it.

Wisdom hymn and Logos hymn compared (cont.)

when he marked out the foundations of
the earth,
then I was beside him,
like a master worker,
and I was daily his delight,
 playing before him always,
³¹ playing in his inhabited world
 and delighting in the human race.

10 He was in the world,
 and the world came into being through him,
 yet the world did not know him.
11 He came to what was his own,
 and his own people did not accept him.
12 But to all who received him,
 who believed in his name,
he gave power to become children of God,
13 who were born not of blood
 or of the will of the flesh
 or of the will of man,
 but of God.

Lady Folly makes her appeal

The woman called Folly is brash,
she is naive and does not know anything.
¹⁴ And she has sat down at the door of her house,
on a seat at the highest point of the city,
¹⁵ calling out to those who are passing by her in the way,
who go straight on their way.
¹⁶ "Whoever is naive, let him turn in here,"
To those who lack understanding she has said,
¹⁷ "Stolen waters are sweet,
and food obtained in secret is pleasant!"
¹⁸ But they do not realize that the dead are there,
that her guests are in the depths of the grave. (Prov. 9.13-18)



King Solomon (Russian icon)

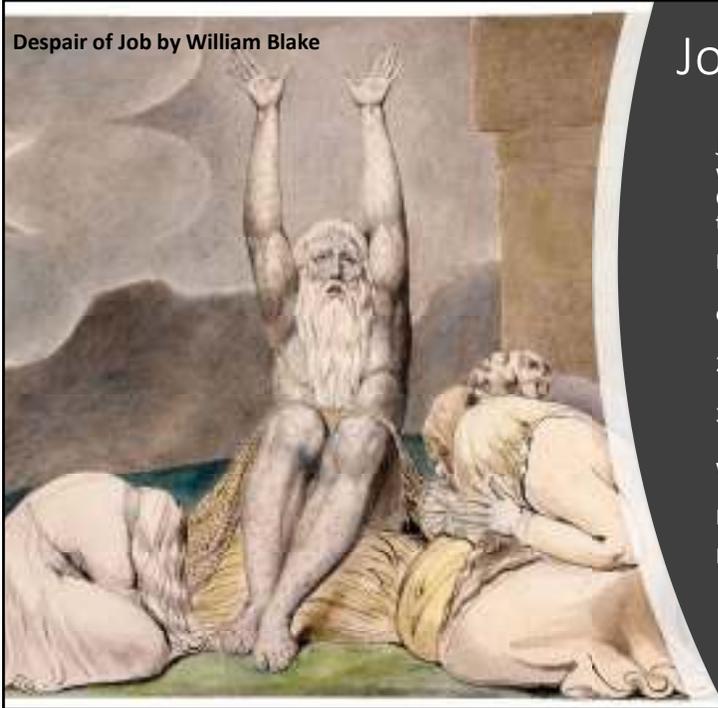
Ecclesiastes

Author: "I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem."

Ecclesiastes questions the answers of the Wisdom tradition. "Its author knows the version of the world espoused by sages but sets out... to put everything to the test: is *hokhmah*, the way of wisdom and restraint enjoined by the sages, the best in life, or is its opposite, *siklut* (Heb., often translated as "folly," the word in Ecclesiastes means self-indulgence and hedonism) the way to choose? ...[Ecclesiastes] implied that learning the truth of wisdom's way is a lifelong task. For the book of Ecclesiastes is framed by its author's life: the young hedonist of chap. 2 ages as his book progresses, and at each turn the propounds new insights in his clipped [proverbs]. But he does not hesitate to confess his frustration: however much the ancient verities seem validated here and there, he is nonetheless baffled at the world's unfairness. How, for example, can one continue to maintain that the righteous are rewarded in old age and the wicked are cut off, when our very experience tells us differently?" (*Harper's Bible Commentary*, pp. 401-402)

Traditionally, Ecclesiastes is attributed to Solomon, but this is highly unlikely. Our idea of authorship did not exist in the ancient world. Saying that Solomon was the author was a way of honoring Solomon.

Despair of Job by William Blake



Job

Job, like Ecclesiastes, questions the truth of the wisdom tradition. In Protestant and Roman Catholic Bibles, Job comes immediately before the book of Psalms. The first psalm says:

Happy are those
who do not follow the advice of the wicked
or take the path that sinners tread
or sit in the seat of scoffers,
2 but their delight is in the law of the Lord,
and on his law they meditate day and night.
3 They are like trees
planted by streams of water,
which yield their fruit in its season,
and their leaves do not wither.
In all that they do, they prosper.

However, the book of Job is a rebuke to Psalm 1.

Then the LORD answered Job out of the whirlwind:

² "Who is this that darkens counsel by words without knowledge?"

³ Gird up your loins like a man;

I will question you, and you shall declare to me.

⁴ "Where were you when I laid the foundation of the earth?"

Tell me, if you have understanding.

⁵ Who determined its measurements—surely you know!

Or who stretched the line upon it?

⁶ On what were its bases sunk,

or who laid its cornerstone

⁷ when the morning stars sang together

and all the heavenly beings shouted for joy?



The messages of the Tanakh and the New Testament

- God acts in history: “I am the LORD [YHWH] who brought you up out of Egypt, out of the house of bondage...” (Exodus 20.2); “For I handed on to you as of first importance what I in turn had received: that Christ died for our sins in accordance with the scriptures and that he was buried and that he was raised on the third day in accordance with the scriptures.” (1 Cor. 15.3-4)
- God is on the side of the oppressed and marginalized: “...seek justice; rescue the oppressed; defend the orphan; plead for the widow.” (Isa. 1.17); “God has brought down the powerful from their thrones and lifted up the lowly; he has filled the hungry with good things and sent the rich away empty.” (Luke 1.52-53)
- History has a direction; it had a beginning, and it will have an end.
- The “first and great commandment” is the same: Love one another.