



Session Nine

**WISDOM IS A GIFT
FROM GOD**

Dear Lord,

*We read in your inspired proverbs that
“the beginning of all knowledge is the fear of the Lord
but fools despise wisdom and discipline.”*

*Grant us the wisdom to bow our heads before you, O Lord
And the desire to lift up our hearts to Your will and Your Way.*

Amen.



What Are the Wisdom Books?

We have seen, in the history that we have been studying, how neighboring cultures and ways of thinking influenced the Jewish people. Long before Israel became a great nation under King David, these cultures—the Babylonians and the Egyptians especially—were known for their “wisdom writings.” These writings, sometimes in the form of poems and stories, ask the big questions that we human beings have always asked and still do ask:

Why are we born and why do we die?

What’s the purpose of life?

What is the best way to live?

Many of the ideas in these “wisdom writings” from other cultures became part of the writings of the Hebrews.

But there is a basic difference between the Hebrew writings and those of other cultures. For other cultures, wisdom itself is a source of power and knowledge. For the Hebrews, only God is wise. He gives wisdom as a gift to human beings (like Solomon, for instance). This God-given wisdom can be applied to life in very practical ways, and so the Wisdom Books of the Old Testament are filled with sayings and stories to help us live in ways that are pleasing to God and beneficial to us. They remind us over and over that the way to have a good life is to know God and follow His teachings.

The Book of Job

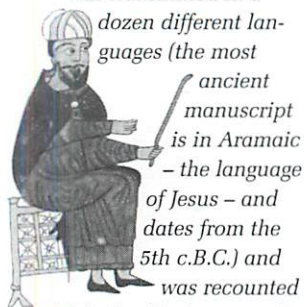
This story of a righteous (meaning morally good) man who suffers shows a new way of thinking among some of the Jewish people. The book was written sometime around the exile and captivity in Babylonia. You remember that the Babylonian army destroyed the Temple, the Ark of the Covenant, and the city wall of Jerusalem, as well as other parts of the city. The Hebrew people were taken away from Judah in chains, to slavery in a foreign land whose people didn’t know or revere God.

How could anyone explain this? Though the Jewish people knew they had not always followed God’s law, they also knew that His Kingdom was eternal and that no human being could overcome it. So how was it that everything most holy could have been destroyed by men? How was it that God’s chosen people could have everything taken from them?

The Book of Job shows that even good people can suffer in this life, and not because of any obvious sin. It’s not a simple matter of punishment for

Did You Know?

There are many famous “wisdom” stories out of the Ancient Near East. One of them was so popular that it was transmitted in a dozen different languages (the most



widely. It tells the story of a certain Ahiqar, a court official in Assyria, who is betrayed and then restored to his post, and contains many proverbs about life, order, and the meaning of things.

the evil and reward for the good. In this life not only will the good suffer, but sometimes it seems as if the evil prosper in a way that is very frustrating to everybody else! So Job is the prime Old Testament example of the “righteous sufferer.”

The story of Job begins by telling us that Job is a man who loves God and has prosperity of all kinds. The devil tempts him by taking away all the good things he has. The devil is sure that if Job loses enough of what he had, he will turn against God. But Job refuses to do so. When his friends tell him that he must have done something wrong because God must be punishing him for something, he insistently claims that he is innocent, but still refuses to blame God.

Finally Job looks over his past behavior, and sees nothing seriously wrong in it. He asks God why the innocent should have to suffer.

God’s answer is a powerful one. Read it in the entire 38th chapter of Job. After reading the chapter, answer the questions below and discuss with your group.

Bible Study: God Speaks to Job (Job 38)

1. What in the natural world is a very awesome experience for you? Something scary like a storm? Something grand like a tall tree or a mountain? Little things like a tiny flower or a hummingbird? Something vast like space or the ocean?
2. In this chapter of Job, does God reveal Himself as something distant or as a personal God?
3. Does God answer Job’s question: *why am I suffering if I’ve done nothing wrong?* What is He saying instead?
4. Do you ask God questions about your life when you’re hurting or confused? What might God be choosing to reveal to us instead of the answers we might expect?

After hearing these words, Job realizes that God cannot be “explained” or fully “understood” by mere human beings. His majesty, power, and love for His creatures are beyond our ability to fathom. At the end of the Book of Job, the many good things Job had are restored to him. This tells us that for those who keep their faith in God, no matter what the circumstances, good things will come. Of course, because this was a story with a moral, it’s not so much about material goods as it is about God’s ultimate blessing – the true joy of the Spirit.

We read this part of the Book of Job at the Holy Saturday service in the Armenian Church. Why was this reading chosen for Holy Saturday?

Word Watch

Job: pronounced to rhyme with “robe”, the meaning of the word is uncertain but James coined the phrase “the patience of Job” and refers to the perseverance of the book’s main character in the face of his suffering (James 5:10-11). Patience may be a bit misleading, however, since eventually Job loses his cool and sputters the question exasperatedly to God: “why?”



The Armenian Angle

Psalms are the foundation of much of our Divine Liturgy. The priest and deacon chant psalms “antiphonally” (ann-tiff-un-ul-ly) in the Armenian tradition, which means verses are alternated in a sing-song style. One of



the oldest psalms used in our badarak is Psalm 24, attributed to David. As the deacon ceremoniously

hands over the veiled chalice of wine (covered by the “paten” or small plate on which rests the wafer of bread or nushkhar) they chant the beautiful ancient couplets “Who is the King of Glory, the Lord of Hosts?” “This is the King of Glory!” “Ov eh sa takavor paratz, Der Zorootyantz?” “Sa inkn eh takavor paratz!”

Because in Jesus Christ, the idea of the “righteous sufferer” is complete. The innocent Christ, who is also the Son of God, suffers for us and faces the evil of the world for us when He is crucified. We will still face suffering in this world, but now we know that it is not simply meaningless. God’s own Son has faced it, and has overcome it. It need not destroy us, and it cannot destroy the reality of God’s Kingdom, as the Babylonians once destroyed Jerusalem.

The Book of Psalms

This book is sometimes called the “prayer book of the Church” because psalms are part of every worship service we have. There are 150 psalms, many of them written by King David and some by his choir director Asaph. Others are by unknown writers. They were written over many years, and were used in the Temple worship. Today, in the longer worship services that are conducted in monasteries, you might hear the whole Book of Psalms (called the Psalter) chanted or sung in just a few days of worship. Try chanting or singing the psalms the same way they are chanted or sung in church.

As most of us know, some of the psalms are songs of praise. Others ask God for help or tell Him of human troubles and ask Him to intervene. Others thank Him for His gifts. Some psalms are a combination of all these.

One group of psalms is very special. They are called the “royal psalms” or “messianic psalms” because they point us toward the coming of the messiah, the king, Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus Himself referred to the Psalms. Read His words in *Luke 24:44* and copy them here:

The Book of Proverbs

Want to know how to be a good parent? Seeking some guidelines for a happy family life? Care for some advice that will help you when you are feeling envious or sorry for yourself? The Book of Proverbs, put together in the third century B.C., is the place to go. These “wise sayings” and useful thoughts were probably written by many people. One of the writers was the wise Solomon, but others came from the minds and pens of unknown writers. We do know that rabbis in those early centuries used these sayings in the moral and religious training of Jewish youth.

The Book of Ecclesiastes

Written in the fifth century B.C., the Book of Ecclesiastes tells us that nothing in this world—fame, money, learning, success—has any meaning in and of itself. Only in God can we find meaning, purpose, and hope in life.

The Song of Songs

This is a Canaanite wedding song which the Jewish people adapted. It's a very romantic description of love between a man and a woman. It is seen as a poetic way of describing how much Jesus Christ loves His bride, the Church (which means all of us).

The Wisdom of Solomon, Sirach

These books of thoughts about the world and the people in it are not from Solomon's time. Rather, they come from the years just before the time of the New Testament. Remember that writers in ancient times sometimes attributed their books to a person whose thought they admired and had tried to emulate in their own writing. That is probably the basis for these books being attributed to Solomon.

Looking In

Proverbs reflect the conventional wisdom of a particular society but they usually have something to say for all people in all times. What's your "wisdom" on friendship? Think of an important tip you have about friendship and write it here in proverb form.

Quick Quiz #9

① The Wisdom writings of the Old Testament consist of:

- a. ___ poetry
- b. ___ advice
- c. ___ stories
- d. ___ all of the above

② Job was a

- a. ___ bad husband and father
- b. ___ righteous sufferer
- c. ___ poor man
- d. ___ slave

③ Job 38 is read in the Armenian church during:

- a. ___ a funeral
- b. ___ the Badarak
- c. ___ Holy Saturday
- d. ___ Good Friday

④ King David wrote many of the chapters in

- a. ___ Psalms
- b. ___ Proverbs
- c. ___ Ecclesiastes
- d. ___ all of the above

⑤ Solomon was one of the writers of this book

- a. ___ Psalms
- b. ___ Proverbs
- c. ___ Wisdom of Solomon
- d. ___ all of the above

⑥ Which word best describes the Song of Songs?

- a. ___ advice
- b. ___ pessimistic
- c. ___ violent
- d. ___ romantic

⑦ Which book is described as the "prayerbook of the Church?"

- a. ___ Sirach
- b. ___ Proverbs
- c. ___ Psalms
- d. ___ Job

⑧ to ⑩ Circle the three words that do not belong :

Psalter Gospel Asaph epistle
poetry praise suffering Torah