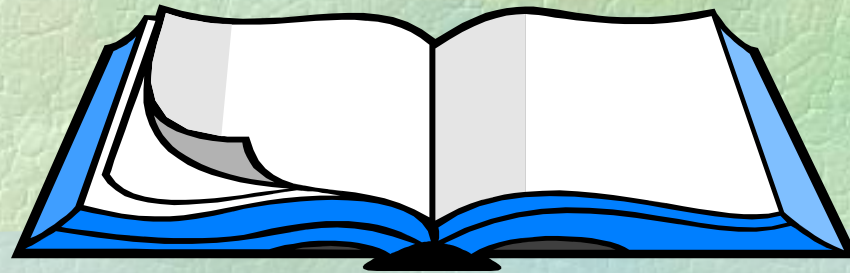


How To Read The Bible



For All Its Worth!

Goals For This Class

- To give a basic approach to understanding the biblical text
- To examine historical methods of interpretation
- To consider other methods of interpretation
- To promote unity of shared understanding
- To relate elders' views on interpretation

Not Goals For This Class

- To ensure everybody believes what I do
- To ensure everybody believes the same thing
- To debate controversial passages of scripture
- To negate or endorse any particular interpretative approach
- To confuse, frustrate, or agitate truthseekers

Wisdom Literature



Types of Wisdom Literature

- Ecclesiastes
- Proverbs
- Job
- Song of Songs (Solomon)

The Nature of Wisdom Literature

- Abuse of wisdom literature
- Who is wise?
- Teachers of wisdom
- Wisdom in the home
- Wisdom among colleagues
- Wisdom expressed through poetry
- The limits of wisdom

What Is Biblical Wisdom?

- Definition:
 - The ability to make godly choices in life

Misuses of Wisdom Literature

- Partial reading of the books
 - “a time to be born and a time to die”
- Misunderstanding of terms and literary style
 - “Stay away from a fool”
- Failure to follow the line of argument
 - “the wicked person suffers torment”

Who Is Wise?

- Wisdom is personal, not abstract or theory
- Our lives are the result of choices
- Goal of wisdom is making best choices
- Unrelated to intellectual ability
- Applied to technical matters and politics
- Wisdom focuses on people and behavior
- Do not seek wisdom for personal advantage

Teachers of Wisdom

- Wisdom “instructors” or “wise men”
- Paralleled role of priests and prophets
- Arose at beginning of kingship (1000 BC)
- Some inspired to write parts of O.T.
- Served as sort of “substitute parent” for wisdom seekers

Wisdom in the Home

- This still happens
 - Don't play in the street; Be sure to dress warmly
- Shapes the behavior of children
- Proverbs subordinates all advice to God
- Advice may be practical or secular
- Always acknowledges the highest good as God's will

Wisdom Among Colleagues

- Role of discussion and argument
- Involves lengthy discourse either as monologue or dialogue
- May involve proverbial wisdom, speculative wisdom, or lyric wisdom

Wisdom Expressed Through Poetry

- Poetry used as a learning technique
- Words, cadence, style promote memorization
- Examples:
 - parallelism (Prov 7:4; Prov 10:1; Prov 21:16)
 - acrostics (Prov 31:10-31)
 - alliteration (Ecc 3:1-8)
 - numerical sequences (Prov 30:15-31)
 - similes/metaphors (Job 32:19; Song 4:1-6)

The Limits of Wisdom

- Not all ancient wisdom was godly
- The origin of true wisdom is God (Prov 2:5)
- The purpose is to please Him (Prov 3:7)
- Wisdom does not deal with theology/history
- Skill in wisdom doesn't guarantee good use
- Only when subordinated to God does wisdom achieve its proper use

Ecclesiastes: Cynical Wisdom

“Meaningless! Meaningless!”

says the Teacher.

“Utterly meaningless!

Everything is meaningless” (Ecc 1:2)

I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind. (Ecc 1:14)

(NIV)

Ecclesiastes: Cynical Wisdom

Fear God and keep his commandments,
For this is the whole duty of man,
For God will bring every deed into judgment,
including every hidden thing,
whether it is good or evil.

Ecc 12:13-14

(NIV)

Wisdom in Job

- Goal of dialogue:
 - To establish that what happens in life does not always happen because God desires it or because it is fair.
- Job knew he did not deserve God's wrath
- The reader can contrast the world's wisdom (seemingly logical, but wrong) with God's wisdom that shows his sovereignty and righteousness

Wisdom in Proverbs

- Rules and regulations people can use to make good choices
- Focuses on practical attitudes
- Contrasts life of wisdom with life of folly
- Urges specific actions
- Uses very little religious language

Characteristics of Life of Folly

- Violent crime (Prov 1:10-19)
- Careless promises (Prov 6:1-5)
- Laziness (Prov 6:7-11)
- Dishonesty (Prov 6:12-15)
- Sexual impurity (Prov 2:16-19)

Characteristics of Life of Wisdom

- Caring for the poor (Prov 2:22,27)
- Respect for government (Prov 23:1-3)
- Disciplining children (Prov 23:13-14)
- Moderation in alcohol (Prov 23:19-21)
- Regard for parents (Prov 23:22-25)

Uses and Abuses of Proverbs

- Hebrew “*meshallim*” = figures of speech
- Proverbs are brief, particular expressions
- Proverbs point toward truth
- Not necessarily to be taken literally
- Often technically inexact

Examples of Proverbs Abuse

Can a man scoop fire into his lap
without his clothes being burned?

Can a man walk on hot coals
without his feet being scorched?

So is he who sleeps with another man's wife;
no one who touches her will go unpunished.

Prov 6:27-29 (NIV)

Examples of Proverbs Abuse

Commit to the Lord whatever you do,
and your plans will succeed.

Prov 16:3 (NIV)

Some Hermeneutical Suggestions

- Proverbs are not legal guarantees from God
- Proverbs should be read as a collection
- Proverbs are worded to be memorable, not necessarily theoretically accurate
- Some Proverbs need to be translated to be appreciated

Wisdom in Song of Songs

- Example of lyric wisdom
- Why is love poetry in the Bible?
- Concerned with the basic choices in life
 - Whom to love?
 - How to love?

Wisdom in Song of Songs

- Two problems with interpretation
 - totality transfer
 - allegorizing
- Considerations for proper interpretation
 - appreciate the overall ethical context
 - understand the genre of the Song
 - read as suggesting godly choices
 - accept focus on different values

Questions or Comments?



Next Week:

Understanding Apocalyptic Literature