

How to Read Biblical Poetry

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Let's just say up front, we should read the Poetical books with an eye for Christ and the gospel.

The Poetical books can be classified in two broad categories: the Psalms and the Wisdom books. The Psalms constitute an introduction to worship, detailing what it is to serve the Lord. Not all psalms are the same. Some are communal; others are individual. Some are joyful; others are mournful. Some confess sin; others claim righteousness. Any regular reading of the Psalms draws attention to this diversity. Together they make it unmistakably clear that true and biblical

religion is found through all of life. Significantly, throughout the entire Psalter we find the contrast between the two ways: the way of the righteous and the way of the ungodly (Psalm 1).

The Wisdom books include Proverbs, Job, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon. In the context of the Wisdom books, "wisdom" designates the skill or ability to perform the biblical ethic, and they give instructions on how we can develop that skill. The focus of the Wisdom books is on the individual, providing practical instructions dealing with the issues, problems, and perplexities of life.

It is helpful to group the Wisdom books into two categories. Proverbs is didactic (teaching), with all of its aphorisms (proverbs or wise sayings) dealing with virtually every situation of life. The other books are more reflective, concerning some of the perplexities of life that may generate improper thoughts about God and thus hindrances to holiness.

In reading these books it helps to know its central theme and primary purpose. On the authority of the words of Christ (Luke 24:25-27), He is the central theme and message of the Old Testament. Therefore, we should read these books through the lens of the gospel and Christ. Seeing Christ and the gospel in the Old Testament is finding the life of the Old Testament; it is what gives life to what otherwise seems to be dry and outdated. Finding Christ is the key that both unlocks and locks in the message of the whole Word of God.

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