

**UGC- MINOR RESEARCH PROJECT**

**Project Title**

**“A Deductive and Pedagogical Analysis of the Holy *Bible* as  
Wholly World Literature”**

1882-MRP/14-15-/KLMG019/UGC-SWRO

**Final Report Submitted to**

The Joint secretary and Head

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## **Declaration and Certificate**

I hereby declare and certify that, the Minor Research Project entitled “**A Deductive and Pedagogical Analysis of the Holy *Bible* as Wholly World Literature**” 1882-MRP/14-15-/KLMG019/UGC-SWRO is a bonafide record of research work carried out by me during the year 2015- 2017. Further certify that the work presented in the report is original and carried out according to the plan in the proposal and guidelines of the University Grants Commission.

Principal Investigator

## **Acknowledgment**

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Principal Investigator

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## Introduction

The Bible is not one book but a library of 66 books that were written over a period of around 1,500 years by many different authors and contains a range of different types of literature or genres. The Bible is a collection of writings or / and of literature that consists of genres such as History (both fact & fiction), Law, Prophecy, Poetry, Gospels and Letters etc... And in each genre, there are various styles employed by different writers such as the use of metaphors, similes, Jewish laws, parables, discourses, eye witness accounts, songs, poems, proverbs, apocalyptic writing, magic realism, symbolism, and the coded message found in Revelation to put across their message.

The criteria for a literary classic provided by Abrams' *Glossary of Literary Terms* is a text that is kept in print, discussed frequently by scholars, and likely to be included in anthologies and college courses meets the standard for a classic. Implicit in Abrams' criteria is the belief that a classic is something most people should read, even if they have not.

Genology is the study of form in Comparative Literature. Theorists of Comparative Literature argue that it is futile to study genres, as genres keep changing. According to this perception, literature should be taken as a whole. In this project paper the researcher tries to identify the characteristic features of a literary classic as well as Comparative Literature in order to analyze the Bible as a paragon and testimony of World Literature or Global Literature and also to suggest the relevance of wisdom literature in college courses. The wisdom books provide direction to those who sought to live moral and productive lives. They were textbooks of a sort to those who were looking for help in how to live life: how to think, how to cope, indeed, how to succeed.

The influence of the *Bible* on the development of English literature is impossible to ignore. There are more than a thousand biblical references in the works of Shakespeare alone. Authors and poets such as John Milton, Charles Dickens, Matthew Arnold, William Wordsworth, Mark Twain, Robert Frost and Emily Dickinson shaped their literature with allusions and metaphors taken from the pages of the Bible.

The *Holy Bible's* influence extends also to the language we speak, the laws we uphold, the names we have been given, the metaphors we use and the similes we employ for emphasis in our daily communications. To this day, we continue to hear biblical phrases like: "My brother's keeper" (Genesis 4:9), "The salt of the earth" (Matthew 5:13), "A law unto themselves" (Romans 2:14, King James Version), "The powers that be" (Romans 13:1, KJV), "Filthy lucre" (1 Timothy 3:3), "Fight the good fight" (1 Timothy 6:12) and many, many more.

A book of books

The word Bible comes from the Greek word 'biblia', a plural noun that simply means "the books." The diversity of the authors of books in the Bible is quite remarkable. Consider just a few: Isaiah was a prophet, Ezra was a priest, Matthew was a tax collector, John was a fisherman, Paul was a tentmaker, and Moses was a shepherd and a leader.

From a literary point of view, it is absolutely astonishing that despite having been written by so many different authors from so many different backgrounds over a period of 15 centuries, the Bible does not contradict itself and does not contain any errors as it was originally written. It contains remarkable unity.

As novelist Frederick Buechner wrote, "In spite of all its extraordinary variety, the Bible is held together by having a single plot" (Longman 48).

The editors of *A Complete Literary Guide to the Bible* suggest asking the following questions when approaching a biblical passage: “What human experiences have been embodied in this text? To what genre(s) does this text belong, and how does an awareness of the relevant generic conventions guide our encounter with the text? What are the unifying patterns and structure of the text? What artistry does the text exhibit?” (19).

#### Literature with a purpose

The *Bible* contains quite a few outstanding literary sections; however, a crucial point that is often overlooked today is that those sections were not specifically written for the sake of making good literature. The literature is, without exception, used for specific purposes. And those purposes are clearly expounded in many places in the Bible itself.

The apostle Paul, one of the *Bible's* most prolific authors, succinctly recorded in 2 Timothy 3:16: “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness.”

This doesn't mean that we don't need to focus on background information such as when and why the biblical authors wrote. Nor should we ignore the specific literary methods they used to convey the essence of the *Bible's* central message.

Understanding its context and history is important. It can be helpful to realize that the first book of the Bible was written about 3,500 years ago and the last book about 2,000 years ago. Since the last book was written, an explosion of scientific knowledge has occurred.

The application of the theories of Comparative Literature in the *Bible* is significant to identify the characteristic features of World Literature in it. Since Comparative Literature is an interdisciplinary field whose practitioners study literature across national boundaries, across time periods, across genres, across languages, across boundaries between literature and other arts,

across disciplines and across cultures, the researcher intends to conduct a survey to gather opinions from scholars from various disciplines and religions with the aid of a questionnaire. This deductive approach helps the researcher to arrive at the suggestion that the wisdom literature can play a vital role in modern pedagogy and modern education.



## Chapter I

### **The *Holy Bible* as Wholly Literature**

*Bible* as literature is a concept newly introduced to the modern world. The *Bible* has long been a source for Western fundamentalism and ideologies due to the fact that it is a religious text. Billions of people throughout the world believe that the *Bible* is not merely a storybook but a code of ethics by which to live. Jews and Christians study the teachings of the *Bible* and apply its laws to everyday life. Viewing the Bible simply as a form of literature is a new phenomenon, causing much provocation and controversy.

The *Bible* is a canon of books. Jews and Christian sects canonized the *Bible* differently. The Christian Bible includes the Old Testament, which is Mosaic Law, and the New Testament, which features Jesus as its main theme. The Old Testament was written in Hebrew while the New Testament was originally written in Koine Greek. Jews have read and learned the Bible on their own. Christians originally only allowed priests to study the *Bible*, and the books were written only in Latin, preventing the majority of Christians from even considering delving into it. During the Renaissance, the Protestant Reformation awakened a rediscovery of the *Bible*; Protestants claimed that all Christians should be able to read the *Bible* and interpret it on their own. They printed the Bible in numerous languages.

Extensive reading of the *Bible* ultimately led to Biblical criticism. In the 17th century, Thomas Hobbes asserted that Moses could not possibly have written the Torah (Mosaic Law). Baruch Spinoza claimed that there were inconsistencies throughout the biblical text that proved Hobbes right. Though religious observers took little heed of these claims, many scholars agreed with these conclusions. David Norton wrote *A History of the English Bible as Literature* in

which he explores the 700-year history of the changing perception of the *Bible*. English Protestants such as John Wycliff and William Tyndale revolutionized the Christian perception of the *Bible* when they attempted to translate the *Bible* into English and take it away from the control of the Roman Catholic Church. The King James *Bible* gained more popularity than the Puritan Geneva *Bible* because of its simple style. The Romantics later on would view the King James *Bible* as a literary classic.

Because so much controversy surrounds the Bible, educating children about the Scriptures has posed a problem. But many authors and literary critics have explored the literary motifs throughout the *Bible* to discover its symmetry and overall message. J.H. Gardiner wrote *Bible as English Literature* in 1907. He says, "The way in which the various types of narrative have been put together has produced a literary effect different from anything else that we have in English literature." He claims that biblical narrative is at its strongest in the stories of the Garden of Eden, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. These pastoral stories of individual men are at once idyllic and relevant. The author goes on to analyze the poetry and rhythmic style of the Old Testament and the New Testament just as he would any other literary text. He does not examine the *Bible* within its own context, its time and culture. Rather, he presents it to the reader as a relevant form of literature in the modern world. Studying the *Bible* as literature does not diminish the eternal aspects of its message; it simply does not enforce that message.

### Genres in the Bible

A Biblical genre is a classification of Bible literature according to literary genre. The genre of a particular Bible passage is ordinarily identified by analysis of its general writing style, tone, form, structure, literary technique, content, design, and related linguistic factors; texts that exhibit a common set of literary features (very often in keeping with the writing styles of the

times in which they were written) are together considered to be belonging to a genre. In Biblical studies, genres are usually associated with whole books of the Bible, because each of its books comprises a complete textual unit; however, a book may be internally composed of a variety of styles, forms, and so forth, and thus bear the characteristics of more than one genre (for example, chapter 1 of the *Book of Revelation* is prophetic/visionary; chapters 2 and 3 are similar to the epistle genre; etc.).

Within the discipline of literary analysis, the existence and subjectivity of genres is a matter of some debate. This is reflected to a lesser degree in academic discussion of Biblical genres. However, isolating the broad genres of the *Bible* and discerning which books/passages belong to which genre is not a matter of complete agreement; for instance, scholars diverge over the existence and features of such Bible genres as gospel and apocalyptic. Furthermore, some detect subgenres—more narrowly defined compositional categories within a genre—in surrounding historical literature, and speculate that certain books and passages of the Bible may be better denominated by subgenre. Despite such differences of opinion within the community of Bible scholars, the majority acknowledge that the concept of genre and subgenre can be useful in the study of the *Bible* as a guide to the tone and interpretation of the text.

By way of literary comparison with the *Bible*, the *Qur'an* is claimed to be a recitation by Allah to the prophet Muhammed in didactic form, and so does not have the degree of genre diversity that is evidenced in the *Bible*; although there is a difference in style and themes between the Meccan surrahs and the Medinan surrahs when Muhammed moved from Mecca to Medina. In contrast, the *Bible* is claimed to be inspired by God and organically written and compiled by many authors over a very long period of time, and so takes a wide variety of forms.

Among the generally recognized genres and categorizations of the *Bible* are the following.

- Historical Narrative/Epic: Genesis and the first half of Exodus
- The Law: the last half of Exodus; also Leviticus, Deuteronomy
- Wisdom: Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes
- Psalms: Psalms, Song of Solomon, Lamentations
- Prophecy: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jonah, Micah, Nahum, Habakkuk, Zephaniah, Haggai, Zechariah, Malachi
- Apocalyptic: Daniel, Revelation
- Gospel: Matthew, Mark, Luke, John, and possibly Acts
- Epistle(letter): Romans, and 2 Corinthians, Galatians, Ephesians, Philippians, Colossians, 1 and 2 Thessalonians, 1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, Philemon, Hebrews, James, 1 and 2 Peter, 1, 2, and 3 John, Jude.

The following literary features of the Bible which together make it unique:

1. A unifying story line.

Although the overall genre of the Bible is the anthology of individual books and passages, the *Bible* possesses a unity far beyond that of other literary anthologies. The technical term for a unifying superstructure such as we find in the *Bible* is metanarrative (big or overarching story). In the *Bible*, the metanarrative is the story of salvation history—the events by which God worked out his plan to redeem humanity and the creation after they fell from original innocence. This story of salvation history is Christocentric in the sense that it focuses ultimately on the substitutionary sacrifice and atonement of Christ on the cross and his resurrection from

death. The unifying story line of the Bible is a U-shaped story that moves from the creation of a perfect world, through the fall of that world into sin, then through fallen human history as it slowly and painfully makes its way toward consummation and arrives at the final destruction of evil and the eternal triumph of good.

## 2. The presence of a central character.

All stories have a central character or protagonist, and in the overarching story of the *Bible* God is the protagonist. He is the unifying presence from the beginning of the *Bible* to the end. All creatures interact with this central and ultimate being. All events are related to him. The story of human history unfolds within the broader story of what God does. The result is a sense of ultimacy that comes through as we read the pages of the *Bible*.

## 3. Religious orientation.

The subject of literature is human experience, and this is true of the *Bible*, too, but a distinctive feature of the *Bible* is that it overwhelmingly presents human experience in a religious and moral light. Events that other writers might treat in a purely human and natural light, a sunrise, a battle, a birth, a journey etc. are presented by the authors of the Bible within a moral or spiritual framework. Part of this moral and spiritual framework is the assumption of the biblical authors that a great conflict between good and evil is going on in our world and, further, that people are continually confronted with the need to choose between good and evil, between working for God's kingdom and going against God.

#### 4. Variety of genres and styles.

Every literary anthology of the Bible's magnitude displays a range of literary forms, but the *Bible's* range may well top them all. We need to be alert to this, because the religious uses to which we put the *Bible* can easily lull us into assuming that the *Bible* is all one type of writing. The list of individual forms, if we include such specific motifs as the homecoming story or trickster or love poem, keeps expanding. The variety that we find in the *Bible* stems partly from the large categories that converge—history, theology, and literature, for example, or prose and poetry, realism and fantasy, past and future, God and people.

#### 5. Preference of the concrete over the abstract.

While the New Testament contains a great deal of theological writing, the general preference of biblical authors is for concrete vocabulary. This is especially true of the Hebrew language of the Old Testament. In the *Bible*, God is portrayed as light and rock and thunder. Slander is a sharp knife. Living the godly life is like putting on a garment or suit of armor. Heaven is a landscape of jewels. To read the *Bible* well, we need to read with the “right side” of the brain—the part that is activated by sensory data.

#### 6. Realism.

The prophetic and apocalyptic parts of the *Bible* give us a steady diet of fantasy (flying scrolls, for example, and red horses), but the general tendency of the *Bible* is toward everyday realism. The *Bible* displays the flaws of even its best characters. Oliver Cromwell famously said that the biblical writers paint their characters “warts and all.” Although the *Bible* does not delineate the sordid experiences of life in the extreme detail that modern literary realism does, it nonetheless covers the same real experiences, such as violence, murder, sexuality, death, suffering, and famine. Of course the *Bible* differs from modern

realism by showing us that there is a realism of grace as well as a realism of carnality. In other words, the *Bible* is not content to portray the degradation of a world that has fallen into sin without also portraying the redemptive possibilities of a world that has been visited by the grace of God and is destined for glory.

#### 7. Simplicity.

Although the *Bible* is certainly not devoid of examples of the high style, especially in the poetic parts, its overall orientation is toward the simple. The prevailing narrative style is plain, unembellished, matter-of-fact prose. Shakespeare's vocabulary is approximately twenty thousand words, Milton's thirteen thousand, and English translations of the *Bible* six thousand. Biblical writers often work with such simplified dichotomies as good and evil, light and darkness, heroes and villains. Of course there is a simplicity that diminishes and a simplicity that enlarges. The simplicity of the Bible paradoxically produces an effect of majesty and authority.

#### 8. Preference for the brief unit

Linked with this simplicity is a marked preference for the brief literary unit. Biblical poets tend to write brief lyrics, for example, not long narrative poems. Most long narratives in the *Bible* such as the story of Abraham or the Gospels are actually cycles of stories in which the individual episodes are briefer and more self-contained than what we find in a novel. The prophetic books are actually anthologies of self-contained oracles and snatches of narrative. Other familiar biblical genres reinforce this tendency toward simplicity.

## 9. Elemental quality.

The *Bible* is a book of universal human experience. It is filled with experiences and images that are the common human lot in all places and times. The *Bible* embraces the commonplace and repeatedly shows ordinary people engaged in the customary activities of life—planting, building, baking, fighting, worrying, celebrating, praying. The world that biblical characters inhabit is likewise stripped and elemental, consisting of such natural settings as day and night, field and desert, sky and earth. Even occupations have an elemental quality—king, priest, shepherd, homemaker, missionary.

## 10. Oral style.

Even though the *Bible* that we read is a written book, in its original form much of it existed orally. This is true because ancient cultures were predominantly oral cultures in which information circulated chiefly by word of mouth. The literary forms of the Bible show this rootedness in an oral culture. The prevalence of dialogue (directly quoted speeches) in the *Bible* is without parallel in literature generally until we come to the novel. Everywhere we turn in the *Bible*, we hear voices speaking and replying. The spare, unembellished narrative style of the *Bible* arises from the situation of oral circulation of the stories. Additionally, many of the non-narrative parts of the *Bible* show signs of oral speech—the prophetic discourses and oracles, the psalms (which were sung in temple worship), the epistles (which were read aloud in churches), and the Gospels (where the words of Jesus are a leading ingredient).



## 11. Aphoristic quality.

An aphorism is a concise, memorable statement of truth—in the words of English poet Alexander Pope, “What oft was thought, but ne’er so well expressed.” The *Bible* is the most aphoristic book of the Western world. It is filled with sayings that are part of the common storehouse of proverbs and idioms: “pride goes before destruction” (Proverbs 16:18); seeing “eye to eye” (Isaiah 52:8); a “house divided against itself” (Matthew 12:25). This quality is present not only in the wisdom literature of the *Bible*, but in all parts of the *Bible* and most notably in the words of Jesus.

## 12. The literature of confrontation.

When we read Shakespeare or Dickens, we find ourselves moved to agreement or disagreement, but we do not ordinarily feel that we have been confronted by someone or something that requires us to make a choice. By contrast, when we assimilate the Bible we feel as though we have been personally confronted with something that requires a response. While this choice is ultimately for or against God, the ideas of the *Bible*, too, require us to believe or disbelieve them. The *Bible* displays a vivid consciousness of values—of the difference between good and evil—with the result that it is virtually impossible to remain neutral about the ideas that confront us as we read the *Bible*. Perhaps none of the twelve features noted above is unique in itself. But if we put them together, they produce a book that is unique. Reading the *Bible* is not just like reading another book. It has an affective power and aura of authority that cannot be duplicated. It possesses a quality of encounter that other books do not display, so that as we read we are confronted with the voice and presence of God and are virtually compelled to believe or disbelieve what we are reading.

## Literary Forms in the *Bible*

The *Bible*, as a unity in diversity, expresses its unique message in a rich variety of literary forms. The literature of the *Bible* is an aesthetically beautiful interpretation of human experience from a divine perspective. As we read, interpret, and seek to apply the truths of Scripture, we must be careful not to overlook this artistic dimension, or we will miss an important part of enjoying the *Bible*. In this section, we will take a brief look at the literary forms found in the pages of Scripture, including figurative language, narrative history, poetry, wisdom literature, prophetic literature, gospel, oratory, and epistle.

The *Bible* abounds in figurative expressions. The wonderful imagery of Scripture is derived from a wealth of human experience, the manners and customs of the ancient Near East, family and business life, and the whole sphere of nature. While literal meaning refers to the normal or customary usage of a word or expression, figurative meaning refers to a concept which is represented in terms of another. The following list is not complete, but it outlines the major figures of speech used in the *Bible*.

### Figures of Comparison

#### Simile

A simile involves an explicit comparison of two unlike things using the words “as” or “like.”

“All we like sheep have gone astray” (Isa. 53:6).

“For He is like a refiner’s fire and like fullers’ soap” (Mal. 3:2).

“Behold, I send you out as lambs among wolves” (Luke 10:3).

#### Metaphor

A metaphor involves a direct or implied comparison of two unlike things.

“We are His people and the sheep of His pasture” (Ps. 100:3).

The seven “I am” statements of Jesus in the Gospel of John are all metaphors.

## Figures of Association

### Metonymy

In metonymy, the name of one object or concept is used for another because of an association or similarity between the two.

“They have Moses and the prophets; let them hear them” (Luke 16:29). This is a metonymy, because “Moses and the prophets” stands for the writings of Moses and the prophets.

“There is one God who will justify the circumcised by faith and the uncircumcised through faith” (Rom. 3:30). In this metonymy, “circumcision” and “uncircumcision” is another way of saying “Jew” and Gentile.”

### Synecdoche

In a synecdoche, a part is used for a whole, or a whole is used for a part.

“All flesh had corrupted their way on the earth” (Gen. 6:12). Flesh is used for the whole person.

“And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry’” (Luke 12:19). Soul is used for the whole person.

“For God so loved the world” (John 3:16). “World” is used for the people in the world. “All Scripture is given by inspiration of God” (2 Tim. 3:16).

“All Scripture” is used for every part of Scripture.

## Figures of Humanization

### Personification

Personification is a figure of speech which takes a human characteristic and applies it to an object, quality, or idea.

“Destruction and Death say, ‘We have heard a report about it with our ears’” (Job 28:22).

“Does not wisdom cry out, and understanding lifts up her voice?” (Prov. 8:2).

“The field is wasted, the land mourns” (Joel 1:10).

### Anthropomorphism

Anthropomorphism is a figure of speech which takes a human characteristic and applies it to God.

“Then I will take away My hand, and you shall see My back; but My face shall not be seen” (Exod. 33:23).

“He who touches you touches the apple of His eye” (Zech. 2:8).

“Lord, hear my voice! Let Your ears be attentive to the voice of my supplications” (Ps. 130:2).

“No one is able to snatch them out of My Father’s hand” (John 10:29).

### Apostrophe

Apostrophe is a figure of speech in which an exclamation is addressed to an object as if it were a person.

“Hear, O heavens, and give ear, O earth!” (Isa. 1:2).

“Open your doors, O Lebanon, that fire may devour your cedars. Wail, O cypress, for the cedar has fallen” (Zech. 11:2).

### Figures of Illusion

#### Irony

Irony is an expression that denotes the opposite of what is meant by the words themselves.

“No doubt you are the people, and wisdom will die with you!” (Job 12:2).

“Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress” (Judg. 10:14).

“‘Throw it to the potter’--that princely price they set on me. So I took the thirty pieces of silver and threw them into the house of the Lord for the potter” (Zech. 11:13).

“For you put up with fools gladly, since you yourselves are wise!” (2 Cor. 11:19).

### Hyperbole

In hyperbole, the writer or speaker exaggerates to create a strong effect.

“Everyone could sling a stone at a hair’s breadth and not miss” (Judg. 20:16).

“I am weary with my groaning; all night I make my bed swim; I drench my couch with my tears” (Ps. 6:6).

“Or how can you say to your brother, ‘Let me remove the speck out of your eye’; and look, a plank is in your own eye?” (Matt. 7:4).

### Figures of Understatement

#### Euphemism

A euphemistic figure substitutes an inoffensive or agreeable expression for one that may offend or suggest something distasteful.

“You shall go to your father’s in peace” (Gen. 15:15). A euphemism for death.

“Our friend Lazarus sleeps, but I go that I may wake him up” (John 11:11). A euphemism for death and resurrection.

“From which Judas by transgression fell, that he might go to his own place” (Acts 1:25). A euphemism for hell.

#### Litotes

Litotes involves belittling or the use of a negative statement to affirm a truth.

“After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom do you pursue? A dead dog? A flea?” (1 Sam. 24:14).

Behold, the nations are as a drop in a bucket, and are counted as the small dust on the balance; look, He lifts up the isles as a very little thing” (Isa. 40:15).

“And they brought the young man in alive, and they were not a little comforted” (Acts 20:12).

“I am a Jew from Tarsus, in Cilicia, a citizen of no mean city” (Acts 21:39).

## Figures of Emphasis

### Pleonasm

Pleonasm is a figure that uses an excessive number of words for the sake of emphasis.

“Yet the chief butler did not remember Joseph, but forgot him” (Gen. 40:23). The redundant “but forgot him” adds force to the statement.

“Knowing that God had sworn with an oath” (Acts 2:30). The redundant “with an oath” adds emphasis.

### Repetition

Emphasis is gained by a number of techniques that repeat the same word, phrase, or sentence.

“Moses, Moses!” (Exod. 3:4).

“The waters saw You, O God; the waters saw You” (Ps. 77:16).

“For His mercy endures forever” is repeated in each verse of Psalm 136.

“Blessed” is repeated through the beatitudes in Matthew 5:3-11.

“Eloi, Eloi” (Mark 15:34).

“Nor” is repeated several times in Romans 8:38-39.

“To another” is repeated in a list of the spiritual gifts (1 Cor. 12:8-10).

## Climax

This figure lists a series of actions or qualities and repeats each one.

“What the chewing locust left, the swarming locust has eaten; what the swarming locust left, the crawling locust has eaten; and what the crawling locust left, the consuming locust has eaten” (Joel 1:4; cf. 1:3).

“In Him was life, and the life was the light of men. And the light shines in the darkness, and the darkness did not comprehend it” (John 1:4-5).

## Figures Requiring Completion

### Ellipsis

Ellipsis refers to the omission of one or more words that must be supplied by the reader to complete the thought.

“And Saul had a concubine, whose name [was] Rizpah, the daughter of Aiah. So [Ishbosheth] said to Abner, ‘Why have you gone in to my father’s concubine?’” (2 Sam. 3:7). The words “was” and “Ishbosheth” are italicized in the translation because they are not in the Hebrew text. They were added to complete the sense of the passage.

“Uzzah put out [his hand] to the ark of God and took hold of it, for the oxen stumbled” (2 Sam. 6:6). “His hand” must be supplied to complete the thought.

“He will not always strive [with us], nor will He keep [His anger] forever” (Ps. 103:9).

### Zeugma

In this figure, a word modifies two or more words but strictly refers to only one of them. One or more words must be supplied to complete the thought. “I have surely visited you and

[seen] what is done to you in Egypt” (Exod. 3:16). “Forbidding to marry, [and commanding] to abstain from foods” (1 Tim. 4:3). “Forbidding” only applies to marriage, and “commanding” must be supplied.

### Aposiopesis

This is a rhetorical figure that breaks off a thought in mid-sentence.

“‘And now, lest he put out his hand and take also of the tree of life, and eat, and live forever’-- therefore the Lord God sent him out of the garden of Eden” (Gen. 3:22-23). “‘Yet now, if You will forgive their sin--but if not, I pray, blot me out of Your book which You have written’” (Exod. 32:32). “‘But if we say, ‘From men’--they feared the people, for all counted John to have been a prophet indeed” (Mark 11:32). “‘And if it bears fruit, [well.] But if not, after that you can cut it down’” (Luke 13:9).

### Extended Figures of Speech

#### Parables

Parables are extended figures of comparison that often use short stories to teach a truth or answer a question. While the story in a parable is not historical, it is true to life, not a fairy tale. As a form of oral literature, the parable exploits realistic situations but makes effective use of the imagination. Jesus frequently composed parables in His teaching ministry (Mark 4:34) and used them in response to specific situations and challenges. His parables are drawn from the spheres of domestic and family life as well as business and political affairs. He used imagery that was familiar to His hearers to guide them to the unfamiliar. Some of the parables were designed to reveal mysteries to those on the inside and to conceal the truth to those on the outside who would not hear (Matt. 13:10-17; Mark 4:10-12). This was especially true of the parables that related to



the kingdom of God. However, other parables like the parable of the Good Samaritan (Luke 10:25- 37) and the parable of the landowner (Matt. 21:33-46) could be grasped by unbelievers.

Parables have one central point; the details are not meant to call attention to themselves but to reinforce this single theme. In most parables, assigning allegorical meanings to each of the details can lead to confusion and obscure the point. A good joke produces the spontaneous response of laughter. If the joke must be explained, it loses its impact. In a similar way, a parable must be “caught” by the hearer. The story parables (e.g., the Good Samaritan, the prodigal son, the workers in the vineyard, the rich man and Lazarus, the wise and foolish virgins) are all designed to elicit a response from the hearers. The moment it is grasped, the point of the parable penetrates like the point of an arrow. Nathan’s parable of the rich man who slaughtered the poor man’s lamb sank into David like a shaft when Nathan said, “You are the man!” (2 Sam. 12:1-7). As soon as David caught the parable, he was caught by it.

### Allegories

The parables in the gospels range from similitudes to true parables to allegories. The parable of the leaven (Matt. 13:33-35) is a similitude, because it is an illustration from everyday life. The parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11-32) is a true parable, because it is a story that has a beginning and an end. The parable of the vineyard owner (Mark 12:1-11) is closer to an allegory, because it has a number of details that have corresponding conceptual meaning.

While a parable is an extended simile, an allegory is an extended metaphor. The allegory of the vine and the branches in John 15, for example, develops the metaphors of Christ as the true vine, the Father as the vinedresser, and believers as the branches.

Allegorical stories have several points of comparison. In John 10:1-18, the allegory of the good shepherd draws a point-by-point comparison between a number of elements (the door of

the sheepfold, the shepherd, the sheep, the thief, and the hireling) and corresponding spiritual truths.

Allegories range on a continuum from the elusive to the explicit. In some, the details obviously point to a corresponding group of concepts, as in the allegory of the good shepherd; in others, the thematic implications of the images are less clear. Jesus told the parable of the soils to the multitudes but explained the spiritual application of each point of the story to His disciples (Matt. 13:1-23; Mark 4:1-20). While parables use realistic imagery, allegories often use words in a figurative rather than literal sense. The parable of the lost sheep (Luke 15:3-7) uses “sheep” literally, but the allegory of the good shepherd uses “sheep” figuratively; the parable of the vineyard owner (Luke 20:9-21) uses “vineyard” literally, but the allegory of the vine and the branches uses “vine” figuratively.

### Riddles

A riddle is a concise and puzzling statement posed as a problem to be solved or explained.

“Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet” (Judg. 14:14; cf. 14:12-19).

“Here is wisdom. Let him who has understanding calculate the number of the beast, for it is the number of a man: His number is 666” (Rev. 13:18).

### Fables

A fable is a fictitious narrative intended to enforce a useful truth or a moral lesson. Fables often involve plants and animals that speak and act like human beings. See the fable of the trees in Judges 9:8-15 (interpreted and applied in 9:16-20), the fable of the thistle in 2 Kings 14:9, and the fable/allegory of the two eagles in Ezekiel 17:2-10.

## Symbols

Symbols are figures of representation in which one thing is used to suggest another. The symbol is a literal object that conveys a lesson or truth.

The pillar of cloud and fire (Exod. 13:21-22) symbolized God's glory and presence among His people.

Blood symbolized the life of an animal or human (Lev. 17:11; Deut. 12:23-25).

Ezekiel's vision of the dry bones (Ezek. 37:1-14) symbolized the judgment and restoration of Israel.

The basket of summer fruit in Amos 8:1 symbolized the end (8:2) that would come in judgment. The Hebrew words for "summer fruit" and "end" sound almost alike, and ripe fruit is either consumed or spoiled--an apt symbol of judgment.

Numbers (e.g., four, seven, and twelve), colors (e.g., blue, purple, scarlet, white, and black), and metals (e.g., gold, silver, bronze, iron) are used symbolically in Scripture.

## Narrative

Narrative, or story, is the most common literary form in the *Bible*. Both testaments are full of the stories of God's redemptive work on behalf of His people. This form is so prominent in Scripture because the God of the *Bible* acts in the arena of human history.

On one level, hundreds of individual narratives like the story of Jacob and Laban are sprinkled throughout the Scriptures. On a higher level, these individual narratives combine to form major motifs like Israel's deliverance from Egyptian bondage and conquest of Canaan. On the highest level, these larger narratives fit together into the ultimate narrative of God's plan to deliver people out of darkness and bring them into the light of His kingdom.

On each level, the biblical narratives contain universal patterns or archetypes that capture the essential themes of human experience. The inner and outer conflicts between good and evil, heaven and hell, light and darkness, angels and demons, wisdom and foolishness, faith and doubt, courage and cowardice, obedience and rebellion, hope and despair are enacted throughout the narratives of Scripture. When all the stories are combined together, a magnificent, unified plot with a beginning, middle, and end unfolds, and the reader realizes that he or she is a part of this plot. From creation to consummation, the sovereign hand of God is upon the course of history.

#### Creation and Consummation

There are a remarkable number of parallels between the first and last three chapters of the *Bible*. These chapters portray the beginning and the end of the great drama of God's creative/redemptive purposes. Genesis 1-3 moves from the creation of the universe to the creation and fall of man. Revelation 20-22 moves from the judgment of the unsaved to the creation of the new universe in which believers will dwell with God. The stories of creation and consummation both stand at the transitional point between time and eternity. Enclosed between these two accounts is the stage of human history on which each person must make the choice between one of two destinies: endless separation from God or endless fellowship with God. Both of these narratives blend figurative with literal language since they deal with realms of existence that transcend our experience. They combine to tell us that our brief earthly existence is not all there is; we must live in the light of who we are (creation) and where we are going (consummation).

## Epic

An epic is a long narrative, often written in an elevated poetic style, which combines many episodes. Although written in prose, portions of the biblical account of the exodus from Egypt to Canaan in the books of Exodus to Deuteronomy combine together to fit the epic form. The exodus epic is unified by strong nationalistic elements (the formation of the nation of Israel), a central hero (Moses), and the underlying motif of a quest (the Promised Land). But unlike conventional epics, the real hero of the exodus epic is not a man, but God Himself. The account extolls the mighty acts of God, not Moses, and focuses more on moral and spiritual values than on human accomplishments. While a conventional epic would praise the exploits of men, the exodus epic exposes the Israelites as a rebellious, frail, and sinful people in need of the grace and deliverance of God.

## Law

A good portion of the narratives in Exodus 20 through Deuteronomy 31 is written in the form of legislation for the nation of Israel. The law consists of the testimonies (moral duties), the statutes (ceremonial duties), and the judgments or ordinances (civil and social duties). The bulk of the more than 600 commandments in the Pentateuch are found in the Book of the Covenant (Exod. 20:22-23:33), the Deuteronomic Code (Deut. 12-26), and the Code of Holiness (Lev. 17-26). Part of the Old Testament law consists of apodictic (“do” and “do not”) commands. These are direct commands that generally apply to every Israelite. The rest of the law is casuistic (case-by-case). These commandments are conditioned by specific circumstances.

The law is written in the ancient form of a binding covenant between a lord and his vassal. Obedience on the part of the vassal would lead to agreed benefits and protection, but disloyalty would lead to punishment (cf. the blessings and cursings of Deuteronomy 27-28).

## Heroic Narrative

In this form of narrative literature, the story is based on the exploits of a principal character. To the extent that the hero or heroine embodies accepted social and moral virtues, the story of his or her life becomes a model for others to imitate. The protagonist's values, the roles he or she fills, and the way he or she faces conflicts are important themes in heroic narrative.

Old Testament examples of this literary form include the story of Abraham (Gen. 12- 25), Jacob (Gen. 27-35), Joseph (Gen. 37-50), Gideon (Judg. 6-8), Ruth, David (1 Sam. 16--2 Sam. 24; 1 Chron. 11-29), Esther, and Daniel.

## Tragedy

Some of the protagonists of Scripture fell from a position of blessing to calamity. The narratives of their lives are tragic because of the disastrous change in their fortunes. There is greatness about most of them that is marred by a fatal flaw in their character. This is why the reader hopes in vain that the story will turn out better than it does.

In each case, the tragic protagonist faces one or more critical moral choices and fails. The consequences of this failure may not be immediate, but they inevitably bind him in a web from which he cannot escape. He is at once responsible for and victimized by his tragedy. In some cases like Samson in Judges 13-16, the tragic hero gains insight from his suffering. Other biblical examples of tragic narrative are Adam and Eve (Gen. 3), Saul (1 Sam. 9-31), and Solomon (1 Kings 1-11; 2 Chron. 1- 9).

## Poetry

More of the Bible is written in poetry than most people imagine. In addition to the books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and the Song of Solomon, a substantial portion of the prophetic

literature (including most of Isaiah, Jeremiah, Hosea, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, and Micah, Nahum, and Zephaniah) is also poetic. Almost half of the Old Testament is poetry, but in many translations some of this poetry appears in prose form.

The poetry of the Bible is an effective vehicle for communicating the full range of human emotions from the heights of joy to the depths of despair. In a very personal way, the poets and prophets expressed their sorrows, the plight of their people, and their unshakable hope in the Lord.

#### Narrative or Dramatic Poetry

The book of Job is an excellent example of narrative poetry that portrays a dramatic story. The plot moves from prosperity to calamity to the restoration of prosperity. There are a number of plot conflicts, including Satan's conflicts with God and Job, the conflict between Job and his friends, and the conflict between Job and God. The prologue (chapters 1-2) and the epilogue (42:7-17) are written in prose, and the rest of the book is in the form of a poetic dialogue. The action moves slowly in the poetic section, and the reader is expected to concentrate more on the development of the imagery and the concepts than on the sequence of events. Within this great poetic narrative there are many lyric passages. It also part of the wisdom literature of the Old Testament because of the themes it explores, including the goodness and sovereignty of God in view of the problem of evil and suffering.

#### Lyric Poetry

Lyric poetry is predominant in the book of Psalms and the Song of Solomon. The psalms speak to the mind through the heart. Since they were set to music, their emotional effect was

even greater when they were sung as part of Israel's worship in the first and second temples. They are rich in the artistry of parallelism, figurative imagery, symbolism, multiple meanings, and emotive vocabulary.

Each of the psalms is a brief literary unit that develops a theme and makes a distinctive contribution to the psalter. The psalms are structured in different ways and can be classified into several types, including individual and communal lament psalms, individual and communal thanksgiving psalms, descriptive praise psalms, and wisdom psalms. The different types of psalms had specific functions in the individual and corporate worship of Israel.

#### Pastoral Literature

This literary form uses the idyllic imagery of rural poetry or shepherds in a rustic setting to portray a feeling or a truth. Psalm 23, for example, takes the reader through a day in the life of a shepherd who cares for his sheep from morning to night. The psalmist uses these images to express God's gracious care for His people. Jesus carries this as a step farther in His allegory of the good shepherd (John 10:1-18). The prophets also made effective use of pastoral settings to depict the blessings of God's kingdom (see Isa. 40:10-11; 41:18-19; Hos. 14:4-7; Amos 9:13-15). The Song of Solomon describes the experience of love by praising the beauty and virtue of the beloved through natural and rustic images (see Song of Sol. 2:8-17; 7:10-13).

#### Literature of Praise

The *Bible* is full of beautiful examples of the literary form of encomium, or praise. The godly man, for example, is praised in Psalms 1 and 15, and wisdom is personified as a woman and praised in Proverbs 8. The last 22 verses of Proverbs use the 22 letters of the Hebrew



alphabet to praise a virtuous wife (Prov. 31:10-31). First Corinthians 13 is an unsurpassed encomium of agape, and the author of Hebrews praises faith in 11:1-12:2.

But the Scriptures reserve the highest praise for the Lord.

### Wisdom Literature

While the wisdom literature of the *Bible* is denoted more by content than by form, it usually appears in the form of didactic poetry that teaches principles about life. Most of this literature is in Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. Some of the Psalms (1, 37, 119) and much of the book of James can also be categorized as wisdom literature. Jeremiah 18:18 mentions three classes of spiritual leaders in Hebrew culture: priests, prophets, and the wise (cf. 1 Kings 4:29-34; Job 12:12). Joseph, Abigail, Solomon, and Daniel are examples of those who possessed prudence and wisdom. As observers of life, the wise could give right answers in critical situations. They were highly practical rather than theoretical; they knew the course of action that would lead to the desired results in life. The sages analyzed conduct and studied the consequences of given actions.

Wisdom is more than shrewdness or intelligence; it relates to practical righteousness and moral acumen. The key word for wisdom is *hokhmah*, which literally means “skill.” Wisdom is the skill in the art of living life with each area under the dominion of God. It is the ability to apply truth in the light of experience. The wisdom literature stresses that the basis for true success in skillful living is the fear of the Lord.

This literary form is generally expressed in poetic terms and uses a variety of techniques including parallelism (antithetic parallelism dominates Prov. 10-15, and synthetic parallelism dominates Prov. 16-22), numerical sequences (Prov. 30:15-31), alliteration (Eccles. 3:1-8), and the full spectrum of figurative language. The proverb is a special feature of wisdom literature

because it uses a comparison or simple illustration to make a poignant observation about life. Proverbs are practical and concise; they are meant to be read slowly in small sections. These maxims are easily memorized statements that are true to life even though individual cases may differ.

## Prophetic Literature

### The Old Testament Prophets

The prophets were divinely appointed individuals who received God's messages through dreams, visions, angels, and direct encounters with the Lord, and related these messages in oral, visual, and written form. Many of them like Nathan, Elijah, and Elisha left no written records, but those who did are responsible for about one-fourth of the *Bible*.

The bulk of the seventeen prophetic books in the Old Testament apply the standards of the moral law of God to the attitudes and practices of the day (twelve were written before, two during, and three after the exile in Babylon). As spokesmen who declared God's will for His people, the prophets proclaimed this word through warnings and promises. They exposed the sinful practices of the people, warned about judgment to come, and called the people to repentance. They stressed the need for right belief (orthodoxy) and right practice (orthopraxy). Theirs was a twofold message of condemnation because of the sin of man and consolation because of the grace of God.

The prophetic books engage in forthtelling and foretelling. The bulk is forthtelling, or spiritual insight: exhortation, reproof, and instruction. The remainder is foretelling, or spiritual foresight: prediction of immediate and distant events to come. These prophecies were not intended to satisfy curiosity, but to show that God is in sovereign control over all of history. Most of these predictions have already been fulfilled, because they concerned the judgment of

various nations including Israel and Judah. Some anticipated the coming Messiah and were fulfilled in the first advent of our Lord. Others await fulfillment in the events associated with His second advent.

There is a great diversity and individuality among the prophets ranging from the sophistication of Isaiah to the simplicity of Amos. Their personalities, backgrounds, interests, and writing styles vary widely. These writings usually take the form of collected oracles that are not always in chronological order. They utilize poetic parallelism, parables, allegories, and other figurative language as well as covenant lawsuits (Hos. 4), woe oracles (Mic. 2:1-5), and salvation oracles (31:1-9). Some of them also express their message through satire, which is “the exposure, through ridicule or rebuke, of human vice or folly” (Leland Ryken). Two examples are the book of Jonah and Amos 4.

#### The Revelation

The book of Revelation is a highly structured work that combines elements of almost all the literary forms in the *Bible*, including figurative language, parallelism, typology and symbols, epic, narrative, lyric and narrative poetry, and praise. The three dominant literary types in this book are apocalypse, prophecy, and epistle. Apocalyptic literature appears in parts of Isaiah, Ezekiel, Daniel, and Zechariah as well as extrabiblical books dating from about 200 B.C. to A.D. 200. John’s Apocalypse shares the basic characteristics of this kind of literature: visions, symbolic language and use of numbers, highly stylized structure, a concern for future events (eschatology), the warfare between good and evil, the judgment of evil, and divine deliverance in time of persecution. The book of Revelation combines these features with a genuinely prophetic word for the church, and puts all of this in the form of an epistle (Rev. 1:4-7; 22:21).

The Revelation is full of contrasting themes: light vs. darkness, heaven vs. earth, time vs. eternity, the forces of good vs. the forces of evil, the establishment of the city of God (new Jerusalem) vs. the destruction of the city of evil (Babylon), the sealing of the saints vs. the mark of the beast, the wedding feast of the Lamb vs. eternal separation from God. The book abounds with archetypal images (universal qualities of human experience). Its richness in symbolism (e.g., numbers, animals, colors, minerals) has led to many interpretive problems, resulting in four major approaches to the book.

Much of its structure revolves around the number seven (seven churches, 2-3; seven seals, 6-8:1; seven trumpets, 8:2-9:21; seven signs, 12-14; seven bowls, 15-16; seven final events, 17-22). Because of the abrupt shifts in the visions and events, it is difficult to arrange them in a clear chronological sequence. The Revelation makes abundant use of Old Testament imagery and ties together many biblical thematic strands into a great portrait of the consummation of all things. As it concludes the plot of Scripture from eternity to eternity, it shows that history is leading to a purposeful climax under the sovereign rule of the living God.

## Gospel

The Greek word *euaggelion* means “good news” or “glad tidings.” The good news about salvation in Christ was first proclaimed orally and later written in the unique literary form known as the gospels. They are highly episodic and do not fit the other literary categories like heroic narrative. The unifying theme of the gospels is the person and work of Jesus Christ who is portrayed not merely an example to be followed, but as the way to eternal life and the rightful object of man’s supreme allegiance. Though they are full of biographical material, the gospels are really thematic portraits of the God-man, taken from four different perspectives. The gospels combine blocks of sayings, dialogues, and narratives to confront the reader with the unique

claims and credentials of Christ. They are four complementary accounts that provide a composite picture of the Savior in such a way that the total is greater than the sum of the parts. In a highly selective manner, each develops major themes in the life of Christ with particular stress on the events of the last week. The gospels depict the conflict between belief and unbelief and build to the climax of the crucifixion and resurrection. Another major theme is the work of Jesus in relation to the kingdom of God. Christ's death and resurrection inaugurated the beginning of the age to come; in one sense, the time of God's rule has already begun, but in another sense it still awaits consummation with His second coming. The gospels display Jesus' unparalleled facility with poetic forms. He was a master of using analogies in nature and human experience to illustrate His teachings. His application of similes, metaphors, parables, allegories, hyperbole, irony, paradox, proverbs, and questions is striking and illuminating.

### Oratory

There are several excellent examples of oratory in the Scriptures. Solomon's sermon and prayer at the dedication of the temple in 2 Chronicles 6 well illustrates the art of speaking in public with force and eloquence.

That the Lord Jesus possessed an unsurpassed oratorical ability is clear from His brief sayings to His extended discourses. The Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5-7) is a model of persuasiveness and exhortation that makes brilliant use of metaphor, rhetorical questions, and analogies from nature, synonymous and antithetic parallel construction, repetition, and satire. Those who were privileged to hear these words were astonished at His teaching (Matt. 7:28-29). The apostle Paul was also a skillful and effective orator. The book of Acts records the effect of his speeches and teachings on different audiences (13:16-45; 14:12; 21:40- 22:24; 24:10-25; 26:1-28). His address before the Areopagus in Acts 17:16-34, although cut short by the audience,

illustrates some of the features of classical rhetoric. Paul began by using the classic form of the exordium, or introduction, to gain the attention and interest of his hearers. By using an anecdote and quoting from Stoic poets, he sought to win common ground with his sophisticated audience. Beginning in verse 30, Paul moved into the second part of his address, the *propositio*, or statement of his thesis. But the resurrection of the dead was too much for this Greek audience that viewed the spirit as good but the body as evil.

## Epistle

On one end of the spectrum of letters is the personal, nonliterary letter; on the other end is the formal epistle that is intended for the public and posterity. The epistles of the New Testament are unusual in that they combine elements of both, in varying combinations. Most of them, like 1 and 2 Thessalonians, generally follow the standard form of ancient letters: the name of the writer, the name of the recipient, a greeting, a wish or thanksgiving, the body of the letter, and a final greeting and farewell. But Hebrews lacks most of these elements, and 1 John lacks all of them. Nine of the New Testament epistles are addressed to churches or groups of churches (they were to be read aloud in congregational meetings), and four (1 and 2 Timothy, Titus, and Philemon) are addressed to individuals. All of them arose out of specific occasions. Some are formal in nature (e.g., Romans and Hebrews), while others are quite personal (e.g., 2 Corinthians, 2 Timothy, and Philemon). There is also a wide variation in the amount of theological content, though none of the epistles were simply intended to be theological treatises. Formal or informal, they all bear the mark of apostolic authority.

The literary quality of the epistles does not surface in their form but in the stylistic richness that they exhibit throughout.

## Chapter II

### *The Bible: A Testimony of Wisdom Literature*

Wisdom Literature is a term applied to the Old Testament canonical books of Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes, and sometimes to the Song of Songs (Song of Solomon). It also includes the Apocryphal books of Sirach (The Wisdom of Jesus ben Sira or Ecclesiasticus) and the Wisdom of Solomon. These books all share characteristics and points of view that are somewhat different than other biblical books, and those differences should be kept in mind when reading and studying them. Wisdom perspectives are also evident in other places in Scripture, such as the Psalms, the teachings of Jesus, and the Epistle of James.

Wisdom is really an approach to life, a way of looking at the world and, for Israelites, a way of living out in very deliberate, rational ways their commitment to God. While Wisdom's roots go back to the early days of Israelite history, it began to flower in the latter part of the Old Testament period, and flourished in the Intertestamental period and the era of the New Testament (400 BC to AD 100).

The wisdom perspectives did not replace the other two major strands of thought in Ancient Israel, that of prophets and priests. It was simply a different focus that was complementary with the other perspectives. While it is easy for us to assume in reading the historical accounts of Samuel or Kings, or the prophetic writings of Amos or Jeremiah, that Israel lived in constant crisis. Yet, if we stop and think about the time span of the major upheavals in Israel's history, there were many periods of several generations at a time where there was no crisis. During those times there was not great prophetic voice booming "thus says

the Lord." There was just the daily routine of life that preoccupied most of the ordinary people of the land with the mundane questions of how to get along in life.

They were simple questions of living: how to discipline an unruly child, how to teach children what they need to know to survive as an adult, the dangers to the community of gossip and slander, the need for hard work and providing the necessities of life, why wicked people seem to prosper, the arrogance of sudden wealth. These are all life questions that most of us face today in the course of living. To realize that ancient Israelites faced these same questions, and grappled with them rationally from the perspective of experience and community wisdom, may say more to us today as modern Christians than we are used to hearing. Perhaps, listening carefully to the Wisdom traditions as Scripture may help us bring an "earthy" balance to our tendency to be preoccupied with the metaphysical and the supernatural as a way to live life daily.

Wisdom is concerned with everyday life, how to live well. Wisdom is concerned with the issues facing humanity in general, the typical and recurring aspects of life that face human beings on a daily basis. Much of the rest of Scripture is concerned with those unique events in history in which God reveals himself. Little interest in history, politics, God who acts, miracles, sin, forgiveness guilt; these things are not discounted, only that the concern is focused on daily living on what might be called the mundane aspects of life, such as raising children, providing economic security, finding the appropriate wife, etc. The world view is not mythical or cyclical, but it is concerned with stability and order, the status quo, especially in the social arena; the goal is to live in harmonious relationship with God, others, and the world. The perspectives of wisdom are not unique to Israelites; although in Israelite wisdom commitment to God is simply assumed (Prov.1:7). The focus is on interpersonal relationships, as well as reflective questions about the meaning of life and how to live it.



Wisdom does not appeal to revealed truth. It does not address the human condition from the divine perspective, but rather from the perspective of human needs and concerns, and in terms of what human beings can and should do to address those concerns. Wisdom attempts to give expression to the way things are; it is descriptive and not prescriptive, describing and defining the world and the existing social order as a means to live within both in productive ways. Wisdom thinking grapples with understanding the world, especially the physical and social environment in which they must live; as such, it is reflective, rational, and concerned with knowledge. It is concerned with learning enough to be able to choose the proper course of action for well-being in life, often expressed metaphorically as the "two ways" or the "two paths" ( Psa. 1).

Wisdom's claim to authority lies in tradition and observation. There is no "thus says the Lord" grounding of authority in wisdom thinking; rather the truth of life is already there in God's creation awaiting discovery. Tradition represents the wisdom of experience, both in individuals and in the collective experiences of the community; preference is usually given to age and established and proven ways of doing things. Wisdom is grounded in social structures, such as the family, the "schools" of the wise elders, or the king and the royal court. Wisdom perspectives do not demand radical change, for example in dealing with social problems.

In the Biblical sense, wisdom is the "ability to judge correctly and to follow the best course of action, based on knowledge and understanding" (Lockyer 1103). The Wisdom teachings of the Bible follow from the two great themes of the Ten Commandments and the Greatest Commandments of Jesus: Reverence to God, our Creator, and respect for all persons, everywhere.

Biblical-era life for the Jews and early Christians was harsh (Ward 37-118). Slavery was commonplace. Tyrannical rule by outside powers was the norm. Women's status in society was distinctly second class. Children were disciplined with beatings. These conditions were often accepted in the Bible as customary for society during those times, but they were not taught as being virtuous or wise. True wisdom is always consistent with the two great wisdom themes of the Bible: reverence to God, our Creator, and respect for all persons, everywhere.

Wisdom is more than following the rules. A set of commandments or rules can give us important examples of wisdom, but they are only examples. No set of rules can cover all situations, and it is up to us to generalize the commandments to all cases. Many times, as in this passage from Matthew, Jesus condemned the hypocrisy of those religious leaders who observed the law in its strict, literal sense, but violated its spirit: "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others. (Matthew 23:23)

Wisdom means always acting according to the spirit of the Commandments and not looking for an ambiguity or omission which we can use to evade their true intent. Wisdom means understanding the consequences of our actions and words before we act or speak. Wisdom means having the knowledge and understanding to recognize the right course of action and having the will and courage to follow it.

Following the ways of Wisdom helps bring us in harmony with God because these ways are in accordance with His will, as revealed in the Bible, and are pleasing to Him. The ways of Wisdom also bring us in harmony with other persons because respect for others is the very essence of the Commandments. The wisdom teachings of the Bible are much more than an

arbitrarily dictated moral code; they form a prescription for living in peace with the people we interact with daily.

Finally, acting with Wisdom brings us in harmony with ourselves, giving us a sense of self-worth and inner peace. This inner peace is achieved because we are acting in accordance with our consciences and avoiding the shame and guilt of following our baser instincts.

We often fail in our daily struggle to act with wisdom -- it does not come easily or naturally. Although it is easier to follow our less-than-wise impulses, the reward for acting with wisdom is great. When we give it our best effort, the payoff in self-esteem and inner peace will compensate us many times over.

### Family Life

Throughout human history, the family has been the foundation of society. Within a strong, well-functioning family we can fulfill our physical and emotional needs. Strong family ties provide us the love and security we need for a happy life. Children grow into well-adjusted adults through example, instruction and discipline. Chores and responsibilities are shared for the good of all.

### Marriage and Divorce

The family of biblical times had the husband as "lord" of the household and the wife as his helper. The husband worked diligently to provide material needs and protection while the wife worked diligently at domestic chores (Ward 92-94). In these New Testament passages, the need for a strong, healthy marriage is expressed in terms of the idealized family of the ancient world:

Wives, in the same way be submissive to your husbands so that, if any of them do not believe the word, they may be won over without words by the behavior of their wives,

when they see the purity and reverence of your lives. Your beauty should not come from outward adornment, such as braided hair and the wearing of gold jewelry and fine clothes. Instead, it should be that of your inner self, the unfading beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which is of great worth in God's sight. Husbands, in the same way be considerate as you live with your wives, and treat them with respect as the weaker partner and as heirs with you of the gracious gift of life, so that nothing will hinder your prayers. (1 Peter 3:1-4, 7)

Contemporary marriages may follow the biblical model or may be quite different. Regardless of how we divide the roles and responsibilities in our marriages, though, we must be sure the marriage fulfills its essential family functions and provides a loving environment for children to grow into responsible adults. Unselfish love is the "glue" that holds families together. In marriage we must subdue our own egos and selfish pride for the sake of the family. The Apostle Paul states it eloquently in this passage from First Corinthians:

Love is patient, love is kind, and is not jealous; love does not brag and is not arrogant, does not act unbecomingly; it does not seek its own, is not provoked, does not take into account a wrong suffered, does not rejoice in unrighteousness, but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. (NAS, Corinthians 13:4-7)

Divorce is a genuine tragedy. It often leaves the marriage partners embittered and disillusioned. It robs the children of the love and security of a healthy family and denies them a good role model for their own future marriages. The expense of divorce may consume the family savings. The work and expense of maintaining separate households means more work and less time for ourselves and our children.

We need to make an effort each and every day to keep our marriages strong and not let them drift toward divorce. We must put aside our anger, forgive our spouse a million times over, always be faithful, subdue our own pride and ego, and always let love guide our actions.

In the Old Testament Law, a man was allowed to divorce his wife at will. (Wives did not have the same privilege.) Jesus saw the injustice and pain of divorce, though, and said that neither husband nor wife should separate from the other:

Some Pharisees came to him to test him. They asked, "Is it lawful for a man to divorce his wife for any and every reason?" "Haven't you read," he replied, "that at the beginning the Creator 'made them male and female,' and said, 'For this reason a man will leave his father and mother and be united to his wife, and the two will become one flesh'? So they are no longer two, but one. Therefore what God has joined together, let man not separate." "Why then," they asked, "did Moses command that a man give his wife a certificate of divorce and send her away?" Jesus replied, "Moses permitted you to divorce your wives because your hearts were hard. But it was not this way from the beginning. I tell you that anyone who divorces his wife, except for marital unfaithfulness, and marries another woman commits adultery." (Matthew 19:3-9)

The Apostle Paul echoed Jesus' sentiment:

Now, for those who are married I have a command, not just a suggestion. And it is not a command from me, for this is what the Lord himself has said: A wife must not leave her husband. But if she is separated from him, let her remain single or else go back to him. And the husband must not divorce his wife. (1 Corinthians 7:10-11)

Adultery destroys marriages. The adulterer shows total disregard for the marriage vows and for his or her spouse. In this passage, Jesus reminds us that not only should we always be

faithful, we should also avoid any actions or situations that might eventually tempt us into adultery: "You have heard that it was said, 'You shall not commit adultery'; but I say to you, that everyone who looks on a woman to lust for her has committed adultery with her already in his heart. (Matthew 5:27-28)

Unfortunately, some marriages cannot and should not be saved. A viable marriage is a contract of mutual love and respect. However, each one of you also must love his wife as he loves himself, and the wife must respect her husband. When one partner seriously violates the marriage contract, as by emotional, physical or sexual abuse, the marriage cannot endure. None of us should feel obligated to endure an abusive relationship.

#### Parents and Children

The single most important function of the family is the raising of children. The family provides for the physical needs of children and teaches them how to grow into well-adjusted, responsible adults. Schools can teach the knowledge and skills needed to earn a livelihood, but children learn their values primarily from the example and teaching of their parents. As parents we must both practice and preach our values. The author of this proverb speaks as a father would instruct his own son or daughter:

Hear, O sons, the instruction of a father, and give attention that you may gain understanding, for I give you sound teaching; do not abandon my instruction.

When I was a son to my father, tender and the only son in the sight of my mother, Then he taught me and said to me, "Let your heart hold fast my words; keep my commandments and live; Acquire wisdom! Acquire understanding! Do not forget, nor turn away from the words of my mouth. Do not enter the path of the wicked, and do not proceed in the way of evil men. Avoid it, do not pass by it; turn away from it and pass on.

For they cannot sleep unless they do evil; and they are robbed of sleep unless they make someone stumble. For they eat the bread of wickedness, and drink the wine of violence. But the path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until the full day. (Proverbs 4:1-5, 14-18)

Of course, the parents' instruction does no good if the child rejects it. Our parents may not be perfect, but they have loved and cared for us, and they deserve our respect. The Bible advises children to honor and obey their parents:

Children, obey your parents; this is the right thing to do because God has placed them in authority over you. Honor your father and mother. This is the first of God's Ten Commandments that ends with a promise. And this is the promise: that if you honor your father and mother, yours will be a long life, full of blessing. (Ephesians 6:1-3)

Listen to your father's advice and don't despise an old mother's experience. Get the facts at any price, and hold on tightly to all the good sense you can get. The father of a godly man has cause for joy-- what pleasure a wise son is! So give your parents joy! (Proverbs 23:22-24)

In addition to instruction and a good example, children need discipline to grow into responsible adults. Through discipline, children learn the consequences of their action and learn to control their behavior: Discipline your son and he will give you happiness and peace of mind.

Teach a child to choose the right path, and when he is older, he will remain upon it. (Proverbs 22:6) Withhold not correction from the child: for if thou beatest him with the rod, he shall not die. Thou shalt beat him with the rod, and shalt deliver his soul from Hell. (Proverbs 23:13-14)

The verse above, and a few similar ones, is sometimes used to justify a harsh parenting style based on corporal punishment. However, the dominant theme of the Bible is not to beat one's children, but rather to "teach a child to choose the right path" through instruction and discipline. Beating with a rod is an example of how discipline may have been practiced in Old Testament times. Unfortunately, beating and spanking embitter the child and teach him or her to control others by physical force. The child may change his or her behavior out of fear but does not learn self-control.

Fortunately, modern parenting methods offer us a better alternative. The methods of natural and logical consequences teach self-control and values without causing bitterness between parent and child (Dreikurs, Kober). In New Testament times, the harsh Old Testament teachings about discipline are replaced with verses such as these: Fathers, do not embitter your children, or they will become discouraged. (Colossians 3:21)

And now a word to you parents. Don't keep on scolding and nagging your children, making them angry and resentful. Rather, bring them up with the loving discipline the Lord himself approves, with suggestions and godly advice. (Ephesians 6:4)

Jesus greatly valued children and the innocence of youth, saying we should humble ourselves before God the way a child does before an adult. He also placed anyone who would corrupt a child among the most despicable of sinners.

The enthusiasm and idealism of youth can be a potent force. Young adults are often able to see the simple truth of a complicated matter and are able to work tirelessly for a good cause. Paul gives this advice to Timothy, his young friend and associate: Don't let anyone look down on you because you are young, but set an example for the believers in speech, in life, in love, in faith and in purity. (1 Timothy 4:12)



On the other hand, the temptations of youth may be a trap for those who have not yet developed a strong sense of right and wrong. Even children must take responsibility for their own actions. Wrong is wrong and evil is evil. Run from anything that gives you the evil thoughts that young men often have, but stay close to anything that makes you want to do right. Have faith and love, and enjoy the companionship of those who love the Lord and have pure hearts. (2 Timothy 2:22). Even a child is known by his actions, by whether his conduct is pure and right. (Proverbs 20:11)

A strong and supportive family bonds husband and wife in a union of love and mutual respect. It is our refuge from the pressures and disappointments of the world and is the instrument for giving our children the things they need most: protection, love, training and discipline. The more we cultivate strong family ties, the more fulfilling our lives will be.

#### Generosity

Each of us has something to offer to someone in need. We can give our money and our time to charity, be a friend to someone who is sick or lonely, do volunteer work, or be a peacemaker. We may give unselfishly of our time to our spouse, children or parents. We may choose a service-oriented occupation, or we may just do our everyday jobs with integrity and respect for others.

It would seem that the more we give to others, the poorer we become, but just the opposite is true! Service to others brings meaning and fulfillment to our lives in a way that wealth, power, possessions and self-centered pursuits can never match. As Jesus said,

For if you give, you will get! Your gift will return to you in full and overflowing measure, pressed down, shaken together to make room for more, and running over.

Whatever measure you use to give -- large or small -- will be used to measure what is given back to you." (Luke 6:38)

Helping those in need is one of the major themes of the Bible and of Jesus' ministry. As far back as the thirteenth century B.C., the Hebrews' law institutionalized assistance to the poor:

When you reap the harvest of your land, you shall not reap to the very edges of your field, nor shall you gather the gleanings of your harvest. You shall not strip your vineyard bare, or gather the fallen grapes of your vineyard; you shall leave them for the poor and the alien: I am the Lord your God. (Leviticus 19:9-10)

Through service, we give others the things they lack, and we find meaning and fulfillment to our own lives. Both the Old and New Testament writings give many examples of the importance of service and charity: He who despises his neighbor sins, but happy is he who is gracious to the poor. (Proverbs 14:21)

"Feed the hungry! Help those in trouble! Then your light will shine out from the darkness, and the darkness around you shall be as bright as day. And the Lord will guide you continually, and satisfy you with all good things, and keep you healthy too; and you will be like a well-watered garden, like an ever-flowing spring. (Isaiah 58:10-11)

The Bible tells us to share generously with those in need, and good things will come to us in turn. We are not meant to live hard-hearted or self-centered lives. A greedy, miserly life leaves us devoid of anything but an empty craving for more possessions, more power or more status.

He who gives to the poor will never want, but he who shuts his eyes will have many curses. (Proverbs 28:27)

It is not necessary to be a wealthy philanthropist or a full-time volunteer to make a meaningful contribution. Rather, we should give generously of whatever wealth and abilities we have, no matter how small the amount.

Finally, our good deeds should be motivated by a sincere desire to help others. Public recognition should not be the goal. If you do, you will have no reward from your Father in heaven. "So when you give to the needy, do not announce it with trumpets, as the hypocrites do in the synagogues and on the streets, to be honored by men. I tell you the truth; they have received their reward in full. (Matthew 6:1-2)

Each of us has something to give. Some have wealth, some have talents, and some have time. Whatever gifts we have been given -- large or small -- we should share generously. When we do, we make the world better for someone else and find true meaning and satisfaction in our own lives.

## Government

The Hebrews of early Old Testament times were governed by leaders of their twelve tribes, with a central leader over all the tribes. Later, kings such as David and Solomon ruled the Hebrews. In 587 B.C., Babylonian forces devastated Jerusalem and subjugated the Hebrews. Later, the Jews were ruled by Persia, Greece, and the Roman Empire. In Jesus' time Palestine was ruled by the Herods, who were governors under the Roman Empire.

Despite centuries of often oppressive foreign domination, both the Old and New Testaments stress the importance of government for protection and for maintaining order. We should support our government, pay its taxes, and obey its laws, even though they may be imperfect: Fear the Lord and the king, my son, and do not join with the rebellious, for those two will send sudden destruction upon them, and who knows what calamities they can bring?

(Proverbs 24:21-22). Let every person be in subjection to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and those which exist are established by God. (Romans 13:1)

Jesus also said we should obey the demands of both God and government. He was asked if one should pay taxes to the Roman Empire and this was his reply: "Show Me a denarius. Whose likeness and inscription does it have?" And they said, "Caesar's." And He said to them, "Then render to Caesar the things that are Caesar's, and to God the things that are God's." (Luke 20:24-25)

The people were expected to respect their governments, and, the same time, the kings or other rulers were expected to rule with wisdom and justice. The Old Testament contains story after story of wicked, greedy and oppressive rulers who brought disaster on themselves and their people. Many of the Old Testament prophets, such as Elijah, Elisha and Daniel, delivered their messages of reform to Israel's kings. Those of us who live under democracy elect our own "rulers." Our votes decide whether our government will be benevolent and just or harsh and oppressive. The Bible's advice and reproaches to the ancient rulers provide us wisdom to help us make wise choices in our own times. Both the Old and New Testament writers were deeply concerned with the rights of the poor and oppressed. A recurring theme in the Bible is that we should provide equal justice for all, not favoring the rich or powerful. Also, because all the peoples of the world are God's creation, we should not discriminate against foreigners: He who oppresses the poor reproaches his maker, but he who is gracious to the needy honors Him. (Proverbs 14:31)

"Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty. "Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of

the righteous. "Do not oppress an alien; you yourselves know how it feels to be aliens, because you were aliens in Egypt. (Exodus 23:6-9)

Woe to those who enact evil statutes, and to those who constantly record unjust decisions, So as to deprive the needy of justice, and rob the poor of My people of their rights, in order that widows may be their spoil, and that they may plunder the orphans. Now what will you do in the day of punishment, and in the devastation which will come from afar?

To whom will you flee for help? And where will you leave your wealth? (Isaiah 10:1-3)

The *Bible* often speaks of almsgiving or charity as an individual-to-individual act of generosity. The Law of Moses and the Hebrews, though, provided an institutional way of providing for the poor that did not depend on the good will of any individual. Not only was individual generosity encouraged, but, as a matter of law, part of everyone's produce or income was to be set aside to aid the poor:

"And you shall sow your land for six years and gather in its yield, but on the seventh year you shall let it rest and lie fallow, so that the needy of your people may eat; and whatever they leave the beast of the field may eat. You are to do the same with your vineyard and your olive grove. (Exodus 23:10-11). "When you have finished paying all the tithe of your increase in the third year, the year of tithing, then you shall give it to the Levite, to the stranger, to the orphan and to the widow, which they may eat in your towns, and be satisfied. (Deuteronomy 26:12)

The ancient Hebrews lived in extended families or clans and could generally take care of their own. In modern industrial societies, though, families are often fragmented and many of the truly needy have nowhere to turn except to public assistance programs. Everyone, both rich and poor, benefits when a government respects the rights of all and provides for the needy. Crime and

drug abuse breed in areas of poverty and unemployment, where people may feel they have nothing to lose. Likewise, apathy and violence breed where people perceive injustice and feel excluded from the benefits of society. To the extent every individual feels empowered as a valuable, productive member of society, then society becomes healthier and more secure for everyone.

## Wealth

"Do not store up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy, and where thieves break in and steal. But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal. For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. (Matthew 6:19-21)

## Obsession with Wealth

It is very easy to become obsessed with wealth and possessions. Because technology has provided such an abundance of consumer goods, the quest for possessions may be a stronger temptation now than in Jesus' time. We may work long hours at stressful jobs so we can afford a luxury car, a larger house, designer clothing, or countless other items. There is nothing inherently evil about owning the things we need. However, when we strive to collect wealth or possessions beyond our need, we may neglect our duty to God, to our families, and to mankind. Jesus said that serving God and serving wealth are mutually exclusive goals:

"No one can serve two masters. Either he will hate the one and love the other, or he will be devoted to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve both God and Money.

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? So do not worry, saying, 'What shall we eat?' or 'What shall we

drink?' or 'What shall we wear?' For the pagans run after all these things, and your heavenly Father knows that you need them. But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well. (Matthew 6:24-25, 31-33)

Does owning a luxury car, a spacious house or designer clothing really make us happier? In reality, it may just make us more conceited and less willing to share with the needy. As soon as the excitement of one new possession begins to fade, we will want yet another possession so we can feel that excitement again. The craving for wealth and possessions can lead us into all kinds of temptation. While we spend evenings and weekends earning extra money, we are depriving our families of our love and attention. We may cheat on our taxes. We may take unfair advantage of our customers, employers, or employees. We may even steal. We will attempt to rationalize our avarice by closing our minds and hearts to the needs and rights of others. In the process, we could become like Scrooge: stingy, bitter, and isolated. Do not wear yourself out to get rich; have the wisdom to show restraint. Cast but a glance at riches, and they are gone, for they will surely sprout wings and fly off to the sky like an eagle. (Proverbs 23:4-5)

What good will it be for a man if he gains the whole world, yet forfeits his soul? Or what can a man give in exchange for his soul? (Matthew 16:26) People who want to get rich fall into temptation and a trap and into many foolish and harmful desires that plunge men into ruin and destruction. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil. Some people, eager for money, have wandered from the faith and pierced themselves with many grieves. But you, man of God, flee from all this, and pursue righteousness, godliness, faith, love, endurance and gentleness. (1 Timothy 6:9-11)

Responsibility of Wealth

Those of us who are blessed with wealth beyond our need have a responsibility to share generously with the less fortunate. We should view our wealth as a gift from God, entrusted to us, to carry out his work on earth. If anyone has material possessions and sees his brother in need but has no pity on him, how can the love of God be in him? (1 John 3:17)

Command those who are rich in this present world not to be arrogant nor to put their hope in wealth, which is so uncertain, but to put their hope in God, who richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment. Command them to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share. In this way they will lay up treasure for themselves as a firm foundation for the coming age, so that they may take hold of the life that is true life. (1 Timothy 6:17-19)

## Honesty

Dishonestly gained wealth can bring spiritual destruction to its possessor. The rationalization required to obtain and keep dishonest gain will turn a person cold and bitter. Dishonest gain brings only anxiety and fear of discovery -- never peace of mind.

'You shall not oppress your neighbor, nor rob him. The wages of a hired man are not to remain with you all night until morning. (Leviticus 19:13) The LORD abhors dishonest scales, but accurate weights are his delight. (Proverbs 11:1) He who walks righteously and speaks what is right, who rejects gain from extortion and keeps his hand from accepting bribes, who stops his ears against plots of murder and shuts his eyes against contemplating evil-- this is the man who will dwell on the heights, whose refuge will be the mountain fortress. His bread will be supplied, and water will not fail him. (Isaiah 33:15-16)

An obsession with wealth can easily lead to all sorts of temptation and evil. We must guard against letting the lure of wealth cloud our good judgment. We must share generously



with those in need. We have a responsibility to be honest and fair in all our business dealings. As with other aspects of wisdom, a wise attitude toward wealth will help bring us true happiness and peace of mind.

## Humility

Blessed are the meek: for they shall inherit the earth. Blessed are they which do hunger and thirst after righteousness: for they shall be filled. Blessed are the merciful: for they shall obtain mercy. Blessed are the pure in heart: for they shall see God. Blessed are the peacemakers: for they shall be called the children of God. (Matthew 5:5-9)

Humility or humbleness is a quality of being courteously respectful of others. It is the opposite of aggressiveness, arrogance, boastfulness, and vanity. Rather than, "Me first," humility allows us to say, "No, you first, my friend." Humility is the quality that lets us go more than halfway to meet the needs and demands of others. Friendships and marriages are dissolved over angry words. Resentments divide families and co-workers. Prejudice separates race from race and religion from religion.

Reputations are destroyed by malicious gossip. Greed puts enmity between rich and poor. Wars are fought over arrogant assertions. Humility as a virtue is a major theme of both the Old and New Testaments. Why do qualities such as courtesy, patience and deference have such a prominent place in the Bible? It is because a demeanor of humility is exactly what is needed to live in peace and harmony with all persons. Humility dissipates anger and heals old wounds. Humility allows us to see the dignity and worth of all God's people. Humility distinguishes the wise leader from the arrogant power-seeker. Acting with humility does not in any way deny our own self-worth. Rather, it affirms the inherent worth of all persons. Some would consider humility to be a psychological malady that interferes with "success." However, wealth, power or

status gained at the expense of others brings only anxiety -- never peace and love. Better is a dish of vegetables where love is, than a fattened ox and hatred with it. (Proverbs 15:17) Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice. (Proverbs 16:8) It is better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud. (Proverbs 16:19)

Better a patient man than a warrior, a man who controls his temper than one who takes a city. (Proverbs 16:32) Better a dry crust with peace and quiet than a house full of feasting, with strife. (Proverbs 17:1)

### The Humble Demeanor

We should maintain an attitude of deference toward both God and other persons. Wisdom cannot be found or practiced through arrogance or anger. As servants of God, we must respect all of God's creation, including our fellow human beings. Do not boast about tomorrow, for you do not know what a day may bring forth. Let another praise you, and not your own mouth; someone else, and not your own lips. (Proverbs 27:1-2) When pride comes, then comes dishonor, but with the humble is wisdom. The integrity of the upright will guide them, but the falseness of the treacherous will destroy them. (Proverbs 11:2-3) Humility means putting God and other persons ahead of our own selfish interests. Humility comes with the knowledge that God's creation as a whole transcends our own narrow interests. As with other aspects of wisdom, humility will gain us much more than we sacrifice. Humility and the fear of the LORD bring wealth and honor and life. (Proverbs 22:4)

### The Golden Rule

Do to others as you would have them do to you. "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' love those who love them. And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' do that. And if you

lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even 'sinners' lend to 'sinners,' expecting to be repaid in full. But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be sons of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. (Luke 6:31-35)

The Golden Rule, spoken by Jesus, is possibly the best known quote from the Bible, and contains a lot of wisdom in one short sentence. If we wish to be loved, we must first give love. If we wish to be respected, we must respect all persons, even those we despise. If we wish to be fulfilled in our lives, we must share generously with others.

### Talk and Gossip

Arrogant words inflame prejudice and hatred, but humble speech soothes. Words make or break human relationships. Words can make war or make peace. The words we say or write have tremendous power for good or evil. We should be as careful with our words as we would be with any other "weapon." A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. The tongue of the wise commends knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly. (Proverbs 15:1-2) Gossip is an act of hostility intended to harm someone's reputation. We must avoid the temptation to misrepresent someone's character or actions as an act of revenge or prejudice.

An evil man sows strife; gossip separates the best of friends. (Proverbs 16:28)

### Judging Others

Self-righteousness is one of the hardest sins to avoid because it is so much easier to see other people's faults than to see our own faults. Rather than look for faults in others, we should look for the good in others and try to correct the faults within ourselves. Jesus' comical parable of a person with a board in his eye trying to see to remove a speck from another's eye

reminds us that we probably have bigger faults within ourselves than the faults we would criticize in others:

"Don't criticize, and then you won't be criticized. For others will treat you as you treat them. And why worry about a speck in the eye of a brother when you have a board in your own? Should you say, 'Friend, let me help you get that speck out of your eye,' when you can't even see because of the board in your own? Hypocrite! First get rid of the board. Then you can see to help your brother. (Matthew 7:1-5)

Don't criticize and speak evil about each other, dear brothers. If you do, you will be fighting against God's law of loving one another, declaring it is wrong. But your job is not to decide whether this law is right or wrong, but to obey it. Only he who made the law can rightly judge among us. He alone decides to save us or destroy. So what right do you have to judge or criticize others? (James 4:11-12)

We should not infer that criminal activity should go unrestrained or unpunished: the laws of Moses had strong sanctions for criminal acts, and the Bible strongly supports civil governments. (See the section on Government.) However, we are reminded that judgment is reserved for God and we should concentrate on correcting our own faults rather than criticizing others for their faults.

### Anger and Revenge

No one makes us angry. Anger is our own emotional response to some action or event. More often than not, our angry feelings are based on a misinterpretation of what someone said or did. Expressing anger tends to prolong and reinforce our anger rather than purge it. Angry words and actions are much more likely to escalate hostilities and block communication than to solve a problem. Whether between parent and child, spouses, friends, or nations, expressions of anger

divide us and drive us toward open hostility. It is all too easy to react to life's annoyances and disappointments with anger. It is far more challenging, but much better, to react with understanding and empathy. In this way, we can quickly settle disputes and avoid turning minor incidents into major battles. The humble demeanor is a perfect tool for avoiding disputes and hard feelings. A fool always loses his temper, but a wise man holds it back. (Proverbs 29:11) My dear brothers, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, for man's anger does not bring about the righteous life that God desires. (James 1:19-20) Holding a grudge can consume us with hatred, blocking out all enjoyment of life. A grudge clouds our judgment and may lead us to an act of revenge that can never be undone.

"Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against one of your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the LORD. (Leviticus 19:18) An angry man stirs up dissension, and a hot-tempered one commits many sins. (Proverbs 29:22) Bearing a grudge and seeking revenge are never appropriate responses to a perceived wrong. A grudge destroys the grudge-holder with bitterness; revenge only escalates hostilities. Jesus told us we must reconcile with our adversaries, forgive their transgressions, and let go of the anger that may tempt us to commit an act of revenge:

Returning love for hatred can often cool the fires of anger. It is very difficult not to respond to anger with even more anger. However, when we respond to anger with empathy and love, we can often break the cycle of hatred and convert even our enemies into friends. Jesus gave us the unique command to love even our enemies:

"There is a saying, 'Love your friends and hate your enemies.' But I say: Love your enemies! Pray for those who persecute you! In that way you will be acting as true sons of your Father in heaven. For he gives his sunlight to both the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and on the unjust too. If you love only those who love you, what good is

that? Even scoundrels do that much. If you are friendly only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even the heathen do that. But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect. (Matthew 5:43-48)

By humility we acknowledge that God created us for his purposes and not for our self-glorification. By humility we acknowledge the dignity of all God's people. By humility we cool the angry passions of others. By humility we can turn enemies into friends. A humble demeanor is not a denial of our worth as individuals. Rather, it is the tool that allows us, insofar as possible, to be on good terms with all persons.

Good vs. Evil

We often hear conflicting moral teachings from our religious and secular leaders. Many claim to have the true message of God or the true message of Christianity. We hear about "Christian values," or "God's will," or "The Bible says...," or "Jesus says...," etc. How can we tell who is interpreting the Bible with true understanding and who is, consciously or unconsciously, merely using it to serve their own ends?

Jesus gives us the answer in the parable of the good and bad fruits. He tells us to judge a teacher or minister by his or her deeds, not by his or her claims. Just as a fig tree produces only figs, a good teacher will advocate only good deeds and will live a life of good deeds. Just as a tree that produces poison fruit, a false teacher will advocate evil deeds and practice evil deeds, even while claiming to give godly advice.

"Beware of false teachers who come disguised as harmless sheep, but are wolves and will tear you apart. You can detect them by the way they act, just as you can identify a tree by its fruit. You need never confuse grapevines with thorn bushes or figs with thistles. Different kinds of fruit trees can quickly be identified by examining their fruit. A variety

that produces delicious fruit never produces an inedible kind. And a tree producing an inedible kind can't produce what is good. So the trees having the inedible fruit are chopped down and thrown on the fire. Yes, the way to identify a tree or a person is by the kind of fruit produced. "Not all who sound religious are really godly people. They may refer to me as 'Lord,' but still won't get to heaven. For the decisive question is whether they obey my Father in heaven. At the Judgment many will tell me, 'Lord, Lord, we told others about you and used your name to cast out demons and to do many other great miracles.' But I will reply, 'You have never been mine. Go away, for your deeds are evil.' (Matthew 7:15-23)

False teachers will preach a doctrine filled with prejudice, hate, greed and covetous desire which are distorted to sound as if these things were virtuous. False teachers will take Bible verses out of context and convolute their meanings to serve their own ends.

Learning the wisdom of the Bible helps us discern good from evil and good teachings from evil teachings. Even when evil teachings are disguised as good, and argued shrewdly, we will not be easily fooled. There is no better application for the wisdom of the Bible than to be able to distinguish good from evil, and to practice good in our own lives.

For the LORD gives wisdom; from His mouth come knowledge and understanding. He stores up sound wisdom for the upright; He is a shield to those who walk in integrity, guarding the paths of justice, and He preserves the way of His godly ones. Then you will discern righteousness and justice and equity and every good course. For wisdom will enter your heart and knowledge will be pleasant to your soul; Discretion will guard you, understanding will watch over you, To deliver you from the way of evil, from the man

who speaks perverse things; From those who leave the paths of uprightness, to walk in the ways of darkness; (Proverbs 2:6-13)

Wisdom is a buffer against life's constant battering of conflicting ideas and desires.

Wisdom frees us from the tyranny of popular opinion and from the emptiness of a status seeking existence. The wisdom of the Bible is a solid foundation on which we can base our attitudes and actions. It is the key to making the best choices throughout our lives.

There are many different ways to distill the lessons of the Bible. It is such a wonderful book and worth studying for a lifetime. Here are 7 life lessons from the Bible. We could certainly look at many more, but what I have tried to do is give a big picture idea of some of the concepts taught over and over in the Bible.

#### Do Right

One of the major themes of the *Bible* is to find out what God says and obey Him. We are familiar with the 10 Commandments and that is a good place to start, but it is certainly not all the Bible has to say about loving God and our fellow man. In the Old Testament we are taught the “letter of the law” and how we should obey God’s commands. But Jesus taught us in the New Testament that the “spirit of the law” is just as important (Matthew 5:21-48).

A good story from the Old Testament that illustrates obedience to God is the story of the life of Joseph. He certainly had his share of hard times and difficult situations to deal with, but he was guided with the simple principle of obeying God and doing right by others around him. His story is found in Genesis chapters 37 through 50.

#### Submit to Authority

We can think of many people in the *Bible* who had gotten themselves thrown into prison or sentenced to death. But the interesting thing is that many of the stories of people dealing with



authority problems show us that these men and women were still submissive to authority even when they found they could not obey authority.

Submission and obedience: what is the difference? Sometimes we find that we cannot obey what authority asks us to do. It may be that the authority has asked you to do something against God's law. Shadrach, Meshach and Abed-nego are good examples of this. They were told by the king that they must bow down to a statue and worship that image. Knowing God's Law, these three young Jewish men refused to obey authority, yet they were still submissive. They accepted the punishment that the king and his government pronounced upon them.

We are told in Romans 13:1-6 to submit to authority. And we are told by Peter in Acts 5:29 that he knew it was right to obey God rather than man's laws that went against God. There is no conflict in these two passages. We should obey God's laws rather than man's laws; however, we should also be willing to submit to the punishment and consequences that may come our way as a result.

The vast majority of the time there is no conflict between submission and obedience. We just like to use examples of disobedience to authority in the Bible as an excuse to do things our own way.

#### Love Others

Besides submission to authority, Romans 13 teaches us a wonderful definition of love. In verse 10 we are told, "Love worketh no ill to his neighbour; therefore love is the fulfilling of the law." Or as a friend of mine summarizes that verse: love means doing what is right towards others.

Love is not always easy or convenient. But love is always right. In some cases love may mean withholding something from someone. Love may mean giving something at great personal

sacrifice. Love is doing what is right and best for the other person in each situation. Be Humble. God is touched by our humility.

### Be Wise with Money

People often misquote 1 Timothy 6:10 thinking that it says money is the root of all evil. What the verse actually says is that the love of money is the problem. Money easily becomes an idol. People begin to worship money and the pursuit of it more than worshiping God. Certainly money is necessary to live in this world. Though we haven't always had paper money like we have today, there has always been a way to buy and sell either through trading other goods or various representations of wealth. The Bible has a surprisingly large number of verses concerning money, especially in the book of Proverbs. Even though we should not lust after money, we do need to be wise in the way we handle it. Paul does not condemn the rich in verse 17. Rather, he encourages them to trust the Lord, not their riches. Then he says in that verse that God gives us things to enjoy. There is nothing wrong with enjoying nice things. The problem comes in thinking stuff will make us happy. The point of the passage is that we should be godly (do what is right) and content (satisfied with what God has given us).

### Sowing and Reaping

What we sow we will reap. The Bible teaches that in various places and ways. In the Old Testament we are told in Numbers 32:23 that our sins will be made known and catch up to us. There is nothing secret before God. In the New Testament we see 2 Corinthians 9:6-8 and Galatians 6:7-9 which teach the principle of sowing and reaping.

A great way I have heard this Bible principle taught is that we reap what we sow (of the same kind), we reap proportionately to how much we sow, we reap more than we sow, and we reap later than we sow. This means that if we sow good, we reap good things. If we sow evil, we

reap evil things. Then if you sow very little you will reap proportionately very little. However, you always reap more than you sow. Even though it is proportionate it is still abundantly more than you plant. If you sow one grain of corn you reap one stalk with many ears. But if you sow a whole row of corn, you will reap many more stalks with many ears and thousands of kernels. Finally, you reap later than you sow. Harvest time is coming in the future. Will your harvest be good or evil?

### Conflict Management

I was listening to a Human Resources coach speak recently and he said that it is not always possible to resolve every conflict, but it was possible to manage conflicts. The Bible teaches us to live peaceably with those around us (Romans 12:18, 19). We are taught the Golden Rule from childhood: treat others the way you want to be treated. That is a principle straight from the pages of Scripture (Matthew 7:12; Luke 6:31). Matthew 18 is the classic passage on conflict management. The first thing to do is go personally to the person who has done wrong toward you. Try to resolve the conflict individually. If that does not work, then take two or three other people with you to try to work out the problem. This way you have people who can be witnesses to what is said, the problem can be clarified and you have other input to help see where the real problem is. If the problem continues, then take it before the church and deal with it as a public matter.

The progression is to keep the problem as private as possible. Only escalate the conflict when it cannot be solved privately. Don't go around gossiping and making your private matter a subject of public news.

## Conclusion

How could an ancient book be relevant to life in our high-tech, fast-paced, postmodern 21st century? The writers of the Bible never experienced a traffic jam, sent a text message or worried about nuclear bombs. They never saw a movie or flew in a jet plane. They probably couldn't imagine a stock market crash, a drone strike or a divorce rate of 50 percent.

In *such* a world, it can be hard to see how the Bible can be relevant to our lives today. Yet the Bible has never been more relevant than in the midst of today's events. The underlying human problems are much the same—or worse—even though the technology is far different.

### Relationships and the Bible

It has been said that life is made of relationships. With increasing selfishness, rudeness, violence, unfaithfulness and divorce rates, it seems that these relationships are falling apart faster than they can be made. Yet the Bible can help us make and sustain meaningful relationships!

The Bible instructs husbands and wives about their roles and how to treat each other (Ephesians 5:22-29) so that the marriage is a balanced relationship. The passage in Ephesians concludes, "Let each one of you in particular so love his own wife as himself, and let the wife see that she respects her husband" (verse 33). If husbands and wives today heeded these two simple, relevant commands, would the divorce rate be so high?

In this context, the loving commitment taught by the Bible and the prohibition of adultery are extremely relevant.

Many problems in society have been traced back to parents who failed to heed the Bible's instruction to care for their children and teach them the right way (Ephesians 6:4). This is sadly

lacking today; and as a result, the prisons are full of young men and women whose parents didn't teach them the right way to live.

Another type of important relationship is friendship. Jesus Christ Himself had a group of special friends whom He confided in (John 15:15). Sadly, in our mobile and fast-paced world, many people feel isolated and alone. The timeless wisdom of the Bible encourages us to treat others as we want to be treated (Matthew 7:12). If we step out and work at being friendly to others, we can make new friends and strengthen our existing friendships.

The Bible even instructs us about dealing with our enemies. Many people know that the Bible says, "An eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth" (Exodus 21:24), not realizing that this expression was designed to prevent inordinate retribution in the Israelite judicial system. For the individual person, different instructions apply. God tells us to turn the other cheek (Matthew 5:39) and to let Him worry about vengeance (Romans 12:19). How much pain and trouble could be avoided if difficult people and even enemies were treated the way the Bible says?

## Living life

The Bible also has much to tell us about how we live our lives. If we applied what we read in the Bible, our lives would definitely change—for the better. Here are just a few examples.

God reveals a way of life that promises us much more than this physical life could ever give us any other way. Many people live very busy lives. We seem to rush from one assignment to the next without a break to catch our breath. Many times people just want a rest, but they never seem to get one. Yet the Bible reveals that we should rest one day a week—

the Sabbath day (Exodus 20:8-11). Obedience to the Bible can give us a guaranteed and much-needed rest every week.

In life, there's a lot of confusion about what really makes us happy. Modern society puts high value on our possessions and wealth. When facing a choice between giving and getting, most of us in today's world choose getting. But is that what will ultimately make us happy?

The Bible reveals, "It is more blessed to give than to receive" (Acts 20:35). Massive amounts of money and possessions fail to make people happy, as can be discovered by a brief look at the world's celebrities. Yet the simple joy that comes from generosity is almost indescribable.

The meaning of life

The Bible gives us something that no other source has successfully been able to do in human history—it reveals the meaning of life! The ancient pantheists believed in gods who made mankind for no good reason. The theory of evolution tells us that life is meaningless and an accident. The Bible alone reveals a much greater truth.

Contextual pedagogy, teaching context as text, is not a new idea to religious educators. Both public educators and religious educators emphasize the importance of "connecting students' learning to the context of life and also connecting the realities of present life to a reinterpretation of the texts." Especially, in contemporary biblical pedagogues, the connection between the text and life contexts of participants is regarded as one of the most critical elements. For example, in her book *The Art of Teaching the Bible: A Practical Guide for Adults* (2001), Christine Blair repeatedly highlights that adults learn best when their learning is grounded in life

experience. Based on that principle, she presents a biblical pedagogy that connects the text and the life contexts of participants through reinterpreting of the Bible in present realities. A contextual model of the biblical pedagogy is also supported by many biblical scholars, such as Mary A. Tolbert who contributed to the volume, *Teaching the Bible: The Discourse and Politics of Biblical Pedagogy* (1998). These scholars focus on contextual approaches to the Bible, ones that seriously consider the diversity of readers and contexts, especially those individuals who have been marginalized by Western Christianity-led biblical hermeneutics.

In fact, the primary and ultimate objective of this project is to explore various aspects to establish the Bible as a literary classic as well as to prove the significance of Wisdom Books in the present society. Since the literary aspects of the Bible and the significance of wisdom books are identified, the researcher conducted a survey on the research question *should the Bible be taught as a literary classic in public education?*

Mark Twain said, “a classic is a book which people praise but don’t read” (Rasmussen,32). Twain’s overstatement notwithstanding, if literary classics go largely unread it would imply a curricular issue.

#### Literature Review

The review is presented in three sub- divisions: the Bible as a literary classic, Relevance of the Wisdom Books, and the possibility to include the Bible in the curriculum of public education.

#### Methodology

In this study the opinions of thirty scholars from the fields of education, language, and literature were sought. Twenty five scholars responded, distributed as follows: eight from

education, 10 from literature, and seven from the language. The percentage of return is 83.3 percent with  $s = 25$ . The qualification for the selection of each participant was either an earned doctorate in one of the three disciplines or practice in one of the disciplines or both. With regard to practice, their work experience is relevant to the research question.

#### Data Collection

A questionnaire was distributed to the chosen scholars of myriad universities all over India by various means: by hand, by post and by mail. Data was retrieved either as postal mail or by hand.

#### Data Analysis Procedure

The data was organized quantitatively by recording the number of *yes*, *No* and *I do not know* responses to 20 questions.

#### Presentation of the Findings

The survey is based on three aspects: the Bible is a literary classic; Wisdom books are relevant today and the possibility to include the Bible in the curriculum of public education. Eighty percent of the participants have not yet read the Bible as a Whole. Ninety percent consider the Bible as a literary Classic and seventy percent accept the relevance of Wisdom books. However, eighty percent disagree to include the Bible as part of curriculum because they are confused of religious and political controversies. The finding can be summarized as follows:

- 1) The Bible is a literary classic
- 2) The Wisdom books are very relevant in today's society.
- 3) It is not recommended to include the Bible in the curriculum of public education.



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