

The Bible Has Poetry!

By

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Did you know that the Bible has lots of poetry in it? Yes, it has. In fact, there is a whole section of the Bible that is called the Books of Poetry.

You see, the Bible is one big book, but it has 66 separate, smaller books in it. These 66 books were written by about 40 different men over a period of about 1,500 years! Imagine that! But all 66 of these smaller books were inspired by God. Yes, men wrote down what God wanted them to write! Some of the 66 books of the Bible are long, but some are very short. So let's talk for just a minute about how the Bible is put together before we talk about the books of poetry. Okay?

Well, first, the Bible is divided into 2 big parts. Do you remember what these 2 big parts of the Bible are? That's right. The Bible is divided into the Old Testament and the New Testament. The Old Testament has 39 books, all of which were written before Jesus came to earth. Then the New Testament has 27 books, all of which were written after Jesus came to earth.

Next, there are different ways that we can look at how the Bible is put together, but today we'll just divide both the Old Testament and the New Testament each into 3 parts. The 3 parts of the Old Testament would be History, Poetry, and Prophecy. The 3 parts of the New Testament would be History, Letters, and Prophecy. (The Letters are usually called epistles, which just means letters.)

So, the Bible has 66 books. The Old Testament has 39 books which would be 17 books of History, 5 books of Poetry, and 17 books of Prophecy. 17, 5, 17. And the New Testament has 27 books, which would be 5 books of History, 21 letters, and 1 book of prophecy. 5, 21, 1.

The first part of both the Old and New Testament (the History parts) are where we find most of the true exciting stories in the Bible. Stories in the History part of the Old Testament about Creation, Noah and the Flood, Joseph with the coat of many colors, Moses as he led the children of Israel out of Egypt, Samson, David and Goliath, and lots of other true exciting stories. And in the History part of the New Testament we find the Christmas and Easter stories, other stories of when Jesus was here on earth, what the apostles did after Jesus went back to heaven, and many more exciting, true stories. But today we're just going to talk about the Poetry part of the Bible. Okay?

As I just said, what we call the Poetry section of the Bible is found in the Old Testament, and it comes right after the large History part. There are only 5 books of poetry, though we can find individual poems in the history books as well. Also, most of what's in the books of prophecy in the Bible is written as poetry, too. But the 5 books of poetry are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

Now, this poetry is not what we might at first call poetry. We often think of poetry as having rhymes, words that sort of sound alike, don't we? For example, "Humpty Dumpty sat on a wall. Humpty Dumpty had a great fall." You can hear how "wall" and "fall" rhyme, sort of sound alike, can't you? Or "Little Boy Blue, come blow your horn; the sheep's in the meadow, the cow's in the corn." Here "horn" and "corn" rhyme with each other, sort of sound alike, don't they?

But in Hebrew poetry, instead of rhyming words, they sort of rhyme ideas or things. They might compare the same type of things or contrast different kinds of things, or they might even compare 2 things to give a word-picture. They may do other things too, but those are the ones we'll talk about today.

Let me give you a few examples to show you what I mean. Here are 2 examples from the book of Psalms for comparing the same type of things, making poetry that way.

The first example is: "The heavens declare the glory of God, and the firmament (sky) shows his handiwork." You can see that both of these sentences are talking about the sky, can't you? The things in the sky, like the sun, moon, and stars and rainbows and sunsets and sunrises and how these all show us what God made and remind us of God, don't they? It is 2 different ways of saying the same thing, isn't it? One way says that the heavens (sky) shows how great and glorious God is, and the other way says that the sky shows us the work that God has done.

A second example of the same type of things being poetry is: "O clap your hands, all ye people; shout unto God with the voice of triumph." Here are two ways of being happy about the things that God does for us, clapping our hands and shouting praises to Him.

Then here are 2 examples of making poetry by showing things that are different. The first one is also from the book of Psalms: "For the Lord knows (is with) the way of the righteous; but, the way of the ungodly shall perish." Here it is comparing 2 different things, isn't it? It is comparing the way of people who follow the Lord and the way of the people who don't follow the Lord.

The second example of making poetry by comparing things that are different is from the book of Proverbs: "A wise son makes a glad father; but a foolish son is the heaviness (grief) of his mother." Here is it comparing how parents feel about a wise or foolish son. A wise son makes his parents happy, while a foolish son makes his parents sad. You can see that, can't you?

Last, here are 2 examples of making poetry by sort of making word pictures. The first one is from the book of Proverbs: "A word fitly spoken is like apples of gold in pitchers of silver." What does that mean; what is the picture these words make? Why, it's saying that if we say the right thing to a person at the right time, it's sort of like giving them a gift or something beautiful and precious. Let's say you were trying to learn to ride a bicycle. You get on your bike and ride across the yard then fall off. Then you are discouraged. But then your friend says, "Hey, look how far you rode this time! Last time you only rode a few feet. You're learning!" That would be encouraging, wouldn't it? It would be words spoken at the right time, like a present to you.

Then a second example of making poetry by sort of making a word picture is from the book of Ecclesiastes. It says, "If the iron is dull, and he does not sharpen the edge, then must he put to more strength; but wisdom is profitable to direct." Now what is that saying? It says that if you have a dull knife or ax and you don't sharpen it but use it anyway, you'll have to work harder. Then it says that in our lives if we use wisdom, then we can live better lives. It's like we are sharpening our minds and what we do. In other words, wisdom, being wise, makes it easier to do the right things in our lives.

Do these examples help you understand how poetry is made in the Bible? I hope so. And maybe you can try making poetry by giving examples of same things or different things or making word pictures. That might be fun to do. And knowing this is like a tool you can use to better understand parts of the Bible.

So you can see that while the poetry in the Bible is not in the way we might think of poetry, they are a kind of poetry that is written in a way that often compares things. In fact, there are even some poems like this in the historical section of the Bible, and most of the prophetic section is written this way, too. For example in a prophecy about Jesus, it says, "For unto us a child is born, unto us a son is given".

So, when you read these sections in the Bible, you can see how they rhyme different ideas in different ways, can't you?

But now let's just quickly look at each of the 5 books of poetry, okay?

Job, the first book of poetry, has 42 chapters, and it has a lot of poetry in it. The book

of Job is the story of a very godly man named Job who has a lot of bad things happen to him. But he still has faith in the Lord God. Job's friends talk to him and are of no help. Then the Lord Himself talks with Job and helps him understand. Finally these bad things are gone, and the Lord greatly blesses Job. My favorite verse in the book of Job is when Job says, "I know that my Redeemer lives and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth...yet in my flesh shall I see God."

But what does that mean when Job says "in my flesh shall I see God"? It means that Job knew that someday he would die, but that he also knew that a long, long time later he would be resurrected, made alive again, and would be with God. Yes, Job had been through very bad times, hadn't he? But he kept his faith in the Lord. And even though Job lived probably close to 2000 years before Jesus came to earth, Job knew that someday the Lord would come to earth, and he also knew that someday people who trusted in the Lord would be resurrected and be with the Lord, their Redeemer. Yes, there is a lot of poetry in the book of Job.

So that's the first book of Poetry, Job.

The second book of poetry is the book of Psalms. I think it's interesting that the book of Psalms is in the exact middle of the Bible! Did you know that?

The book of Psalms was written about 1000 years before Jesus came to earth and is what we might call the song book or hymnal of the Jewish people. By the way, today many of the Psalms as songs for us to sing are in our hymn books as well. The book of Psalms has 150 songs in it, many of them very short. You are probably very familiar with at least one of these psalms, the 23rd Psalm. It starts out, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." Have you heard that before? (Here "want" means that we will have everything we need. We won't want or lack anything.)

Many of the Psalms are songs of praise to the Lord God. Some of them praise Him for when He had helped them. Some of them have prophecies in them. Some of them talk about when the Messiah, Jesus, will come, both the first and second times. Some of them give us good advise. Some of them are asking for help. Some of them encourage us. And many, many of these Psalms were written by David, the shepherd boy who became king of the Jews.

Some of these Psalms are quoted in the New Testament. For instance, in Psalm 2 it says, "...Thou art my Son; this day have I begotten thee." And then in the book of Acts in the New Testament it says, "...as it is also written in the second psalm, `Thou art my Son, this day have I begotten thee.'" And this is quoted again twice in the book of Hebrews in the New Testament. There are more examples, but I won't give any more here.

So those are the first 2 books of Poetry: Job and Psalms.

The last 3 books of Poetry are Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon, and these were all written by King Solomon, who was King David's son.

The book of Proverbs has 31 chapters and is a book of very wise sayings that Solomon collected. These wise sayings tell people how to live in a wise and godly way. The book of Proverbs tells us to pay attention to what our parents teach us and to stay away from bad people and not to pay any attention to bad people when they try to get us to do bad things. Instead, the book of Proverbs tells us that it is important to have friends who are good people. And it tells us that we are to look for wisdom and to trust in the Lord with all our hearts and to follow Him, and that if we do this, the Lord will guide us in our lives. It also tells us that God hates it when people are proud toward others or if they lie or if they are trouble makers or if they murder someone. It also says that it is more important to have a good name, to be known for being a good person, than it is to be rich. Yes, the book of Proverbs is full of wise sayings. And it ends with a description of what a very good woman is like. A good woman is very valuable. She is trustworthy, kind, hard working, and she is a good wife and mother.

So those are the first 3 books of Poetry: Job, Psalms, and Proverbs.

The next book of poetry, the book of Ecclesiastes, has 13 chapters and is also a book of wise sayings that Solomon had gathered together. In this book Solomon says that he tried all sorts of things to be happy, like having a good time and building things and getting rich and being very great. Then, he says, he realized that these weren't important things. He realized that being wise and doing the right things (following what God tells us in the Bible) was what was important. And he said that the good things we have are gifts from God. He said that it would be better to be a wise and poor child than to be a foolish king. Solomon ends the book of Ecclesiastes by saying that we should pay attention to God and do what He tells us to do. How good it is to have 2 poetry books in the Bible that are written by the very wise King Solomon and which give us all sorts of wise advice! Oh, and there are words from Ecclesiastes that you may have heard. For instance, in Ecclesiastes it often says "there is nothing new under the sun" and "vanity, vanity, all is vanity." Have you heard people say that?

So those are the first 4 books of Poetry: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes.

Then the last of the 5 books of poetry is called the Song of Solomon. Sometimes it is called the Song of Songs. It has 8 chapters and sounds like a poem between a loving husband and his wife.

So those are the 5 books of Poetry in the Bible: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

Very quickly, what are they about? Yes. First there is the story of Job, a man with terrible troubles who still trusts in God and has his troubles taken away. Then the book of Psalms is the Jewish hymn book, Next are 2 books (Proverbs and Ecclesiastes) which are full of short wise sayings. And last a love song. Again, the books of Poetry are Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon.

But can the Lord Jesus and the Gospel be found anywhere in the books of Poetry? After all, the Gospel is the most important thing in the whole Bible, isn't it? And what is the Gospel? Yes, the Gospel tells us that God the Father loves us so much that He sent God the Son, Jesus, to earth to die for our sins and then be made alive again, be resurrected. Why? Yes, so that if we trust in the Lord Jesus to forgive our sins, He will forgive us. And then Jesus will be like our King, and we are to follow Him, and we can someday go to heaven and be with the Lord forever. And then when He comes back we will be resurrected and given perfect bodies and be with Him forever.

So, do any of the books of Poetry tell us how to have our sins forgiven or tell us anything about Jesus? Yes, they do. Let me show you a few places. I've already mentioned that Job knew that the Lord, the Redeemer, would someday come to earth and that even though Job himself would have died by then, he'd be resurrected someday and see his Redeemer when he was alive again. And Who is Job's Redeemer? Yes, Jesus is. So Job knew that he would be resurrected, didn't he? I don't know how Job knew this, but he did. Also, we are told in both the Old and New Testaments that the just shall live by faith. And Job was just, and he certainly had faith, didn't he?

And then in the book of Psalms, there are many prophesies about Jesus -- about the Crucifixion and also things that sort of tell of the Resurrection of Jesus. And there are many more that tell about when Jesus comes back to earth to be King of everyone and everything.

So those are a few places in the books of Poetry where we can find the Gospel. So, again, yes, we can say that the Gospel can be found in the books of Poetry, can't we? Of course, the Gospel is much more clearly told in the New Testament.

So we can see that the Bible has Poetry, doesn't it? How many books are there that we call books of Poetry in the Bible? That's right, 5. Let's see if you can say their names with me, okay? The 5 books of Poetry are (all together now) Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon. Good for you! And there are lots of beautiful poems in these 5

books, poems that teach us many things, and poems that praise the Lord God.

And as I said earlier, there are also some shorter poems in other books of the Bible. And, remember, the books of prophecy are full of poetry, too. But Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon are 5 books that we call the books of poetry.

I think we all like poems, don't we? Of course, as I said before, the poems in the 5 books of Poetry were first written in the Hebrew language, so they may not sound so much like poetry when they are translated into English. But these 5 books sort of rhyme ideas or things, don't they? Yes. And they are still poems, aren't they?

I hope you enjoyed hearing about Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon, the 5 books of Poetry in the Bible. I certainly enjoyed talking about them with you.