

Lesson 31

“Happy Is the Man That Findeth Wisdom”

Proverbs and Ecclesiastes

Purpose: To inspire us to receive the promised blessings that come from temple work and scripture study.

My lessons take a different path than the Gospel Doctrine lesson manual. The lesson outline looks closer at the doctrinal topics included in the lesson purpose and scripture block. The lessons are designed to challenge mature, active Latter-Day Saints who have a solid Gospel foundation and are looking for insights into the scriptures that will broaden their faith and understanding.

If you are interested in downloading the Powerpoint file, links to source material or reading posts about improving Gospel Doctrine class preparation, delivery and engagement, you can join my Facebook Group and have full access to the content posted there. The link is <https://www.facebook.com/groups/188904648521022/>

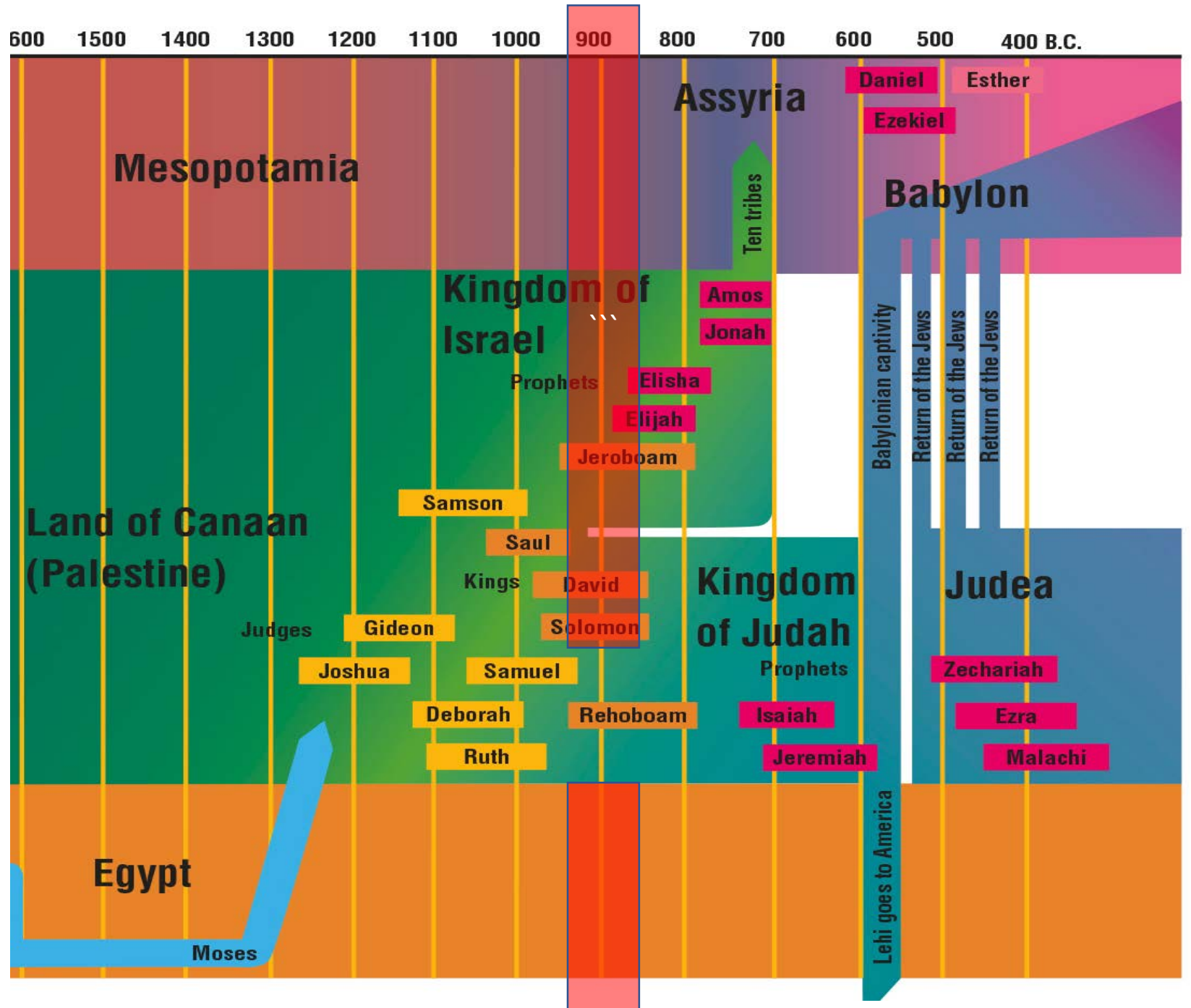
Last Week's Lesson Challenge

One of several things that set Latter-day Saints apart from other Christian faiths is temples. We believe that temples are an essential part of our salvation and the salvation of humankind. Temples existed in ancient times and Christ taught at the temple during his ministry.

Last week's challenge is to consider the part that the temple plays in both our daily life and our eternal life. What can you do to increase your temple attendance and participate in the family history work that redeems the dead.

Would anyone like to share their thoughts about the part that the temples plays in your life?

Proverbs and Ecclesiastes



Introduction to the Book of Proverbs

Why study Proverbs? - The book of Proverbs contains many brief but wise statements about how to live a godly life. Although the book was written in ancient Israel, its messages remain applicable in the modern world. As you study Proverbs, you can learn wisdom that will help them draw closer to the Lord.

Who wrote Proverbs? - Some of the book of Proverbs is attributed to “Solomon the son of David, the king of Israel” (see Proverbs 1:1; 10:1; 25:1; see also 1 Kings 4:32; Guide to the Scriptures, “Proverb—the book of Proverbs”; scriptures.lds.org). However, while Solomon is considered an author of many of the proverbs, it is best to think of the book of Proverbs as a library of the wisdom of the Israelites. Some of its content is deeply spiritual, while some “does not rise above the plane of worldly wisdom, but throughout it is taken for granted that ‘the fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom’ (1:7; 9:10)” (Bible Dictionary, “Proverbs, book of”).

What are some distinctive features of Proverbs? - The book of Proverbs was written as poetry, and it employs many of the techniques common to Hebraic poetry—vivid imagery, parallelism, and other literary techniques—to guide the reader in the quest for wisdom. The introductory verses of the book express this central theme: “A wise man will hear, and will increase in learning ... but fools despise wisdom and instruction” (Proverbs 1:5, 7). The wisdom contained within the book of Proverbs covers nearly every aspect of life. The proverbs focus as much on the quirks of human nature as they do on the basic behavior of a righteous person and on man’s proper relationship to God. Because the proverbs address such varied topics, a verse in Proverbs often has no connection to the verses before or after it. However, readers can find within Proverbs many passages that are simple, humorous, profound, and beautiful. One well-known passage tenderly describes the attributes of a righteous woman and declares that she is far more precious than rubies (see Proverbs 31:10–31).

Introduction to the Book of Ecclesiastes

Why study Ecclesiastes? - The name Ecclesiastes is a translation of the Hebrew word koheleth, which means “one who convenes an assembly” or simply a preacher (see Bible Dictionary, “Ecclesiastes”). Throughout this book, the writer presents a series of questions in search of the purpose of life. His questions and subsequent conclusions illustrate his own journey of seeking to understand why we are here on the earth. As students study this book, they can likewise consider the purpose of mortality and discover with the writer that everyone will one day have to stand before God and be judged.

Who wrote Ecclesiastes? - Little is known about the writer of Ecclesiastes beyond his own description of himself as “the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (Ecclesiastes 1:1). It is often assumed that this is Solomon, but David had many sons.

What are some distinctive features of this book? - The book of Ecclesiastes is unique because although the Preacher is a believer, he often poses questions and makes statements as if he were not. Everything that he says, therefore, must be taken in context of his final conclusion in Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 that all of our works in this life will one day be judged by God. The teachings of this book seem to be directed at individuals who do not believe in God or at least are not yet fully committed to Him. The Preacher presents questions and statements that many of these individuals may feel inclined to agree with, but then he helps them to see how much purpose and meaning can come into our lives when we seek to live in accordance with God’s will.

Why Should We Read Proverbs?

The vast majority of what Proverbs says is common sense, but the way it says things sticks with you, makes you think, and forces you to adjust the way you act. Where many how-to books deal with very specific subjects (winning friends, influencing people, walking in high heels, talking and listening to children), the Book of Proverbs deals with very broad subjects. It's a how-to manual for life.

Now, everyone I know is searching for advice about living the good life. The problem is that most people assume the good life is caught up with healthy relationships, professional accomplishment, and financial independence, but the Book of Proverbs digs deeper. Its vision of the good life begins not with what you have, but with who you are. Proverbs deals with inward character first, then—and only then—with outward success.

<https://georgepwood.com/2007/09/17/why-read-the-book-of-proverbs/>

Why Should We Read Proverbs? (con't)

Consider, in this regard, what we read in [Proverbs 1:2-6](#):

2 To know wisdom and instruction; to perceive the words of understanding;

3 To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;

4 To give subtilty to the simple, to the young man knowledge and discretion.

5 A wise man will hear, and will increase learning; and a man of understanding shall attain unto wise counsels:

6 To understand a proverb, and the interpretation; the words of the wise, and their dark sayings.

There's not one word here about how to have a healthy marriage or how to earn a six-figure salary or how to raise nice kids. Instead, we read about wisdom, discipline, prudence, justice, fairness, knowledge, and discretion. Now, if you get wisdom and all the other virtues, you'll probably find a good mate, get a good job, and raise good children. But there are no seven infallible habits or twenty-one irrefutable laws that will get you those things without wisdom. Life just doesn't work that way. You must be a certain kind of person before you can experience certain kinds of results in your life.

In the biblical scheme of things, being always comes before doing. Do you want a good life? Then become a good person! The Book of Proverbs will show you how.

<https://georgepwood.com/2007/09/17/why-read-the-book-of-proverbs/>

Six Hints to Help Understand Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes situates us long after the start and long before the end of the story. Taken by itself, it can seem an odd book. Hopefully, these six hints can get you started.

1. Ecclesiastes describes life after Eden and before heaven. - It's as if a man who fled from home before an invasion, and years later returned to its ruins, is crying out to us. He knows what Eden was. And he now sees it as it is—the broken shell of its former glory. Ecclesiastes shines like a lighthouse back into the Old Testament waters of broken patriarchs and sinful kings. It pulses forward into a first-century world that crucifies criminals on the street for anyone to view. “Life under the sun” reminds of what we fell from and why a Savior is needed.

2. Ecclesiastes reveals God to us. - Many want to reshape this book to sound like Isaiah or Paul, to align with the language of systematic theology, to comb the hair and remember our manners while in the presence of good company. But Ecclesiastes will not allow it. Bend it to your comfort zone, and you will miss what this God-inspired text reveals about him. There is more to God than what Isaiah and Paul alone can show you.

3. Ecclesiastes exalts the joy of mundane things. - Don't lose sight of the joy. Many times Ecclesiastes tells us, “There is nothing better under the sun” than to experience God-intended pleasure from work, food, relationships, and sleep. If we use God's gifts as mini-gods, we are like those who try to play soccer with a watermelon. The melon isn't designed to withstand our kicking and will crumble. But if we enjoy God's good gifts the way he intended, not as mini-gods but as kindnesses, then we grow wise in locating the feisty joy that refuses to quit under the sun.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/preachers-toolkit-how-should-i-preach-ecclesiastes/>

Six Hints to Help Understand Ecclesiastes (Con't)

4. Ecclesiastes offers the exceptions to the rules. - When any of us learns a language, we grow excited for a moment, eager with the satisfactory progress we made. Then the day comes when the teacher informs us there are exceptions to the rules we've memorized. "'I' before 'E'—except after 'C' and sometimes 'Y' and with words that sound like 'neighbor' and 'weigh.'" Proverbs tell us, essentially, do good and good will follow, do bad and evil will follow. Then Ecclesiastes comes along (with Job) and says bad happens to those who do good, and good happens to those who do bad. Just in case we want to use Proverbs to turn discipleship into a formula, God gives us Ecclesiastes.

5. Recognize the value of Ecclesiastes for evangelism and apologetics in our generation. - Churchgoing persons may struggle at first with how foreign Ecclesiastes sounds compared to Jeremiah or Paul. But the thoughtful non-Christian is often stunned and drawn by its way of speaking about life and God. A preacher who has the honesty to say, "Life is meaningless!" or "I hated life" enables the listener to feel known and heard by those who speak for God. The preacher gives voice to the way things are rather than how we want them to be. The hope offered has grit. The God who speaks doesn't sound like an old man who needs help using an iPad. He sounds like the God who created all this and sees its ruin, feels its loss, experiences it with us, and leads us home.

6. Expand your capacity to behold Jesus, not only as prophet, priest, and king but also as fulfillment of the Old Testament sage. - Jesus tells us this about himself: "One greater than Solomon is here" (Matt. 12:42). Paul takes up what Jesus taught and passes it on to us. Jesus, he says, is the wisdom of God (1 Cor. 1:18–31). All the treasures of wisdom and knowledge are hidden in Christ (Col. 2:3). Seeing Jesus as our wisdom doesn't invite you to search for him as if he is hiding encoded within every text in Ecclesiastes. The sage who wrote the book did not intend this. Our task is not to divine hints of Jesus where none is hiding. But recognizing Jesus as the one greater than Solomon means we can't rightly read, interpret, or preach Ecclesiastes as if the wisdom it espouses finds its source and purpose somewhere outside of Jesus—as if the Father and the Spirit gave us wisdom with no reference to the Son.

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/article/preachers-toolkit-how-should-i-preach-ecclesiastes/>

The Best of the Book of Proverbs

- Proverbs 3:5 - Trust in the LORD with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding.
- Proverbs 22:6 - Train up a child in the way he should go: and when he is old, he will not depart from it.
- Proverbs 1:7 - The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction.
- Proverbs 31:10 - Who can find a virtuous woman? for her price is far above rubies.
- Proverbs 14:12 - There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death.
- Proverbs 4:23 - Keep thy heart with all diligence; for out of it are the issues of life.
- Proverbs 30:5 - Every word of God is pure: he is a shield unto them that put their trust in him.
- Proverbs 27:17 - Iron sharpeneth iron; so a man sharpeneth the countenance of his friend.
- Proverbs 29:18 - Where there is no vision, the people perish: but he that keepeth the law, happy is he.
- Proverbs 23:7 - For as he thinketh in his heart, so is he: Eat and drink, saith he to thee; but his heart is not with thee.
- Proverbs 1:3 - To receive the instruction of wisdom, justice, and judgment, and equity;
- Proverbs 9:10 - The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom: and the knowledge of the holy is understanding.
- Proverbs 17:22 - A merry heart doeth good like a medicine: but a broken spirit drieth the bones.
- Proverbs 28:13 - He that covereth his sins shall not prosper: but whoso confesseth and forsaketh them shall have mercy.
- Proverbs 16:9 - A man's heart deviseth his way: but the LORD directeth his steps.
- Proverbs 16:18 - Pride goeth before destruction, and an haughty spirit before a fall.
- Proverbs 15:1 - A soft answer turneth away wrath: but grievous words stir up anger.
- Proverbs 13:24 - He that spareth his rod hateth his son: but he that loveth him chasteneth him betimes.

The Best of Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes 3:1 - To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

Ecclesiastes 1:11 - There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.

Ecclesiastes 4:9 - Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour.

Ecclesiastes 3:4 - A time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

Ecclesiastes 12:13 - Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

Ecclesiastes 3:11 - He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end.

Ecclesiastes 1:3 - What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?

Ecclesiastes 9:5 - For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten.

Ecclesiastes 12:1 - Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them;

Ecclesiastes 9:10 - Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it with thy might; for there is no work, nor device, nor knowledge, nor wisdom, in the grave, whither thou goest.

Ecclesiastes 1:2 - Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.

Ecclesiastes 5:6 - Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands?

Ecclesiastes 7:8 - Better is the end of a thing than the beginning thereof: and the patient in spirit is better than the proud in spirit.

Ecclesiastes 1:9 - The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 1:5 - The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.

Ecclesiastes 1:6 - The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.

Ecclesiastes 1:8 - All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

Ecclesiastes 4:5 - The fool foldeth his hands together, and eateth his own flesh.

Ecclesiastes 1:7 - All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

<http://topverses.com/?find=ecclesiastes>

This Week's Lesson Challenge

Latter-day scripture (the Book of Mormon and the Doctrine and Covenants) does not contain the types of poetic books that are included in the Old Testament. Therefore, Latter-day Saints are generally unfamiliar with the peace that can be found in reading the Books of Psalms, Proverbs and Ecclesiastes.

Our challenge this week is to spend time reading from these books and seeing if they can help us better understand God, Jesus Christ and His Gospel, particularly how to apply it better in our daily lives.