

A background image showing a pair of hands holding a pen over an open Bible. The Bible is open to a page with the word 'BIBLE' visible at the top. The hands are positioned as if about to write or pointing at the text. The image is slightly blurred and has a warm, golden-brown color palette.

**A PASSAGE THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT  
YEAR TWO, QUARTER FOUR**

# **Wisdom Literature and Post-Exile**

**THE BOOKS OF PSALMS, PROVERBS, JOB,  
ECCLESIASTES, SONG OF SOLOMON,  
ESTHER, EZRA, AND NEHEMIAH**

**A Thirteen Lesson Bible Study  
by Jeff S. Smith**

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# A PASSAGE THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT

## Year One

## Year Two

### First Quarter: "In The Beginning"

1. Creation (Genesis 1-2)
2. Sin (Genesis 3-4)
3. Noah's Ark (Genesis 6-10)
4. Promises to Abraham (Genesis 11-12, 15-18)
5. Sodom and Gomorrah (Genesis 13-14, 18-19)
6. Abraham, Sarah and Isaac (Genesis 20-24)
7. Jacob and Esau (Genesis 25-28, 32-33, 36)
8. Jacob and Rachel (Genesis 29-31, 34-35)
9. Joseph Sold Into Slavery (Genesis 37-38)
10. Joseph Imprisoned (Genesis 39)
11. Joseph Interprets Dreams (Genesis 40-41)
12. Providence (Genesis 42-45)
13. Reunited (Genesis 46-50)

### Second Quarter: "From Egypt to Canaan"

1. Call of Moses (Exodus 1-5)
2. The Nine Plagues (Exodus 6-10)
3. The Passover (Exodus 11-13)
4. Crossing the Red Sea (Exodus 14-18)
5. The Ten Commandments (Exodus 19-31)
6. The Golden Calf (Exodus 32-40)
7. Nadab and Abihu (Leviticus 1-10)
8. Holy Living (Leviticus 11-27)
9. Leaving Sinai for Canaan (Numbers 1-10)
10. Loyalty and Disloyalty (Numbers 11-21)
11. Balaam and Balak (Numbers 22-36)
12. Moses's Review (Deuteronomy 1-4)
13. Moses's Final Charge (Deuteronomy 5-34)

### Third Quarter: "Taming Canaan"

1. Entrance Into The Land (Joshua 1-4)
2. Jericho (Joshua 5-6)
3. Ai and Other Conquests (Joshua 7-21)
4. Covenant Matters (Joshua 22-24)
5. Failure to Drive Out Canaanites (Judges 1-2)
6. Deborah and Other Judges (Judges 3-5)
7. Gideon (Judges 6-9)
8. Jephthah (Judges 10-12)
9. Samson and Delilah (Judges 13-16)
10. Tribal Depravity (Judges 17-21)
11. The Courtship of Ruth and Boaz (Ruth 1-4)
12. Samuel's Beginnings (First Samuel 1-3)
13. The Ark of the Covenant (First Samuel 4-6)

### Fourth Quarter: "The Throne of David"

1. Institution of the Monarchy (First Samuel 7-12)
2. The Reign of Saul Begins (First Samuel 13-16)
3. David and Goliath (First Samuel 17)
4. Saul Persecutes David (First Samuel 18-20)
5. David's Flight and Fight (First Samuel 21-24)
6. Abigail and David (First Samuel 25)
7. Saul's Downfall (First Samuel 26-28)
8. David's Rise (First Samuel 29-31)
9. David Becomes King (Second Samuel 1-5)
10. David's Successes (Second Samuel 6-10)
11. David and Bathsheba (Second Samuel 11-12)
12. Absalom's Rebellion (Second Samuel 13-19)
13. David's Decline (Second Samuel 20-24)

### First Quarter: "Israel and Judah"

1. David's Demise (First Kings 1-2)
2. Solomon's Splendor (First Kings 3-10)
3. Solomon's Demise (First Kings 11)
4. Rehoboam and Jeroboam (First Kings 12-16)
5. Elijah (First Kings 17-19)
6. Ahab and Jezebel (First Kings 20-22)
7. Elisha (Second Kings 1-4, 6)
8. Naaman the Leper (Second Kings 5)
9. Bloody Reigns (Second Kings 7-12)
10. Fall of Israel (Second Kings 13-17)
11. Hezekiah (Second Kings 18-21)
12. Josiah (Second Kings 22-23)
13. Fall of Judah (Second Kings 24-25)

### Second Quarter: "The Major Prophets"

1. The Book of Isaiah (Part 1)
2. The Book of Isaiah (Part 2)
3. The Book of Isaiah (Part 3)
4. The Book of Jeremiah (Part 1)
5. The Book of Jeremiah (Part 2)
6. The Book of Jeremiah (Part 3)
7. The Book of Lamentations
8. The Book of Ezekiel (Part 1)
9. The Book of Ezekiel (Part 2)
10. The Book of Ezekiel (Part 3)
11. The Book of Daniel (Part 1)
12. The Book of Daniel (Part 2)
13. The Book of Daniel (Part 3)

### Third Quarter: "The Minor Prophets"

1. The Book of Joel
2. The Book of Jonah
3. The Book of Amos
4. The Book of Hosea
5. The Book of Micah
6. The Book of Zephaniah
7. The Book of Nahum
8. The Book of Habakkuk
9. The Book of Obadiah
10. The Book of Haggai
11. The Book of Zechariah
12. The Book of Malachi
13. Review

### Fourth Quarter: "Wisdom Literature & Post-Exile"

1. The Book of Psalms
2. The Book of Proverbs
3. The Book of Job (Part 1)
4. The Book of Job (Part 2)
5. The Book of Ecclesiastes
6. The Song of Solomon
7. The Book of Esther (Part 1)
8. The Book of Esther (Part 2)
9. The Book of Ezra (Part 1)
10. The Book of Ezra (Part 2)
11. The Book of Nehemiah (Part 1)
12. The Book of Nehemiah (Part 2)
13. Intertestamental Period

1. What are the names and approximate eras of the four periods of history during the last five centuries before Christ?

- 1. 3.
- 2. 4.

2. What powerful military leader conquered Persia and its possession, Palestine. When?

3. Who took Palestine in 198 B.C. With what intent?

4. Who devastated Jerusalem in 168 B.C.?

5. What historical period began with a revolt against him?

6. What military genius conquered Jerusalem in 165 B.C.?

7. What line of rulers was established at that time? How long would it stay in power?

8. Who conquered Palestine in 63 B.C.?

9. What governor of Judea rebuilt the temple? Why?

10. Who was born in approximately 4 B.C. and narrowly escaped the wrath of the jealous king?

## A PASSAGE THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT

### Year Two, Fourth Quarter:

#### *Wisdom Literature and Post-Exile Period*

A PASSAGE THROUGH THE OLD TESTAMENT is designed to take a Bible class all the way through the thirty-nine books of the Old Testament in two years' time. Sacrifices were made to arrange this pace, especially in obscure passages such as some found in the Pentateuch, major prophets and wisdom literature. Topical class books can supplement the cursory study of these books at other times, however, so that no part of God's writ is slighted.

#### *Lessons*

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2. The Book of Proverbs .....	3
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12. The Book of Nehemiah (Part 3) .....	23
13. Intertestamental Period .....	25

## *Lesson 13: The Intertestamental Period*

### **PERSIAN PERIOD (539-331 B.C.)**

- 478-473** The events of the book of Esther occur during the reign of Xerxes I.
- 457** Ezra comes to Jerusalem and makes his reforms.
- 444** Artaxerxes I (465-425) sponsors the rebuilding of the walls of Jerusalem at the request of his cupbearer, Nehemiah.
- 432** Malachi prophesies to the Jewish remnant.
- 425-331** Xerxes II, Darius II, Artaxerxes II, Artaxerxes III, Arses and Darius III reign successively in Persia.
- 331** Alexander the Great takes Persia and Palestine for Greece.

### **GREEK PERIOD (331-167 B.C.)**

- 330-328** Greek language, ideas and culture spread through empire.
- 323** Alexander dies and four of his generals assume divided power.
- 301** Judea falls to Syria and Egypt during struggle among Egyptian Ptolemies and Syrian monarchs.
- 198** Syria, under Antiochus the Great, regains Palestine with plans to exterminate the Jews.
- 175-164** Antiochus Epiphanes commits many outrages against the Jews, seeking to establish idolatry in Jerusalem, and defile the Second Temple. He orders the worship of Zeus and slaughters resisters. He defiled the altar with swine and other abominations, prohibits circumcision, destroys Scripture copies, and tortures survivors.

### **MACCABEAN PERIOD (167-63 B.C.)**

- 167** An infuriated priest named Matthias gathers a band of Jews to revolt. He refused to worship Zeus, killed a Hellenistic Jew who tried to sacrifice to Zeus, and fled into the wilderness. Matthias dies in 166 and his son, Judas, took the lead.
- 165** Judas re-conquers Jerusalem and purifies the rededicated temple. He destroys the pagan altars, circumcises boys, and "hammers" the Hellenists. Judas establishes the Asmonean line of priest-rulers, nicknamed Maccabees, that rules for a century. Hanukah celebrates the temple rededication following victory over the Seleucids.

### **ROMAN PERIOD (63-4 B.C.)**

- 63** Palestine is conquered by Rome's Pompey. Antipater, an Edomite, is appointed to rule Judea. His son, Herod the Great, is installed as the governor of Galilee.
- 37** Herod is made king of the Jews and rebuilds the temple to garner Jewish favor.
- 4** Jesus is born, just escaping the wrath of the jealous king.

#### **Printing Instructions**

1. Download the booklet and open it in Adobe Reader.
2. Print ONLY the ODD pages.
3. Now FLIP THE PILE OVER so the blank sides are ready.
4. Print ONLY the EVEN pages.
5. Fold the pages in the middle and staple twice along the spine.

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7. What did the people do when they heard and understood the law (8:9-12)? Why do you think they reacted this way?

8. What holiday did the people observe according to the law (8:13-18; see also Leviticus 23:33-43)? How long had it been since God's people had done this (see also First Kings 8:65; Second Chronicles 7:9; Ezra 3:4)?

9. Essentially, what is accomplished in the following three chapters?

- Chapter Nine:
- Chapter Ten:
- Chapter Eleven:
- Chapter Twelve:

10. What happened while Nehemiah was away (13:1-13)?

11. Describe some of the other reforms that Nehemiah made (13:15-31).

## *Lesson 1: Psalms*

The book of the Psalms is a collection of praises and prayers that was assembled over a very long period of Israel's history. While some of them date as far back as the reign of David, others appear to have been written around the time of the exile. The 150 works are divided into five units:

Book One: Psalms 1-41	Book Four: Psalms 90-106
Book Two: Psalms 42-72	Book Five: Psalms 107-150
Book Three: Psalms 73-89	

Scholars have identified some subtle differences between these units, but subject matter is not among them. Each unit of the Psalms contains messages of petition, praise and thanksgiving. Certain psalms even appear more than once. Psalms 14 and 53 are identical, as are parts of Psalms 60 and 108 and Psalms 70 and 40. Furthermore, some psalms are recorded elsewhere in the Old Testament.

The Hebrew psalms were not written to rhyme, but to create a sense of balance between positive and negative statements. Both sides of a subject are often examined to give a better understanding of the writer's motivation. They are generally lyric poetry, designed to be sung rather than read, and run the gamut of human emotions: joy, sorrow, gratitude, confusion, anger.

Many of the psalms are obviously very personal, but most seem to have been written for public consumption and use. Certain themes are troubling to the mind of one living under the new covenant, as the psalmists seem to plead for quick vengeance to be exacted on their enemies. As to authorship, the Psalms break down this way:

50	Anonymous	2	Solomon
73	David	1	Heman
12	Asaph	1	Ethan
10	Sons of Korah	1	Moses

Tradition says that the Psalms were collected and arranged by Ezra and his contemporaries around 450 B.C., but that some later additions were also made. It could be said that Psalms was the Hebrew hymnal.

Certain psalms stand out: Psalm 23 is the most memorized as it tells of the Lord as Shepherd while man walks through the valley of the shadow of death. Psalm 51 is David's mea culpa in confessing his sin with Bathsheba. Psalm 16 is quoted by Peter in the New Testament in describing Christ's ascension to the throne of the kingdom of God. Psalm 2 makes it clear that God begat Jesus by raising him from the dead, when coupled with its use in the New Testament.

1. There are psalms that serve to bring us into the presence of God, for petition or for worship. What is the twenty-ninth psalm trying to say about the voice of the Lord?

2. His attitude is certainly one of reverence. How do we express our reverence as we approach God (John 4:23-24, Colossians 3:17, First Peter 4:11, Romans 14:11)?

3. What kinds of joyful noises do we make (Psalm 95:1-7 and 100:1-5; Hebrews 13:15, Ephesians 5:19)?

4. What could possibly mar our entrance into God's courts for worship (Psalm 96:1-9; Isaiah 1:12-17, Matthew 23:23-26)?

5. In what role does Psalm 23 cast the child of God (cf. John 10:11-15)? What is his hope? What do people find in this psalm?

6. Why don't we accompany our psalms today with mechanical instruments like the ones in Psalm 150 (Ephesians 2:14-17, Colossians 3:16-19)?

7. How did David feel before he confessed his sins to God (Psalm 32:1-4)? How did he feel afterward (Psalm 32:5; 51:7-12)? How might such psalms play a role in your repentance (First Peter 3:18-22)?

8. What did David learn in writing Psalm 22 (see v. 1, 24)? What does this have to do with your own suffering (Hebrews 13:5-6, First Peter 1:6-9)?

## *Lesson 12: Nehemiah (Part 2)*

1. What message did Sanballat's group send to Nehemiah four times (Nehemiah 6:1-14)? What was their evil intent?

2. What was the accusation contained in the fifth message?

3. Who was Shemaiah?

4. Describe the city and its inhabitants (6:19-7:5, 66, 73).

5. Who read the law for the congregation (8:1-8)?

6. According to verse eight, what was the goal of the reading? What does Ephesians 3:4 say to us?

9. What made Sanballat angry (4:1-9)? What did his crew plan to do?

10. What two measures did God's servants take, according to verse 9?

11. As the adversaries strengthened themselves, Nehemiah called on the people to have courage (4:10-14). What was his charge in verse 14?

12. Who was given credit for bringing the adversaries' counsel to nothing (4:15-23)?

13. What protective measures were the workers forced to take (see verses 16, 18, 20 and 23)?

14. What problem then arose (5:1-13)?

15. What does Nehemiah propose to do about it, according to verses 10-11?

16. What promotion is described (5:14-19)?

17. How is the new governor different from previous ones? Why?

## *Lesson 2: Proverbs*

Proverbs is a collection of very brief, pithy statements about a godly life. Proverbs, then, is a practical instruction manual for the soul.

The first nine chapters form a series of short poems that contain practical lessons on a wide variety of subjects, chiefly addressed by a father to his maturing son. The more classic proverbs begin in chapter ten. Religion is the guiding force in Israel's proverbs. Every nation and every generation has had its own proverbs, but Israel's were special because they were truly inspired by the wisdom of God that exceeds the thoughts of man. America still repeats the proverbs of Benjamin Franklin and his generation, but even many of those statements were inspired by the Bible.

The completion date of the book of Proverbs is very uncertain. While the sponsorship of Solomon pervades the collection, Proverbs 25:1 suggests some of the material might not have entered the canon around Hezekiah's reign in the eighth and seventh centuries B.C.

The first verse of the Proverbs ties the entire book to Solomon, the most famous man of wisdom in the history of the world. It is axiomatic to cite "the wisdom of Solomon," especially regarding the decision between the two mothers. The first section of short poems is attached to his name, as well as the second section of actual proverbial statements. The book of First Kings 4:30 says that, "Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt." Other wise men in his tradition contributed Proverbs—the words of the wise in 22:17-24:34 and of King Agur and Lemuel in chapters 30 and 31.

The book goes to great lengths to prove that a search for wisdom is wise itself and that wisdom will change the way one lives. The Proverbs are blissfully old-fashioned in the realm of necessary work and the dangerous desire to be rich. They are very frank on issues of sexual immorality, sins of the tongue, and a wayward mind. We are blessed with the wisdom of God regarding interpersonal relationships and relationships inside the home.

### Questions for Discussion

1. Summarize the theme of the book of Proverbs (1:1-7).

2. How does immorality appeal to a foolish person (Proverbs 2:16-19)? How can we rise above the appeal of sin (Second Corinthians 4:16-18)?

3. How does God chasten his own (Proverbs 3:11-12; see Hebrews 12:3-11)?
4. What is the main thing (Proverbs 4:7-9)? How is it gained (James 1:5-8)?
5. How is sin usually self-destructive (Proverbs 5:21-23)?
6. What are the seven things God hates (Proverbs 6:12-19)?
7. What does a father show by refusing to punish his children when they are wrong (Proverbs 13:24; see also Ephesians 6:4)?
8. List some ways modern women tear down their houses (Proverbs 14:1).
9. How should we answer a person who is trying to pick a fight (Proverbs 15:1; cf. James 1:19-20)?
10. How can thoughts harm (Proverbs 16:3; Matthew 5:28, Hebrews 4:12)?
11. What are some of the negative consequences of alcohol (Proverbs 20:1)?
12. How is truth found (Proverbs 23:23; see also Second Timothy 3:16-17)?
13. What was wrong with that generation (Proverbs 30:1-14)?
14. Where did Lemuel learn about the worthy woman (Proverbs 31)?

## *Lesson II: Nehemiah (Part I)*

1. What report concerned Nehemiah (1:1-11)? How did he react?
2. What happened next that had never happened before (2:1-3)?
3. What kind of relationship does Nehemiah seem to have with the king?
4. What does Nehemiah do before requesting anything from the king (2:4-10)? What was his request?
5. What did Nehemiah do during the night (2:11-20)?
6. The approval of two parties seemed to help persuade the people to get to work. What were those parties?
7. Who appears to be in early opposition to Nehemiah?
8. According to Nehemiah 2:19, what suspicion does he have?

7. What class had been foremost in this transgression?

8. What are some adjectives to describe Ezra's emotions?

9. How did the people respond to Ezra's sorrow (10:1-8)?

10. For what did the proclamation call?

11. What did Ezra instruct the throng to do about their illicit marriages on a cold and rainy December day (10:9-17)?

12. What was their response?

13. How were the unlawful marriages handled (10:18-44)?

14. What further complicated their repentance?

## *Lesson 3: Job (Part 1)*

1. What four traits are attributed to Job (1:1-5)?

2. Describe the happiness of Job.

3. Where had Satan been prowling (1:6-19)? Where does he prowl today (First Peter 5:8)?

4. How much did Satan think of Job's faith and obedience? Why did he feel this way?

5. What did God permit the devil to do?

6. What did the devil take from Job?

7. How did Job react to the news (1:20-22)? Was this what the devil anticipated? Was it what God anticipated?

8. To what did Job hold fast in his loss, according to God (2:1-10)? What is this?

9. What did the devil propose now? Did God allow it?

10. What kind of encouragement was Job's wife?

11. Did Job heed her? How did he respond?

12. List Job's three friends (2:11-13). Why did they come to see Job?

13. How low was Job (3:1-26)?

## *Lesson 10: Ezra (Part 2)*

1. What do we know about Ezra (7:1-10)?

2. Why is Ezra going to Jerusalem in about 458 B.C. (7:11-26)?

3. What two sets of laws must the people obey and what was the punishment for disobedience?

4. Why did Ezra proclaim a fast (8:1-31)? How did this prove wise, according to verse thirty-one?

5. What law was given in Deuteronomy 7:1-4 (see also Deuteronomy 23:3-4 and Leviticus 18:3)?

6. What was the crime of the people (9:1-15)?

7. How did Judah's adversaries (the Samaritans) react to the temple restoration (4:1-5)?

8. Later they wrote to the king to stop the rebuilding of Jerusalem (4:6-16). How does the letter describe Jerusalem in verse twelve and what is the accusation made in verse thirteen?

9. Whose side did the king take and why (4:17-24)? What happened to the work?

10. Whose prophetic work gets the reconstruction going again (5:1-17)? From your studies, about when did these men work?

11. Is the work now without opposition? Explain.

12. Summarize what the decree of Darius did to help the Jews (6:1-12).

13. Describe what took place as the temple was completed (6:13-22).

## *Lesson 4: Job (Part 2)*

1. To what did Eliphaz attribute Job's despair (Job 4:1-5:27)?

2. What did Job want God to do to him (6:1-30)?

3. Did Job find any comfort while asleep (7:1-21)?

4. Why did Bildad think Job's children were killed (8:1-22)?

5. Why did Zophar believe Job was being punished (11:1-20)?

6. What was Job's concern about the afterlife (13:28-14:14)?

7. Job dissented from his friends' opinion about the wicked always suffering and the righteous prospering (21:1-34). What was his contention?

8. Think back to the beginning of the book. What had Job done to bring this suffering on himself?

9. What does Job mean by making “a covenant with [his] eyes” (31:1-4)?

10. Why was Elihu angry (32:1-5)?

11. How did Elihu defend God’s honor (34:10-15)?

12. How did God answer Job (38:1-40:2)?

13. What did God think of the three friends’ opinions (40:7-16)?

14. How did God end Job’s sad story here?

## *Lesson 9: Ezra (Part 1)*

1. Summarize what the decree of Cyrus commanded (Ezra 1:1-11). Did the Jews obey or disobey?

2. What else did Cyrus do?

3. How large was the group (2:1-70)?

4. In what manner did they give to the treasury of the work?

5. What did Jeshua and Zerubbabel do (3:1-13)?

6. Contrast the emotions of the younger people and the older people when the temple foundation had been laid.

9. What event, however, is about to occur?

10. How does Esther accuse Haman (7:1-10)?

11. What is Haman's ironic fate?

12. Disaster still lurks for the Jews under Haman's decree (8:1-17). What do Esther and Mordecai do to avert this in verse eleven? What conversion takes place in verse seventeen and why?

13. What side did all the government officials take and why (9:1-17)? Who was to prevail on this day and the next?

14. What Jewish holiday was established by Mordecai (9:20-24)?

15. What becomes of him (10:1-3)?

## *Lesson 5: Ecclesiastes*

1. Who is the preacher (Ecclesiastes 1:1-2)? What did he say?

2. Summarize the preacher's first speech (1:3-11).

3. Explain what he means by "grasping for the wind" (1:12-18).

4. In what did the preacher seek meaning, only to be disappointed (2:1-11)?

5. How did the preacher feel when he realized that no amount of wisdom could sustain man on Earth forever (2:12-26)?

6. Explain what the preacher is trying to convey in this speech (3:1-11).

7. For what also is there a time and purpose (3:12-22)?

8. Who is better off than both the living and the dead, according to the Preacher (4:1-6)?

9. How did the preacher describe loneliness (4:7-16)?

10. What warning did he give concerning speech (5:1-9)?
  
11. Why won't a covetous man ever be satisfied with his gain (5:10-20)?
  
12. What is true of a man who labors only in this life for his mouth (6:1-12)?
  
13. What is better than precious ointment (7:1-14)? What is better to hear than the song of fools? What does he say is an unwise question to ask?
  
  
14. What has the preacher discovered about man's nature from God's creation (7:15-29)?
  
  
15. What happens when a sentence is not executed speedily (8:1-17)?
  
  
16. What does he recommend to the man who finds good to do (9:1-18)?
  
  
17. How much folly does it take to spoil a wise man's reputation (10:1-11:10)?
  
  
18. When should young people turn to the Lord (12:1-8)?
  
  
19. What happens to the body and spirit at death?
  
  
20. What is man's all (12:9-14)? Why?

## *Lesson 8: Esther (Part 2)*

1. When is Esther planning to do what she must (5:1-14)?
  
2. Describe Haman's feelings according to verses 9 and 11-12.
  
3. Was Haman satisfied now? What did his wife advise?
  
  
4. What did the king do about his insomnia (6:1-5)?
  
  
5. Who entered the court and what was his purpose?
  
  
6. What did the king ask him (6:6-11)? About whom was the king speaking? Whom did this person think Ahasuerus wanted to honor?
  
  
7. How do you think Haman reacted to verse ten? What did he do in verse eleven?
  
  
8. What advice does Haman receive now (6:12-14)?

7. What was Esther's secret (2:19-23)?

8. What was Mordecai's discovery?

9. Who was Haman (3:1-6)? How did Mordecai exasperate him?

10. How did Haman hope to find a measure of revenge?

11. With what testimony did Haman accuse the Jews (3:7-15)?

12. What did Haman advise? What actions did the king take?

13. Esther sent Hathach to discover what troubled Mordecai (4:1-12). What message did Mordecai return? Was Esther immediately prepared to act?

14. How did Mordecai persuade Esther to act (4:13-17)? How did she respond?

## *Lesson 6: The Song of Solomon*

Perhaps the most neglected book of the Bible is the Song of Solomon (or "Canticles" or "Song of Songs"). No doubt, this is a strange book and has baffled many even as to its inclusion in the canon.

For centuries, commentators believed that the book could only fit in the Bible if it were regarded as an allegory of Christ's love for the church. This interpretation was problematic, however, due to the intensity of the book's language and its obvious theme of human romance. More recently, a literal understanding of the Song of Solomon has gained acceptance.

The love between a man and a woman is not a shameful thing; it is a beautiful bond and a gift from above. Although man has sought out many ways to cheapen this emotion, when purely pursued, it is glorious.

No one is really certain when this book was written, nor if it was written by, for, or about Solomon. It is clearly a Hebrew work, though, and upholds the points of Old Testament law in a practical way. Nowhere does it mention God and yet his influence is unmistakable.

Song of Solomon is a romantic love story. The main female character is the Shulamite woman, a country girl who is dark and lovely, unlike the city girls. The main male character is called the Beloved, a young suitor who sweeps the Shulamite off her feet. In the background is a chorus of the Daughters of Jerusalem, a gathering of the Shulamite's brothers, and some friends of the beloved.

The plot is often hard to follow; it is really just a series of love letters and soliloquies between the Shulamite and her beloved. The Shulamite is just a young girl, inexperienced in love and uncertain about her own physical appearance when her beloved becomes engrossed with her features, both physical and spiritual (1:5-6). They shower each other with compliments and pledge their devotion (1:15-2:3). Although her father does not appear, her brothers take paternal care for their sister (2:15).

As their love grows, she fears being separated from him in a dream (3:1-3), but the fourth chapter returns her to reality and his loving words until the fifth chapter makes her nightmare come true (5:2-8). When he comes to her door, she makes excuses to keep it closed and when she finally opens it, he is gone. Such illogical actions come from one who is lovesick.

The two lovers are reunited in chapter six. Their love matures over time and they commit themselves to one another forever. A handful of practical lessons might be taken from the book:

- There is a difference between infatuation and love
- Love develops over time
- Love is physical and emotional
- My sister, my friend, my spouse
- Do not stir up love before its time

1. Love often starts as infatuation and there can be little doubt that the two lovers are deeply infatuated with one another. What are the dangers of taking infatuation too seriously (Song of Solomon 1:1-2:17)?

2. What makes the distinction between infatuation and the true love of a man and a woman?

3. If two people are deeply in love and have decided to spend their lives together, but have not yet wed, will God look the other way if they commence a sexual union (2:1-7, 3:5, 8:4)? Explain your answer.

4. How can unmarried people guard against this enticement?

5. Chapter four is consumed with physical attraction (1-8). Why isn't that enough to form a lasting marriage? What is even more important (First Peter 3:1-7)?

6. Who has ravished the heart of our hero (4:9-16)? He calls her by two words – what are they?

7. How can a couple considering marriage enjoy this deep a relationship?

8. How is she his “garden enclosed” (First Corinthians 7:1-5)?

9. The events of the book have proven their love to be genuine and strong (7:1-13). What does it take to prove love will last and two should marry?

10. How strong should the love of husband and wife be (8:1-7)? What does that entail?

## *Lesson 7: Esther (Part 1)*

1. Describe one good quality and one bad quality exhibited by Ahasuerus in Esther 1:1-12. Responses may vary.

- Good:

- Bad:

2. What does the king command of the queen and why? How does she respond?

3. Ahasuerus asks his advisers what to do with his wife (1:13-22). What insight does Memucan provide?

4. What is the plan described in Esther 2:1-4?

5. How does Esther 2:7 describe Esther?

6. How is Esther treated before she came into the presence of the king (2:1-18)? What did the king think of Esther?