

A General and Brief Introduction to Each Book

Sometime ago I committed to reading a chapter of wisdom literature each day. I start here but read non-Biblical literature, too. Though the history is different for the Hebrews and the Egyptians and the Moabites, wisdom is much the same, based as it is, on human nature.

I made this checklist to keep track of my Biblical reading. You can see above that there are 378 chapters included, just over one per day.

Some will say that all Biblical writing is wisdom literature, and I won't argue. These books are pulled out under that heading, though, as not part of the Pentateuch and not having a primary focus on history or a particular prophet. The list includes Apocryphal wisdom literature. Dates given in parenthesis are from the Jerusalem Bible and are meant only as a reference to list them in order. Much controversy surrounds most of the dates.

Genesis: (2,000 bc) Who needs an introduction to Genesis? It's properly - according to theological standards - a historical book and part of the Pentateuch. For me, though, chapters 17-19 blow theology apart and set the basis for everything else you read in Scripture. Everything is wrong here: G is a man who argues with Abram and Sari in a tit-for-tat way. He's not sure about news from Sodom so chooses to check on it for Himself. He blesses Lot's daughters with sons after they drunk dad up and have sex with him.

If you want to read wisdom literature then start here and hold anything else you believe to be true in an open hand, loosely.

Job: (~2,000 bc) Much wisdom here. And much philosophy. The primer of wisdom literature.

The Psalms: (~1,000 bc) Psalms is also categorized as a book of poetry, and it is. I enjoy the Psalms most by reading them chronologically, as they apply the the goings-on of events recorded in other books. So, on one hand, you have a funeral dirge in the Psalms, and it feels detached. On the other hand, if you know where this fits, it's a prayer of David, hiding out in a cave from men who mean to kill him.

Proverbs: (~1,000 bc) Just that. Pithy one-liners about everything under the sun.

Song of Songs: (950 bc) A love poem. Usually considered being between G and His beloved people. I leave that to you to figure out. Also often considered a sex manual by Christians. Okay. I scratch my head over that one. Wonderful poetry.

Ruth: (800 bc) I love Ruth. It's a story of love and of doing right.

Baruch: (586 bc) Baruch writes of the exiled Israelites, and of their hope in G.

Lamentations: (587 bc) Despite it's title and reputation for being too long and too slow, another of my favorites. It is, well, a lamentation about how the nation of Isreal has left G for other paths.

Ezra: (540 bc) Ezra and Nehemia go together. Ezra mostly concerns the restored nation's devotion to G, the temple, and the Law.

Ecclesiastes: (400 bc) Another primer. The author struggles with the how and why of G, righteousness, and unrighteousness.

Nehemiah: (450 bc) While Ezra looked after the nation's spiritual needs, Nahemia took care of the business side, putting the nation back together.

Ecclesiasticus: (200 bc) Devotion to the Law and the temple and the precepts of G.

Daniel: (165 bc) A book about firm belief and G's intervention. Contentious in every way, but valuable as wisdom.

Esther: (160 bc) Basis for the Jewish Feast of Purim. My favorite book of the Hebrew scriptures. A story of righteousness and sacrifice in the face of almost certain death. scriptures.

Wisdom: (50 bc) Interesting to me as it's written by a Greek Jew about 50 years before Jesus was born. A little like Proverbs, Lamentations, and Ecclesiastes rolled into one.