

Brown Trail School of Preaching

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon

Class Notes

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FIGURATIVE LANGUAGE

Introduction:

A. The books comprising the OT are written in various forms and are in different classes known as “genre.”

1. The Pentateuch is seen as both historical narrative, but more importantly, is known as Law. “Pentateuch” means simply “five books.”
2. Joshua through Esther is basically seen as historical narrative.
3. Jeremiah through Malachi is seen as prophecy, and is divided into two groups known as Major and Minor Prophets.
4. Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon are known as Hebrew Poetry or Wisdom Literature. Our study will focus on three of these: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon.

B. There are many misconceptions held and false doctrines taught that can be laid directly at the feet of a misunderstanding of the type of genre that is used.

1. This is especially true regarding the proper use of figurative language. If a literal approach is taken when examining and exegeting a passage, numerous problems will arise (as will be discussed in this material).
2. However, when we understand that the material is figurative, we gain a much more full meaning of the Scriptures, as well as adopting a more correct position based on that understanding.
3. Therefore, the first order of business in studying this material will be to examine the various figures of speech that are used in Scripture.

Discussion:

I. The Parable

A. “Parable” defined:

1. The word is taken two Greek words: “para” translated as “beside” and ballein” translated as “to throw.” A literal translation would be “to throw down alongside or beside.
2. The concept of a parable, therefore, is a comparison. Dungan defines it as “a story by which something real in life is used as a means of presenting a moral thought.”
3. The parable is said to be the oldest and most common figures of speech. A parable was used by Nathan in confronting David (2 Sam. 12:1-7). Christ Himself used parables a great deal in His teaching.

B. Why were the parables used and why were they so effective?

1. This was a question asked by the disciples themselves (Matt. 13:10-13).
2. Several reasons are to be gleaned from this passage:
 - a. To reveal truth – making people understand the unknown by a comparison with the known.
 - b. For the purpose of concealing truth from the minds of those who had no right to it, or would abuse it if it were given to them.
 - c. They were made means of “embalming” truth (i.e., lessons learned would “stick with” the hearers).
 - d. The hearers would be lead to acknowledge truth before they could know what it fully meant.

C. As there is a wider range of parables in the NT, let us examine a few of them as examples.

1. Some are easily explained: The parable of the Sower (Mt. 13:1-9) is explained in verses 10-23.
2. However, there are some that might appear to be simple to easy to understand, yet, there are numerous points made by some from the same parable.
 - a. The parable of the Good Seed and the Tares (Mt. 13:24-30) -- My understanding of this has always been that the dividing of good and evil will be done at the judgment. Until that time we will dwell among them in the world.

- b. There are, however, other viewpoints as well. Dungan indicates that a common interpretation is that there can be no withdrawal of fellowship. I have also heard it said that validates our “intermingling” with those of the denominational world.
- 3. I must disagree with Dungan’s belief that Luke 16:19-31 is a parable. If it is such, it is the only one which mentions someone by name. If is a parable, what does it mean? My understanding is that this is a literal and inspired account of a discussion that actually occurred in the Hadean Realm. Some holding that is a parable indicate that is speaks of the injustice by the poor in this world at the hands of the rich and the reversal of such in eternity.
- 4. There is another danger, when interpreting parables, that is illustrated in Luke 15 and the parables of Lost Things.
 - a. In this chapter we find three parables describing “lost things” (sheep, coin and son). I do not deny that the Bible speaks to the great lengths to which God and Christ have gone for our salvation.
 - b. However, further scrutiny shows an apparent lesson we often miss. Luke 15:1-2 defines our audience: the Pharisees, with their poor attitudes as to what Jesus was doing. The older brother of the parable is the key figure and the key point to be considered. His attitude toward the younger brother is greeted with the poor attitude of the older brother. The Pharisees had a poor attitude toward those who had “come to the Father.”

2. The Fable

A. Fable defined:

- 1. Webster: “a feigned story or tale; a fictitious narration intended to enforce some useful truth or precept.”
- 2. Dungan: “If we take the fables of Aesop as a guide, a fable is an illustration made by attributing human qualities to animate and inanimate beings. The truth or moral to be enforced may be of a very high order, but the actors are selected from those beings which are incompetent to do such things.
- 3. Dungan also indicates that, while parables are very similar, fables differ in one major way: the actors in a fable are unreal.

B. Fables see limited use in the Bible:

1. Judges 9:7-21 is comprised of a fable which teaches that those who may be less competent and worthy are most ready to assume responsibility and take command. Note, the NKJV heading indicates this is a parable, but it best fits the definition of a fable.
2. 2 Kings 14:8-10
 - a. Amaziah had hired an army of Israelites to help him against Edom, but the Lord refused to let them go with the Jews.
 - b. He paid them, sent them home, but injured Jews on his return home.
 - c. He defeats Edom and returns home to ask that this “breach” be mended, prompting the fable to be told by Jehoash (thistle and cedar...notice that they are inanimate things with human qualities).

3. Simile

A. Simile defined

1. Webster: “A word or phrase by which anything is compared in one of its aspects to another; a similitude; a poetical or imaginative comparison.
2. Similes are characterized by the use of the words “like” or “as.”

B. Examples:

1. Isaiah 29:8 uses a simile to teach the outcome of those who come against “Mt. Zion.”
2. Isaiah 55:10-11 uses this figure of speech to teach that God’s word “will not return void.”
3. Isaiah 1:8-9 uses a strong simile to make a powerful point regarding the remnant.

C. Dungan: “The simile always furnishes the means of a comparison by a statement, not a story. It also contains the sign of that comparison. It is plainer than the metaphor, on that account; the metaphor makes the comparison by mentioning the one when you know the other is meant, because of some feature or features in the thing referred to that are like the thing that is mentioned.”

4. Similitude

A. Similitude defined:

1. A drawn out or prolonged simile
2. It differs from an allegory, in that it is comprised of similes and not metaphors.
3. It differs from the parable, in that it is made from statements, but not woven into a story.
4. The similitude often contains its own explanation.

B. Examples:

1. Matthew 7:24-27 contains a “double simile” or similitude regarding how one is gauged as to being either wise or foolish.
2. Many of the Psalms are similitudes (cf. Psa. 102:2-11).

5. The Metaphor

A. Metaphor defined:

1. The word “metaphor” is taken from two Greek words: “meta” is translated as “beyond” and “pherein” is translated as “bring.” Hence, it means “to bring beyond.”
2. Webster: “a short similitude; a similitude reduced to a single word; or a word expressing similitude without the signs of comparison. An illustration: A simile would be “That man is like a fox.” A metaphor would be “That man is a fox.”
3. Dungan: “It presents characteristics by the means of a representative of the thought that is intended to be conveyed, by calling one thing by another term which denotes the characteristic which is to be made prominent.”

B. Examples:

1. Herod is referred to as a fox (Lk. 13:31-32).
2. Jeremiah 2:13 contains two metaphors in the same verse.
3. Jesus used the metaphor in His institution of the Lord’s Supper (Mt. 26:26-28).
Note: This also involves the use of another figure of speech we will cover later.

4. It is used to teach of the corrupting influence of sin that is tolerated (1 Cor. 5:6-8).

6. The Allegory

A. Allegory Defined:

1. Webster: "A figurative sentence of discourse in which the principal subject is described by another subject resembling it in its properties and circumstances. The principal subject is thus kept out of view, and we are left to collect the intentions of the writer or speaker by the resemblance of the secondary to the primary subject.
2. Webster goes on to say, "The distinction in Scripture between a parable and an allegory is said to be that a parable is supposed history, and an allegory a figurative application of real fact."

B. Examples:

1. Solomon used an allegory to teach young men to seek God before it was too late (Eccl. 12:2-6).
2. Jesus used an allegory to answer the question as to why His disciples did not fast (Mt. 9:16-17).
3. Paul used an extended allegory to depict both the offensive and defensive means God has provided in our war against evil (Eph. 6:11-17).
4. The allegory in Gal. 4:21-31 is probably one of the best known regarding its teaching about the two covenants.

7. Metonymy

A. Metonymy defined:

1. The word "metonymy" is derived from two Greek words: "meta" is translated as "change" and "onoma" is translated as "name"; thus, the term means "the change of the name."
2. Webster: "A trope (word used in a figurative sense) in which one word is put for another; a change of names which have some relation to each other, as when a man keeps a good table, instead of good provisions...they have Moses and the prophets, instead of their books or writings...a warm heart, instead of being affectionate and/or compassionate."
3. There are several different forms of metonymy.

B. Metonymy of the Cause:

1. The cause is stated while the effect is intended.

2. Examples:

a. God, Christ and the Holy Spirit are frequently mentioned whereas the result of their efforts in redemption is what is intended to be emphasized.

- Eph. 4:20 is intended to focus on what Christ taught.
- Col. 3:4 speaks of Christ as our life or that we have life through Him. He is the cause of life. He is named, but the effect of His work is what was intended.

b. Parents are put for their children.

- Gen. 9:25-27 speaks of the descendants of those mentioned.
- Rom. 9:13 does the same regarding Jacob and Esau (cf. Mal. 1:2-3).

c. Authors are put for the works they produced.

- The rich man in Hades is told that his brothers “have Moses and the Prophets” (Lk. 16:19-31).
- Christ used the same technique in teaching His disciples about their misconceptions of certain prophecies (Lk. 24:27).
- In Acts 15:7-11 we see that Gentiles were converted by Peter’s mouth.

C. Metonymy of the Effect

1. In this figure, the effect is put for the cause (opposite of the one above).

2. Examples:

a. Deut. 30:15 shows what is the result of serving God or refusing that service. However, the effect of what occurs is what is given.

b. John 11:25 speaks of Christ as our resurrection and life. He is the cause of those things to us. We can be resurrected and have eternal life because of what He did.

D. Metonymy of the Subject

1. In this figure, the subject is announced, while some property belonging to it, or circumstance, is referred. These things are meant, but the subject is named.

2. Different uses:

a. The container is put for that which is contained in it.

- In John 1:29 it is said of Christ that He takes the sins of the world; speaking of the people in it.
- In John 3:16 it is said that “God so loved the world”; again, speaking of those who are in it.
- In Matthew 26:26-28 the cup represents that which is contained in it.

b. The possessor is put for the thing possessed.

- A double metonymy is used in Psa. 79:7. Jacob refers to his descendants and his descendants represent the land they owned and occupied.
- In Matt. 25:34-35 Jesus is named, regarding being fed, for those who are His disciples, who are His possession. The possessor is put for that which is possessed.

c. The thing signified is put for the sign.

- Cross-reference 1 Chr. 16:11 with Psa. 105:4 and see that the ark represents the strength of Jehovah.
- In Ezek. 7:27 the word “desolation” refers to the sackcloth they would wear or the other signs of sorrow indicated.

d. Actions are said to be performed when they have only been permitted or even foretold.

- In Gen. 12:13 they would be permitted to leave if Sarah would claim to be his sister.
- In Jer. 1:10 it is said that they had been appointed to foretell these calamities rather than do these things themselves.

e. An action is sometimes said to have been accomplished when all that is meant is that an opportunity was given.

- In Rom. 14:15 the example is provided for someone to be lead into idolatry.

- In both 1 Cor. 7:16 and 1 Tim. 4:16 one person does not literally save another by these actions but allows them the opportunity to be saved.

8. How can we know figurative language?

A. By the sense of the context

1. Nothing should be assumed to be figurative unless the immediate context demands it.
2. The evident meaning of the passage as a whole will indicate whether or not something is figurative.

B. Something must be seen as figurative when the literal meaning would involve impossibility.

1. In Jer. 1:18 it is said, “For behold, I have made you this day a fortified city and an iron pillar, And bronze walls against the whole land— Against the kings of Judah, Against its princes, Against its priests, And against the people of the land.”
2. We know that this was not a literal fact. God had made this man resemble these things in some fashion. He should be strong and immovable like them, hence the comparison.
3. Psalm 18:2 states, “The Lord is my rock, and my fortress, and my deliverer; my God, my strong rock, in him will I trust; my shield, and the horn of my salvation, my high tower.” Literally, it is impossible for God to be a rock, tower or horn. It is obvious that the author did not expect this to be understood literally.
4. We must be cautious in the application of this rule. We must study it sufficiently to know that impossibilities exist before demanding that the passage is figurative.

C. A passage may be considered figurative if a literal interpretation results in one passage contradicting another.

1. That is, if we have two passages, and the literal interpretation of both makes one contradict the other, we are to assume that the language of at least one of them is figurative.
2. There is a possibility to examine.

- a. We have some words that are used in more than one way...more than one meaning.
- b. For example, the word in one place may have one meaning, but may mean something else in another place.
 - “For as in Adam, all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive” (1 Cor. 15:22).
 - “The Lord knows how to deliver the godly out of temptation and to keep the unrighteous under punishment unto the day of judgment” (2 Pet. 2:9).
 - Not only will God reserve the wicked as well as the righteous in the intermediate state, but He will send the one away into everlasting life and the other into everlasting punishment (Mt. 25:46).
 - Jesus said to her, "I am the resurrection and the life. He who believes in Me, though he may die, he shall live. And whoever lives and believes in Me shall never die. Do you believe this?" (Jno. 11:25-26)
 - Take all these passages literally and contradiction is inevitable.

D. A passage is to be understood as figurative when the Scriptures are made to demand an action that is wrong, or forbid that which is good.

1. “If your hand or foot causes you to sin, cut it off and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life lame or maimed, rather than having two hands or two feet, to be cast into the everlasting fire. And if your eye causes you to sin, pluck it out and cast *it* from you. It is better for you to enter into life with one eye, rather than having two eyes, to be cast into hell fire.” (Mt. 18:8-9)
2. Maybe a few have understood this to be intended to direct men to so punish themselves, but it is sufficient to say that 99 of every 100 understand this to be figurative. It is not right for man to so abuse his body, therefore, the passage is to be understood figuratively.
3. “If anyone comes to Me and does not hate his father and mother, wife and children, brothers and sisters, yes, and his own life also, he cannot be My disciple.” (Lk. 14:26)
4. Except those who desire to find something in the Bible that is totally repugnant, none have taken this literally. The command to honor one’s father and mother would be directly violated with a literal understanding.

E. When something is said to be figurative.

1. The author understands when something is figurative or not. Look to John 2:18-22 and Jesus' statement regarding destroying the temple and raising it again. They at least pretended to understand this literally and Jesus set them straight.
2. John 10:6 indicates that Jesus spoke a parable to them. Therefore, it is to be interpreted as such.
3. In Luke 18:1 and 19:1 it is explicitly stated that He was speaking in parables.

F. When the definite is put for the indefinite. This occurs many times in Scripture. Many expressions are used: days, hours, years, ten, one hundred, one thousand, ten thousand and ten thousand times ten thousand. They are rarely supposed to refer to just that exact number or system of time.

G. When something is said in mockery.

1. Men have always had the habit of using words to convey a thought quite different from that which a literal interpretation would indicate. Note Elijah's mocking of Baal on Mt. Carmel (1 Kgs. 18:27). No one understands Elijah to recognize that Baal was truly a god, for he said it sarcastically.
2. One Pentecost, the apostles were mocked in such a fashion regarding their speaking in tongues (Acts 2:13).
3. Christ was mocked in such a fashion (Lk. 23:35). They did not concede that Jesus had saved anyone, but mere acknowledged that Christ had claimed to do so.

H. Common Sense

1. Figures of speech sometimes occur when we have to depend on things we know in order to decide if something is seen as literal or figurative.
2. We have many statements in the Scriptures that are in excess of the facts (hyperbole, etc.).
 - a. As such, we know that they must then be taken figuratively.
 - b. Yet, there is no lie if we realize that they are hyperbole.
 - c. If it is used for the purpose of intensifying the thought and, with that purpose in mind, there is no danger of being misled.

3. When God says He will make His “arrows drink with blood” or Paul declares that he is less than all the least of all the saints, there is an obvious need to apply common sense to the passages in question.
4. In Matthew 20:20-23 Jesus tells His disciples He had a cup to drink and a baptism with which to be baptized, and asks James and John if they were able to endure those things. They said they were able. We use common sense to know that He was not speaking of literal things to describe what He would face.

9. Rules for Interpreting Figurative Language

A. Let the author give his own interpretation.

1. This applies to the use of either literal or figurative language.
2. In whatever setting, it is best to allow an author to define his terms before assigning meaning to what has been communicated.
3. There have been many strange interpretations placed on Ezekiel’s vision of the valley of dry bones (Ezek. 37). However, in vs. 11, he clearly relates that the vision applies to the house of Israel. They were ready to give up all hope of returning home from the captivity. His vision made it clear, with the usage of figurative language, that they would return home.

B. The interpretation should be according to the general and special scope.

1. Again, this is true of literal language as well. It is much more the case as we consider figurative language.
2. Psalm 19:7 states that “The law of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul.”
 - a. In the interpretation of this passage, we must not lose sight of what is being considered in the context.
 - b. In His handiwork we see the evidence of His wisdom and goodness and in His law is power to turn the souls of men from wrong to right.
 - c. This does not mean that God had nothing to add to this law; it was perfect for the purpose for which it was given.
 - d. We learn from Paul that it was a “tutor” to bring us to Christ (Gal. 3:24-25).
3. Matthew 5:13-15 is regarded as an easy figure and yet it can be removed from its purpose by a failure to keep the immediate context in mind.

C. Compare the figurative with literal accounts or statements of the same things.

1. If we accomplish this, we cannot make the figurative conflict with the literal.
2. It may enhance a literal statement, but it will not teach something different.

D. By the resemblance of things compared

1. Christ is presented as a slain lamb from the foundation of the world. In His trial and crucifixion He is presented as a sheep before her shearer and a lamb taken to the slaughter.
2. When we consider the characteristics of a lamb, we can easily understand what was intended in such a figurative manner.
3. However, in the book of Revelation, He is also called the Lion of the tribe of Judah. How can He be portrayed as both a lamb and a lion? The figure used in Revelation forces us to look at another aspect of Christ under consideration. It is the same Christ, but different characteristics are portrayed.
4. In the use of this rule we must be careful not to compare accidental qualities, or, those for which the figure was not intended.

E. The facts of history and biography may help in interpreting figurative language.

1. If we can know what a writer or speaker was referring to in the day something was written or spoken, we can understand his usage of such figures.
 - a. Jeremiah 1:13 refers to a “boiling pot facing away from the north.” Contextually, this is speaking of the enemies of Judah as portrayed to Jeremiah in his call to prophecy.
 - b. It was about to overflow and scald them to death. The coming destructions as the hands of Babylon, known from recorded historical events, enable us to see the meaning intended in the use of that figure.
2. This being the case, we, as Bible students, must be acquainted with the facts of history if we are to understand the use of such figures in God’s Word.

F. Any inspired interpretation or use of the figure, in an argument or teaching will decide its meaning.

1. In a previous rule, we noted that the author’s interpretation of a term or phrase must be considered.

2. This rule is based on the same principle. If we conclude that the author's of the NT were inspired, we must accept any application of Scripture they made. to deny their exegesis of a passage is to deny the authority by which they spoke.
3. Isaiah 6:9-10 is applied by Christ in Matthew 13:14-15. Another good example is Paul's use of Sarah, Hagar and their sons in Galatians 4:31-32. There Paul clearly tells us that they are an allegory, and the proceeds to tells us what the allegory conveyed.

G. We must be careful not to demand too many points of analogy.

1. Many interpret passages invent points of similarity in passages and then seek to demand a corresponding thought to each one. For example, some have attempted to "put toes" on the feet of Daniel's vision in chapter two.
2. If a man was said to have a wart on his nose, it would have to be considered in a discussion of his features, and a spiritual point made in its regard.
3. Some have attempted to use the apostles' use of an OT reference and force others to see some sort of typology in its use. This has resulted in the misunderstanding of passages such as Matthew 24. Some have seen only the destruction of Jerusalem in that passage. Others have read their premillennial doctrine into the text. In reality, the destruction of Jerusalem and the end times are discussed, but without the "trappings" included by premillennialists.

A Survey of OT Introduction

Gleason L. Archer

I. Introduction to Hebrew Poetry

- A. Many 19th century critics assumed that the Hebrews were incapable of writing poetry of this nature until late, and then only under the influence of more educated neighbors.
 1. The "Rationalist School" denied all Davidic authorship of the Psalms and claimed that none could have been written before Babylonian captivity (606 B.C.).
 2. They assigned the writing of many of them to the time of the Maccabees (160 B.C.). The same is true of other books under consideration in this study.

B. 20th century criticism has modified this view somewhat, indicating that at least some of these books may have come from an earlier period. This is especially the case in referring to what they saw as an earlier oral form.

1. The discovery of Akkadian and Egyptian hymns has confirmed that Israel's neighbors produced this material in the 2nd millennium B.C. This has been upheld by Ugaritic poetry in the Canaanite language about 150 B.C.
2. Most modern critics concede the possibility of early poetic elements going back to the time of David. However, they also hold that the finished product was much later.

C. The most noteworthy characteristic element of Hebrew poetry is that of parallelism. This involves the placing of one thought beside another that corresponds to it in some fashion. We will overview five types of parallelism:

1. Synonymous parallelism
 - a. Identical – Psa. 24:1
 - b. Similar – Psa. 19:2
2. Antithetical parallelism – opposed...common in Proverbs – see Psa. 1:6
3. Synthetic or constructive parallelism
 - a. Completion type – Psa. 2:6
 - b. Comparison type – Prov. 15:17
 - c. Reason type – Prov. 26:4
4. Climatic – Psa. 29:1 – notice how the first line is incomplete and the second line takes up some of the words again and then completes the thought.
5. Emblematic – The second line gives a figurative illustration but does so without any words of contrast simply by placing the two ideas loosely together. In this sense the first line serves as an emblem to illustrate the second (see Prov. 25:25; 11:22).

D. The Wisdom Literature

1. In Hebrew, the term “hokma” means “wisdom.” This type of literature was used commonly among the Ancient Near Eastern peoples. There are both Akkadian and Egyptian forms providing instruction to kings and princes.
2. It is in this context, the use of this genre among Israel's neighbors, that we understand the wisdom literature of the Hebrews.

- a. Most characteristic of the “hokma” are the practical precepts based on the observation of the laws of human nature and the rules for success in social, business and political life.
- b. In general, we say that the “wisdom” was of more of a practical nature than that it was theoretical.
- c. Like the “sophoi” (‘wise man’) of the early Greek culture, the Hebrew “hakam” originally was a person who knew how to do things well which the other person could do only indifferently (“expert”?)
 - 1) In this sense the master craftsman Bezaleel is referred to in Ex. 31:3 as “hakam.”
 - 2) From this usage it was later applied to the act of getting along with God.
 - 3) Necessarily it also brought in the moral law which governs both human relationships and those with God, and which determines the degree of success to which a man may attain.
 - 4) “Hokma” was related to persons who were able to come up with the right answer in critical situations. In this sense, Joseph was seen as “hakam” because of his ability to interpret Pharaoh’s dream (Gen. 41:39).
 - 5) The same is true of the wise woman of Tekoa who brought David and Absalom back together (2 Sam. 14). Solomon was referred to in the same way due to his clever handling of the situation regarding the two claims of motherhood (1 Kgs. 3).
3. There actually seems to have been a prominent class or school of wise men in ancient Hebrew society. One scholar said, “They applied themselves rather to the observation of human character as such, seeking to analyze conduct, studying action in its consequences, and establishing morality upon the basis of principles common to humanity at large.”
4. In its highest form, “hokma” sought to look into the essence of God’s truth and grasp the general ideas which gave men basis for their faith. From this perspective all natural and moral phenomena and experiences were considered in order to grasp areas of life and principles by which they were governed.

II. Miscellaneous Introductory Thoughts:

- A. Definition of “proverb” (masal): comes from root idea meaning “parallel” or “similar.” Hence, a proverb is “a description by way of comparison.”

B. Terms for “wisdom” in Proverbs:

1. “Hokma” (wisdom): refers to a proper grasp of the basic issues of life and the relationship of God to man as a moral agent...requires a proper discernment between good and evil, between virtue and vice and between duty and self-indulgence. It implies an ability to apply theory to practice in real life situations, consistently applying what we know to what we have to do.
2. “Bina” (understanding) – the ability to determine between fake and reality, between truth and error, between the moment and long-range values that truly characterize a successful life. The word “between” is key as it refers to analysis and personal judgment...the ability to distinguish between the valid and the invalid.
3. “Tusiyya” (sound wisdom or abiding success) – refers to an insight or intuition regarding spiritual or psychological truth. It focuses on the ability of the human to rise from below to a grasp of divine reality above. It refers to the ability of the human mind to grasp and apply what God has revealed to a particular situation in life.

C. Authorship, Date and Composition

1. Authorship

a. The following sections are attributed to Solomon:

- 1:1-9:18
- 10:1-22:16
- 25:1-29:27 – apparently selected and published by a committee under the appointment of Hezekiah (728-697 B.C.)

b. Two sections (22-24) are attributed to “the wise men” (hakamim)—not otherwise specified, but apparently of the same class referenced in 1 Kgs. 4:31.

c. Sayings of Agur (Chap. 30) – of uncertain origin...have no reference to the reign of his father Jachin historically, geographically or even ethically.

d. Sayings of King Lemuel (Chap. 31) – of non-Israelite origin – supposedly a North Arabian prince who cherished a faith in the one true God – composed as an acrostic of 22 lines.

2. Date

- a. If primarily Solomonic, we are looking at a date of the 10th century B.C. (971-931 B.C).
- b. Critics indicate that this is much too early for “wisdom” to have developed...some date it as late as 350 B.C.
- c. E.J. Young claims that the book never claims to be a work of solely Solomonic authorship. Modern critics deny Solomon as author that the style is more Grecian and therefore penned later. To rebut this claim it must be understood that “wisdom” was not only a Grecian concept. The Hebrews also had a “wisdom philosophy.”
- d. Young also indicates that critics claim that certain passages (10:1-22:16) contain numerous Aramaic words, also indicated a later dating of the material. However, portions of the Proverbs could have been penned early and collected later.
- e. Others claim that 22:17-24:22 is based on the Egyptian Wisdom of Amenemope, claiming that ten of the eleven are from that source. Young indicates that there are similarities, but that the linguistic style of Amenemope is an older form, making it a later writing than claimed by these critics. There is a sense of polytheism in Amenemope that would have repulsed the Israelites.

3. Composition/Canonicity (Young)

- a. According to the Talmud, some rabbis questioned its canonicity. This resistance was based on perceived contradictions.
- b. Later, however, it was accepted. The primary contradictions were the statements: “Do not answer a fool according to his folly” (26:4) and “Answer a fool according to his folly” (26:5). The Talmud indicates that the solution of the dilemma was seeing one in reference to the things of the Law and the other things according to secular matters.
- c. In the Hebrew Bible Proverbs stands between Psalms and Job, while in the LXX and the Vulgate Psalms stands between Job and Proverbs.

D. Purpose: two central objectives (Clifford Newell, Jr. in “Proverbs: A Handbook for Youth”, Annual Bristol Gospel Journal Lectures (2004) – Two major objectives:

1. To train leaders for the nation of Israel (more below)
2. To provide guidance to individuals in avoiding life’s personal pitfalls.
3. Hence, it serves as an ethical handbook or an instruction manual.

E. Four types of people discussed (Newell):

1. The Simple – the Hebrew refers to one who is gullible or naive. It is derived from a word meaning “open” and refers to one being open to deceit or who is easily misled. The simple person...
 - lacks judgment (7:7)
 - believes anything (14:15)
 - stumbles through life without considering his actions or their consequences (22:3)
 - Yet, he can acquire wisdom if he wants it (8:5)
2. The Fool -- Defined by three Hebrew words:
 - “Kesil” – one who is dull and obstinate...not a reference to one who cannot be wise, but one who stubbornly clings to foolishness. This “fool” ignores the pursuit of wisdom (17:24), thinks he can simply buy it (17:16), has no real desire for knowledge (1:22) or godly understanding (18:2).
 - “Ewil” (evil) – one step lower than the previous term...moves beyond simple stubborn foolishness by adding moral indecency. He refuses any advice (12:15), prefers to revel in sin (14:16) and goes so far as to mock sin’s consequences (14:9).
 - “Nabal” – occurs only three times in Proverbs...completely closed to reason, yet insists on speaking (17:7). Abigail’s husband is an example (1 Sam. 25:17).
3. The Mocker – sometimes translated as “scoffer” – appears 17 times in Proverbs...not only foolish and proud, but he displays open contempt for wisdom and instruction...the one who seeks to correct him is asking for trouble (9:7)...he deliberately brings strife (11:9). Peter referred to some like this in his day (2 Pet. 3:2-3).
4. The Wise – the heroes of Proverbs...mentioned over 100 times...refers more to the attitude of one’s heart to God than his intellectual ability.
 - They want to be with other wise people (13:20)
 - they want to hear and observe instruction (15:31)
 - they pay attention to biblical commands (15:31; 10:8)

- he understands that even God's discipline reflects His desire to move people to wisdom (3:11-12)
- wisdom to the wise man is more priceless than rubies (8:11) and more precious than gold or silver (16:16)

III. Guidelines for Interpreting Proverbs – “Mastering the Old Testament: Proverbs”, Dallas: Word Publishing, 1989 – written by David Hubbard.

A. See the book as a collection of collections of wisdom materials.

1. The book is divided by separate headings that introduce major sections (1:1; 10:1; 22:17; 24:23; 25:1; 30:1; 31:1).
2. Each section likely comprises a distinctive collection, marked by differences in literary form and instructional content.
3. Grasping these differences will likely help us understand the meaning by understanding that the author has purposely used a given genre or technique.

B. Recognize the various forms of which the book is comprised. Two major forms dominate the first collection (1:1-9:18):

1. Instruction – extended admonition (commands or warnings) usually directed to “my son” or “sons.” They either:
 - a. Extol the qualities of wisdom and urge the young men to seek them (2:1-22; 3:1-20; 4:1-9, 20-27; 9:7-12)
 - b. Sound an alarm regarding...
 - friendship with the “wrong crowd” (1:18-19; 4:10-19)
 - strife with neighbors (3:28-35)
 - deceptive or malicious speech (4:20-27)
 - sexual promiscuity (5:1-23; 6:20-35; 7:1-27)
 - rash guarantees of loans (6:1-5)
 - slothfulness (6:6-11)
 - duplicity (6:12-15)
 - discord (6:16-19)
2. Wisdom Speeches – poems which depict wisdom as a person uttering, to whoever will listen, a call to follow and become her disciple (1:20-33; 8:1-36; 9:1-6)

3. Forms of Proverbs:

- a. Sayings – their mood is indicative, not imperative. They give descriptions of how wisdom and folly work and that it is observable in human experience. Two kinds:
 - 1) Comparisons – similar ideas or similar words (simile) – some begin with the word “better”
 - 2) Numerical sayings – usually follows an x, x+1 pattern (cf. 30:18).
- b. Admonitions – form is imperative in the third person in Hebrew (i.e., Let him/it obey, hear, etc. – cf. 3:1-2; 1;15-16)

4. Other literary forms:

- a. Rhetorical questions (6:27)
- b. Calls to attention (5:1)
- c. Reflections on experience (4:3-9)
- d. Account of personal observation (7:6-23)
- e. Beatitudes (3:13-14)
- f. Allegory, or, extended metaphor (5:15-23)

C. Watch for other literary clues.

- 1. Repetition – a standard device in Hebrew for connecting sections and verses or emphasizing an idea (30:3-4, 11-14, 18-19).
- 2. Catchwords – a specific instance of repetition – often accounts for the pairing of individual sayings (30:28-31; 11:3-8, 9-14, 18-20, 30-31; 15:13-17)
- 3. Inclusions – another case of repetition – i.e., the declaration of purpose and theme (1:2-7) – sets the form for the whole book.
- 4. Synonyms – in the declaration of purpose (1:2-7), the author cites several terms for wisdom in an attempt to cause the reader to choose to “walk wisely.” the stress is not on each word; rather, it is on the accumulative impact of the combination of the terms.
- 5. Acrostic – effectiveness is seen in the ability to aid in memory – another strength is comprehensiveness.

D. Interpret the book on its own terms.

1. There is much value in noting the relationship between Proverbs and other parts of the Bible.
 - a. Comparison between Proverbs and the Law of Moses
 - b. Lining up the prophets' concern for justice and righteousness with Proverbs can show both similarities and differences.
 - c. Comparing Psalms and Proverbs reveals both common ground and different emphases.
 - d. Follow similar themes from Proverbs into NT to see the unity of the Bible.
2. Proverbs is in the genre known as "Wisdom Literature" and views life in its own way. It also has its own definition of terms. Words like "way", "walk", "stumble" and "fall" have their own connotation in wisdom literature as pictures of patterns of life, habits and failure to follow God's revealed way.

E. Remember the initial purpose of the book. Proverbs is a collection of collections of material designed initially for use by the young men of Israel's society who are being groomed for positions of leadership.

F. Acknowledge the covenantal setting. The wise men of Israel did not have a different religion than the prophets and psalmists.

Patterns in Proverbs
Notes from Unknown Source

I. Identity, Equivalence or Invariable Association – "This is really that."

A. English Examples:

1. Business is business.
2. A friend in need is a friend indeed.
3. A man's home is his castle.
4. The best things in life are free.
5. One man's junk is another man's treasure.
6. A penny saved is a penny earned.

B. Biblical Examples:

1. Jdgs. 8:21 – “...as a man is, so is his strength...”
2. Prov. 14:4 – “...Where no oxen are, the trough is clean...”
3. Prov. 29:5 – “...A man who flatters his neighbor Spreads a net for his feet.”
4. Gal. 6:7 – “Whatsoever a man sows, that shall he also reap.”

II. Nonidentity, Contrast or Paradox – “This is not really that.”

A. English Examples:

1. All that glitters is not gold.
2. Not all are hunters who blow horns.
3. You can lead a horse to water, but you cannot make him drink.
4. There is no such thing as a free lunch.
5. Good fences make good neighbors.

B. Biblical Examples:

1. Eccl. 5:10 – “...Whoever loves money never has enough”
2. Jno. 1:46 – “...Can anything good come out of Nazareth?”

C. In Proverbs:

1. Prov. 25:15 – “...A gentle tongue breaks a bone...”
2. Prov. 27:7 – “...to a hungry soul, every bitter thing is sweet”

III. Similarity, Analogy or Type – “This is (or acts like) that.”

A. English Examples:

1. A chip off the old block
2. Time and tide wait for no man
3. Like father like son

B. Biblical Examples:

1. Hos. 4:9 – “...Like people, like priest...”
2. Ezek. 16:44 – “...Like mother, like daughter...”

3. Prov. 25:13 – “Like the cold of snow in the time of harvest, is a faithful messenger to those who send him...”

IV. What is contrary to right order, and so is futile or absurd – “This makes about as much sense as...”

A. Where it uses a mocking comparison:

1. A whistling woman and crowing hen are liked by neither God nor men.
(Always come to a bitter end)
2. Prov. 6:14 – “As a door turns on its hinges, so does the lazy man on his bed.”

B. When it takes the form of a rhetorical question –

1. “What is the use of running when you are on the wrong road?”
2. Jer. 13:23 – “Can the Ethiopian change his skin, or the leopard its spots?”

C. A Maxim

1. English Examples:

- a. Do not count your chickens before they hatch.
- b. You have the cart before the horse.
- c. You are barking up the wrong tree.
- d. Money does not grow on trees.

2. Biblical Example – 1 Kgs. 20:11 – “One who puts on his armor should not boast like the one who takes it off.”

V. Classified and Characterizes Persons, Actions or Situations – “You remind me of...”

A. English Examples:

1. A fool and his money are soon parted.
2. A rolling stone gathers no moss.

B. Biblical Examples:

1. Prov. 14:15 – “...The simple believes every word, but the prudent considers well his steps.”
2. Prov. 13:1 – “A wise son heeds his father’s instruction, but a mocker does not listen to rebuke.”

VI. Value, Relative Value or Priority, Proportion or Degree – “This is worth that” or “Better this than that”

A. English Examples:

1. A bird in the hand is worth two in the bush.
2. Better late than never.
3. Out of the frying pan into the fire.
4. It ain't over until it is over, or the fat lady sings.
5. Two heads are better than one.

B. Biblical Examples:

1. Prov. 19:22 – “Better to be poor than a liar.”
2. Prov. 22:1 – “A good name is more to be desired than great riches.”

VII. Turns on the consequences of human character and behavior – “If you do this, then...”

A. English Examples:

1. Nothing ventured, nothing gained.
2. Do not bite off more than you can chew.
3. No pain, no gain.
4. No guts, no glory.

B. Biblical Examples:

1. Hos. 8:7 – “Sow the wind, reap the whirlwind.”
2. Prov. 1:5 – “A wise man will hear and increase in learning, and a man of understanding will acquire wise counsel.”

Interpreting the Proverbs

Unknown Source

I. Introduction:

A. We must first begin by affirming that the Proverbs are as inspired as any other book in the Bible.

1. The principles present therein are for the purpose of God providing help that His children may choose the right path in life (cf. 1:1-6).

2. They are comprised of general commands and statements of truth and promises. They are general in the sense that they cover a wealth of topics dealing with daily living.

B. We must also remember that, hermeneutically speaking, we must always be cognizant of the type of material with which we are engaged in study. Let us look at some suggestions that will aid us in our study of the Proverbs (and other Wisdom Literature).

II. Principles for Studying Proverbs:

A. There are statements made that are not to be taken literally. For example:

1. Prov. 15:19 – There is no literal hedge of thorns for the lazy man, nor a highway for the righteous.
2. Prov. 21:22 – The wise man does not literally scale the city.
3. Prov. 23:2 – Are we to understand that we are literally to put a knife at our throats?

B. There are statements made that may not always be true.

1. Prov. 29:12 – will ALL his ministers become wicked. Not always (as in the case of Saul, where David and Jonathan were not wicked; or as in the case of Athaliah in 2 Kgs. 11). So in this case we see that there are some exceptions to the rule (but most of the time it will be true).
2. Prov. 15:25 – The widow (or poor) will not always have an established land inheritance (as in the case of Lazarus in Luke 16 who lived and died poor).
3. Prov. 15:19 – Mentioned in #1 above as well – We know from Rom. 8:31-38 that the “highway” of the righteous may be filled with famine, nakedness, peril, sword and even death. From 2 Tim. 3:12 we know that persecution is the way for those who are in Christ. See also Psalm 73.
4. Prov. 22:6 – Even the Proverbs show that a well-trained child may turn against his parents (2:1ff.; 10:5; 13:1; 17:21; 28:24; 29:3; 30:11, 17; etc.). So the general rule is that a child trained properly will not deviate from that good training.
5. Prov. 3:17 – The ways of wisdom will not always end in paths of peace.
6. Prov. 22:4 – Certainly we know of truly humble people who never attained riches and honor, neither have they had much of a life (perhaps Jesus himself would be evidence of this, as would Moses).

C. Some Proverbs are merely suggesting more forethought before one acts, not giving a hard and fast rule of action. The Proverbs encourage us to think before we act (cf. 15:28; 19:11; 21:23; etc.).

1. Prov. 26:4-5 – Here we have one proverb that says, “Do not answer a fool”, whereas the next one says, “Answer a fool.” Which one are we to follow? Certainly, we ought to “known how to respond to each person” (Col. 4:6).
2. Prov. 22:26-27 – Are we to understand from these proverbs that we should never borrow? Even the Law provided rules to be followed in lending and borrowing (Ex. 22:25-27; Lev. 25:35-37; Deut. 23:19-20; Psa. 15:5).

Ecclesiastes

Name – E.J. Young

- A. In Hebrew, the title is rendered “The words of the preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (1:1). It is written in the feminine case, indicating that the word refers to an office, but it is said that it can also be seen as neuter.
- B. Its root is in a word meaning “assembly,” probably referring to one who addresses an assembly.
- C. The English title is from the LXX (ekklasiastes). Jerome translated it as “concioneter”, or “one who gathers an assembly.” The word “preach” is an accurate rendition of these original words.
- D. The term “koheleth” (preacher) is used seven times in this book and is used nowhere else in the Hebrew canon.

Author

- A. The author is not stated as Solomon, per se, but there is really no one else who really fits. Jewish tradition holds that Hezekiah wrote it, but it probably refers to his editing or publishing it for public use.
- B. E.J. Young, a conservative, provides several arguments against Solomonic authorship.
 - 1. His name is never stated explicitly.
 - 2. All the writings of Solomon bear his name in the title. This is taken to mean that the absence of his name here is significant.
 - 3. The reference to “son of David, king in Jerusalem” is taken as representative. He sees “wisdom” as personified as Solomon.
 - 4. The phrase in 1:16 is taken as a reference to past kings. It would not fit chronologically, thus, it supposed to be written at a later time.
 - 5. In 1:12 the word “was” is used, implying he was no longer king. This would rule out Solomon because he was a king all his life. Some say the phrase could be seen as “I was and still am...”
 - 6. The background of the book does not fit the age of Solomon. Thus, some claim the language and mood refer to a later time. Young dates the book in the time of Malachi (400 B.C.).

C. Other conservative scholars agree that someone other than Solomon wrote it.

1. R.K. Harrison

- a. “Many who argue against Solomonic authorship do so because of the presence of what is seen as “Aramaicisms.” He includes Delitzsch in such a group. However, findings made since Delitzsch’s time indicate the fallacy of such reasoning.
- b. The vast majority of modern scholarship dates the book between 280-250 B.C.
- c. “Ecclesiastes was written in Hebrew by an author who, like his contemporaries, was familiar with Aramaic and doubtless heard it freely in everyday life.”

2. Michael A. Eaton

The difficulty is that the linguistic data show that Ecclesiastes does not fit into any known section of the history of the Hebrew language. It is dissimilar to works which claim to be Solomonic. It does not correspond to the fourth century of Malachi or Ezra. It does not tally with the Hebrew of the Qumran scrolls.

D. Solomon’s authorship was basically unchallenged until the rise of 19th century criticism. Luther may have been the first to deny Solomonic authorship. Today some conservatives have joined liberals in their claim that a reference to Solomon was just an artistic device and that the book was post-exilic in composition. **A significant number of conservative critics maintain Solomonic authorship. There is really no credible evidence to alter that view.**

1. The experiences in 2:1-11 clearly relate to Solomon. This “search” probably occurred when Solomon was alienated from God (1 Kgs. 11:1-10).
2. According to John Waddey, modern scholarship has challenged his authorship.
 - a. They argue that the historical facts of Solomon’s life as seen in 1 Kgs. 1:2-11 do not match what is indicated in Ecclesiastes.
 - b. They note several words and expressions in the book that they date from the Persian period.
 - c. Thus, many would date the book from the time of Malachi. Conservatives holding this view see the book as a product of some unknown, yet inspired author who wrote using the literary tool known as “impersonation.”

E. Solomon's Life:

1. He was the third, and final, king of a united Israel. He was the son of David and Bathsheba (2 Sam. 12:24) and was born approximately 1000 B.C.
2. His name meant "peaceful." Nathan the prophet called him Jedidiah, which meant "beloved of the Lord" (2 Sam. 12:24-25).
3. He assumed the throne about 972-970 B.C., being some 20 years of age. He ruled for 40 years (1 Kgs. 11:42).
4. As a builder, he built the fabulous Temple of Jehovah at Jerusalem. This project involved 153,300 laborers and took seven years. He also built a palace for himself that took 13 years to complete (1 Kgs. 7:1).
5. He was also a literary great. He penned 3000 proverbs and wrote 1005 songs (1 Kgs. 4:27-34). As a philosopher he gave us the book of Ecclesiastes. His great wisdom was a gift from God (1 Kgs. 3:11-12). He also learned from other men (Eccl. 12:9).
6. Though great in many areas, he also had glaring weaknesses. Ignoring God's plan for monogamous marriage, he took 700 wives and had 300 concubines, many of whom were foreign women. They turned his heart from the worship of the true God to idols (1 Kgs. 11:1-8).

Simple Summary

1. The Problem: How to be happy without God (1:3)
2. The Search: Solomon sought happiness and satisfaction in every available way, but to no avail (1:4-12:12).
3. The Conclusion: "Fear God and keep His commandments" (12:13-14).

About the Book (John Waddey)

A. Purposes:

1. He wishes to convince his readers of the vanity of any world view which does not rise above man and his earthly surroundings.
2. He demonstrates the utter insufficiency of all earthly pursuits and material things to bring true happiness. Having done this, he labors to draw us away from that which is only apparently good to that which is real and enduringly good; namely, fearing God and keeping His commandments.

3. He argues that one may enjoy every mental, physical and social pleasure along with riches, fame and honor, and still never realize his true purpose for existing. In so doing, he will miss the only genuine and lasting joy.
4. The preacher teaches us that the absence of God from one's life allows the entrance of every kind of unhappiness.
5. He wants us to see God as the ultimate standard by which every aspect of life must be interpreted.
6. The judgment of vanity is pronounced upon every philosophy that makes the material world of human pleasure an end in itself.

B. Theme: The theme is the "vanity" of "everything under the sun." This is first announced, then proven from the preacher's personal experience and from his wide-reaching observation. Finally, by appeal and declaration, he shows that the whole of life is found only as there is recognition of things above the sun as well as those under the sun – of things spiritual as well as material. The following observations will prove helpful to the proper interpretation of the book:

1. Remember that it is a dramatic autobiography of Solomon's experience and observations while he was estranged from God. Forsaking the Lord, he sought satisfaction in the things the world has to offer.
2. In this short story, God provides us a record of all that human wisdom can discover about the meaning and purpose of life. **The arguments advanced are Solomon's, not God's.** We have here an accurate record of what Solomon said and did in his estrangement, given to us by the Holy Spirit.
3. With the above point in mind, the meaning of several difficult passages will be clear. Some of the thoughts of the book reflect shrewd common sense. Others contain glimpses of deep spiritual truth. Still others are only partially true, and some are false. For example:
 - a. "There is nothing better for a man than that he should eat and drink..." (2:24).
 - b. "For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them; as the one dieth, so dieth the other, yea, they have all one breath; and man hath no preeminence above the beasts...all go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again..." (3:19-20).
4. Solomon was wrestling with the problem of how to find happiness and meaning in life without God (1:3). He tells us of his search in science (1:4-11); philosophy (1:12-18); pleasure, strong drink and mirth (2:1-3); in elaborate houses, possessions and wealth (2:4-8a); in music, entertainment and sexual indulgence (2:8b); in position, prominence and power (2:5-11); in fatalism (2:12-3:15); in materialism (3:16-27); and

in morality (7:1-18). It is noteworthy that he found the answer to be that which he had no doubt heard long ago at his father's knee: "Fear God and keep His commandments" (12:13b).

5. It is essential that we remember that Solomon was not privileged to know all that we now know about a future life that would explain the mysteries of this life and reward the just and unjust. Immortality was only a vague hope until it was revealed through the gospel of Jesus (2 Tim. 1:10).

C. Some interesting facts:

1. Most students agree that Ecclesiastes is one of the most difficult books of the OT.
2. It is considered to be the most melancholy book of the Bible.
3. Strangely, it has been a favorite book of noted infidels such as Voltaire, Frederick the Great, and Volney. Failing to grasp its message, they identified with Solomon's fruitless search for meaning and happiness. Of course, they ignore the last chapter.
4. The discussion of the author is from the viewpoint of a philosophical observer of social and political life rather than a king.
5. The book has some remarkable statements that reflect a scientific knowledge far ahead of the times – for example, the cycle of evaporation and rain pictured in 1:6-7.
6. The writer does not use the covenant name "Jehovah" when referring to God. It is always "Elohim," the creator.
7. There is no Messianic message in Ecclesiastes.
8. The writer seems to direct his lessons especially towards youth. The Hebrews considered one a youth until about age 40.
9. This is one of the most difficult books to correctly interpret. This is reflected in the many different views expressed by scholars.
10. It is a favorite of such cultic groups as the Seventh Day Adventists and Jehovah's Witnesses who deny the immortality of the soul.

Song of Solomon

Author:

1. The book claims to be written by Solomon. The content seems to reflect a time before the division of the kingdom. The author refers to Jerusalem, Carmel, Sharon, Lebanon and other places as belonging to the same kingdom, though later they would be in different kingdoms.
2. The comparison of the bridegroom with “a company of horses in Pharaoh’s chariots” (1:9) is interesting since Solomon introduced horses from Egypt (1 Kgs. 10:28).
3. Modern scholarship denies Solomonic authorship, seeing a much later date due to their perspective of the linguistic data. They date the book in the 3rd century B.C. Such linguistic differences could be attributed to editorial changes made later to make the book more understandable to later generations. Young indicates that Persian and Greek influence in the book does not require a late date. We must remember that Solomon’s commerce and trade were extensive, which would explain the knowledge of such languages.
4. Some see the phrase “which is of Solomon” as a dedication to him rather than a claim of authorship. But, the preposition used is the only consistent way of expressing possession or authorship in the Hebrew language.
5. Positive evidences of Solomon’s authorship (Archer):
 - The author shows a noteworthy interest in natural history, as did Solomon (1 Kgs. 4:33).
 - The books shows many evidences of royal luxury and the abundance of costly imported objects such as spikenard (1:12), myrrh (1:13), frankincense (3:6) as well as cosmetic powders, silver, gold, purple, ivory and beryl.
 - The geographical references indicate a date prior to 930 B.C. The author mentions locations to be found in both the Northern and Southern Kingdoms, yet they are seen in the same realm in this material. Note that Tirzah is mentioned as a city of particular beauty and is spoken of in the same breath as Jerusalem (6:4). If this been written after Tirzah was selected as the first capital of the breakaway Northern Kingdom, it would not have been referenced in such glowing terms. Judging from the internal evidence the author is unaware of the notion of a divided kingdom.
 - Note: One argument can be offered here regarding unification under John Hyrcanus and Alexander Jannaeus. However, evidence from the Dead Sea Scrolls indicate that book was written before that time.

Interpretation of the Content of the Song of Solomon:

1. Allegory

- a. This view prevailed from ancient times to the rise of modern scholarship.
- b. This view identifies Solomon with either Jehovah or Christ (if application is to the church) and the Shulamite with either Israel or the Church.
- c. Solomon's concubines (80), according to some, represent 80 heresies in the church.
- d. There is no question that the marriage relationship was viewed by the prophets as bearing an analogy to Jehovah's position toward Israel (cf. Isa. 54:6; 61:10). They also regarded apostasy as adultery or whoredom (Jer. 3:1; Ezek. 16, 23; Hos. 1-3).
- d. The allegorical view faces certain difficulties. The greatest of these is that an allegory requires a spiritual application for every physical detail. The spiritual applications made by proponents of this view interpret only very general terms.

2. Literal

- a. This view regards the poem as a secular love song not intended to convey a spiritual message or theological overtone.
- b. This view sees it simply as a lyric expression of human love in a highly romantic style. E.J. Young indicates that the book deserves to be canonized because it refers to divine sanction for the relationship of marital love in contrast to the polygamous perversion of marriage prominent in Solomon's time. It must be admitted that the lover here is Solomon, husband of 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kgs. 11:3). It is difficult to see how this poem taken as an expression of mere human love can be said to provide a high standard of devotion and affection. Advocates of this position indicate that it may provide the one experience that Solomon ever enjoyed of pure romance.

3. Typical

- a. The poem is based on an actual historical event in Solomon's life. The Shulamite, in contrast to some of Solomon's more glamorous wives, was a country girl who was strikingly attractive. By her sincerity and personal charm she taught Solomon, at least temporarily, to know the beauty of monogamous love.
- b. In this method, the song elevates natural love to a holy level. The author intends for his readers to understand Jehovah's love for His people as well as Christ's love for the Church.

- c. This view is set apart from the allegorical view in that the analogies drawn from details are less important and more general. In essence, Solomon here stands as a type of Christ.

4. Drama – Two theories:

- a. Shepherd – this position states that there are two characters: Solomon and a shepherd. The shepherd is speaking to her first and Solomon comes later to lure her away from him. She refuses and stays with the shepherd.
- b. Erotic – Solomon is the only male character. He falls in love with her and takes her to his capital Jerusalem. Here, his love is transformed from sensual love to pure love.