

PROVERBS 1–4; 15–16; 22; 31; ECCLESIASTES 1–3; 11–12

Introduction

The following “Witnessing Christ from the Old Testament” study covers **Proverbs 1–4; 15–16; 22; 31; Ecclesiastes 1–3; 11–12**.

[You can find the LDS outline of study and resources here.](#)

LDS Study Focus

LDS study material will focus on the theme “The Fear of the Lord Is the Beginning of Wisdom.”

In the first chapter of the book of Proverbs, we find these words: “My son, hear the instruction of thy father, and forsake not the law of thy mother” ([Proverbs 1:8](#)). Proverbs can be seen as a collection of wise sayings from a loving parent, whose main message is that blessings of peace and prosperity come to those who seek wisdom—particularly the kind of wisdom God offers. But Proverbs is followed by the book of Ecclesiastes, which seems to say, “It’s not that simple.” The Preacher quoted in Ecclesiastes observed that he “gave [his] heart to know wisdom” but still found “vexation of spirit” and “much grief” ([Ecclesiastes 1:17–18](#)). In a variety of ways, the book asks, “Can there be real meaning in a world where everything seems vain, temporary, and uncertain?”

And yet, while the two books look at life from different perspectives, they teach similar truths. Ecclesiastes declares: “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man” ([Ecclesiastes 12:13](#)). This is the same principle found throughout Proverbs: “Trust in the Lord with all thine heart. ... Be not wise in thine own eyes: fear the Lord” ([Proverbs 3:5, 7](#)). No matter what life holds, even when it seems confusing and random, it is always better when we trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Biblical Focus

Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Job are part of the *wisdom* series in the Old Testament. These books emphasize how to live as God’s people and offer godly wisdom concerning some of life’s most complex problems.

A study of Proverbs leads the reader to conclude that God is wise and just. He rewards the righteous and punishes the wicked. However, Ecclesiastes observes that life is complex, unpredictable, and hard to understand, prompting the question, *is* God wise and just? The Book of Job answers this question through the interactions between God and Job.

Hebrew Poetry

These books are written in poetic form. Hebrew poetry doesn’t focus on rhyme and rhythm. Instead, it generally uses parallelism. The writers use parallelism to repeat and deepen a point or to show a contrast between two opposing thoughts.

Some Hebrew poetry is written in acrostic form. The first letter of each verse is a letter from the Hebrew alphabet. **Proverbs 31** is one such example.

PROVERBS

Purpose of Proverbs

Proverbs teaches believers how to live a good life with wisdom born of love and rooted in the fear of the Lord. Wisdom is not just knowledge alone, but it is applied knowledge. Godly understanding leads to godly actions.

The Hebrew word for a proverb (*mashal*) means “parallel” or “similar.” The book teaches using points of comparison and contrast. As you read, you will notice this teaching style throughout. The wisdom of God brings blessings and order, while folly brings chaos and disorder.

In a sense, there are five main characters in the book. First is the son, who is the audience or the reader (that’s you). Next is a godly couple, the wise fatherly king and Lady Wisdom. Finally, Proverbs introduces an ungodly couple, a wicked man and Lady Folly. Contrast is used throughout the book to show the wisdom of living according to God’s ways and the consequences of rejecting them.

Many commentators believe that **Proverbs 8** (not included in the week’s lessons) implies that Christ is wisdom. Given the opportunity, read this section with your friends and discuss it.

Witnessing from Proverbs

Proverbs is a great book to teach about godly living for those who are rooted and secure in their relationship with God. However, without the backdrop of true faith, the book may seem like a list of demands meant to help one improve and progress so that one may acquire God’s acceptance and blessings.

Keep this in mind as you discuss Proverbs with your LDS friends. As we have discussed, “There is a great difference between approaching life *from* God’s acceptance and *for* God’s acceptance.” As a believer who knows that you are fully loved and accepted by God, you will be able to read without a defensive posture. Some verses will convict you, pointing out your failures and flaws. Since you walk in the light, you can comfortably admit your weaknesses, knowing your status before God remains unchanged.

Mormons may read the Book of Proverbs and conclude that they are either pulling it off (earning God’s acceptance) or struggling. Be sensitive to this as you go. Be a friend that carefully and lovingly speaks the truth. Do not succumb to gossip about those who live lives of folly! It’s always easier to dwell on the brokenness of others than our own.

Finally, a note about **Proverbs 31**: this chapter has been especially hard on many women in the Christian church. The proverb is not an instruction manual for how to be the perfect wife. Instead, it is a poem written by a husband who greatly admires his wife. A woman with peace and security in her relationship with God naturally blesses those around her. The love of God that fills her flows out of her. Just as a well-fertilized apple tree bears beautiful fruit, so does the woman who knows God loves her.

ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes seems to take a depressing turn following the hopefulness of Proverbs. The teacher examines the world and finds that it often does not operate according to what we might view as justice. The wise suffer, and the wicked prosper. The Proverbs aren't a list of promises. Living a godly life doesn't guarantee blessings, and success does not always follow wisdom. If this is the case, what gives life meaning and purpose?

The teacher attempts to live a fulfilling life by experimenting with different lifestyles. He provides three main observations.

- 1) **The march of time.** We may accomplish many things, but after we die, the world continues. We are forgotten.
- 2) **We will all die.** All people face the same fate as animals. The righteous and the wicked, the rich and the poor, will all die.
- 3) **Life is random, confusing, and disorienting.** Regardless of our wise or foolish living, we may or may not enjoy a comfortable life. We cannot really control anything in life. It is too unpredictable.

Hevel

Hevel is the Hebrew word usually translated as *vanities* or *meaningless*. The teacher uses *hevel* thirty-eight times in Ecclesiastes. The literal translation is *smoke* or *vapor*. Consider the appearance of dense smoke or a puffy cloud. They look like something you can grasp, but if you try, it's impossible. Smoke and fog can be so dense it's blinding but may disappear in a few moments as if they had never existed. Life is temporary, unpredictable, and full of paradoxes.

Accepting Hevel

It all sounds depressing and can leave one wondering, "what's the point?" Continued study will leave one weary and without a satisfying answer. However, the author comes to a comforting conclusion. He acknowledges the advantages of living by wisdom and fear of the Lord, as Proverbs suggests.

When we adopt a posture of trust in the Lord, we can accept that our lives are not in our control. Therefore, we can approach life with an open hand and be set free to enjoy the little things (good conversation, work, or the sun on our faces). Finally, we rely on God's unchanging character of justice. True meaning and hope come from his judgment. We know that one day God will clear away all that is unjust and evil, remaking the world the way it was meant to be.

Witnessing from Ecclesiastes

[Another LDS study guide for the Old Testament says](#), "From these verses, we learn that if we choose to focus on God and keeping His commandments rather than on worldly pursuits, we will find purpose in mortality and be prepared for the judgment of God."

A good question to ask Mormons based on the Book of Ecclesiastes and the commentary above would be, "**What prepares us for God's judgment? How could finding "purpose in morality" for the sake of morality be the same as finding purpose in other worldly pursuits?"**

Both are human rather than God-focused.

[The same LDS study guide offers](#), “The writer of Ecclesiastes often wrote from the perspective of someone who had little to no understanding of the plan of salvation. By using this perspective, he sought to illustrate how people waste much of their lives focusing on pursuits that end when they die.”

A question to ask based on this idea would be, “**What is the purpose of life and all the things we do each day when it comes to the perspective of eternity? How do we properly prepare for eternity?**”

Other opportunities to witness could come from:

Sharing Personally

Ecclesiastes 1:2–8

“Meaningless! Meaningless! Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless” (Ecclesiastes 1:2). Isn’t that the truth? Everything is meaningless! It sounds like I’m having a bad day. But those are words straight from the Bible. The Book of Ecclesiastes tells it like it is: “What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? Generations come, and generations go, but the earth remains forever. The sun rises, and the sun sets and hurries back to where it rises. The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again. All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing” (Ecclesiastes 1:3–8). What an accurate description of life without God! Meaningless. Everything is meaningless!

Do you know who gives meaning to the meaninglessness around us? Jesus. Oh, how we need Jesus! We need the forgiveness that comes from Jesus’ cross. We need the hope that comes from Jesus’ promises. We need the meaning that comes from Jesus’ purpose for every single one of our lives. If life in this world seems meaningless, it is! Until you see the hope, future, and meaning in Jesus.

Ecclesiastes 12:1–7

Death is drawing closer. Do you have that feeling? For some of us, death seemed so much closer with the pandemic. For others, no pandemic is necessary to put death on our minds. You see and feel your body wasting away. The Book of Ecclesiastes has an incredibly picturesque way of describing aging and death. See if you can picture what each metaphor describes:

“Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, ‘I find no pleasure in them’—before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars grow dark, and the clouds return after the rain; when the keepers of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, when the grinders cease because they are few, and those looking through the windows grow dim; when the doors to the street are closed and the sound of grinding fades; when men rise up at the sound of birds, but all their songs grow faint; when men are afraid of heights and of dangers in the streets; when the almond tree blossoms and the grasshopper drags himself along and desire no longer is stirred. Then man goes to his eternal home and mourners go about the streets. Remember him—before the silver cord is severed, or the golden bowl is broken; before the pitcher is shattered

at the spring, or the wheel broken at the well, and the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it” (Ecclesiastes 12:1–7).

I hope one phrase stands out: “Remember him” Remember our God and his promises! Remember him when your eyes grow dimmer (the sun, moon, and stars grow dark). When your back aches (the strong men stoop), remember him. When your teeth fall out (the grinders cease), remember him. When you get up at the sound of birds, remember him. When your hair turns white (the almond tree blossoms), remember him. When the silver cord or golden bowl or wheel of your life is nearing its end, remember him. Death is drawing closer, but our God is here. And with Jesus comes eternal life. Remember him! It’s not about you and what you will or can do. It’s all about trust in Jesus and Jesus alone.

Ecclesiastes 7:20

*A terrible sickness has spread around the world. I’m not talking about a virus. As the coronavirus has gotten all the attention, another killer disease goes unnoticed. Do you know what it is? Sin. The Bible says, **“For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not.” (Ecclesiastes 7:20)**. Those are strong words, aren’t they? 100% of humans test positive for sin, including you and me. Even worse, sin is always fatal in 100% of the people who have it. Every person who sins dies. That’s a big deal, isn’t it? Have you been taking your sin seriously? Do you recognize the deadliest disease that plagues your body and your life?*

I hope you do because then you can find a cure. As deadly as sin is, as helpless as we are on our own to fight it, there is a cure for sin that is 100% effective: The blood of Jesus Christ, our Savior. Jesus came to earth and did the impossible. He lived a perfectly righteous life and never sinned. Then he did the unthinkable. That one perfect man died in our place for all of our sins so that we are forgiven and saved. Eternal life is found in Jesus! Every sickness, every disaster, and every heartache in life is a call to repent of our sins and trust in Jesus, our Savior. He’s what we need more than anything else. In a world where no one is righteous, we trust in the One who was righteous for us.