

## Chapter 9 Parish A Spiritual Journey

### *Student Preparation*

- Students were assigned to read Chapter 9, “A Spiritual Journey: A Look at Wisdom and Apocalyptic Literature,” pages 202–223.
- Students were also asked to complete the Chapter 8 “Review and Reflection” questions from pages 178, 182, 190, 193, and 198.

### *Warm-up (about 20 minutes)*

- Hand out seven or eight index cards on which common aphorisms or proverbs are printed. (“A friend in need is a friend indeed”, “Haste makes waste”, “Waste not, want not”, “A stitch in time saves nine”, “Make hay while the sun shines”, etc.) Ask students if they think that there’s really good advice in these old sayings? Invite students to explain and share proverbs popular in their own families. Are there any that no longer make sense?
- Remind the group that the Wisdom literature they’ve just read about is a collection of wise sayings, proverbs, short stories collected by Jewish authors during the Exile and post-Exilic periods. Even though these proverbs don’t carry specifically religious messages, the Jews saw all human wisdom as coming from God.
- Have students exchange the assigned Chapter 8 Review and Reflection questions done as homework. Recruit different students to read aloud answers for these fifteen questions.

### *Part 1: Lesson (about 30 minutes)*

*Text Reference: Introduction, Wisdom Literature: Themes and Styles, Wisdom Books: A Unique Form of Spirituality (202–210)*

- Write the Hebrew word for wisdom—“hokma”—on the board or on an overhead projector overlay. Sample student opinion about why people search for wisdom. (*It helps people to make sense of life, helps people to be happy, guides them through troubles and grief, etc.*)
- In small groups, have students select three favorite movies or songs that have wise messages about life, happiness, or pain and grief. The groups should write a brief summary of each movie or song, and then find a related proverb from Wisdom literature—Proverbs, Sirach, or Ecclesiastes. Have the groups present their movies or songs and their related proverbs. (*This exercise should take about twenty minutes.*)
- Connect the movie or song messages back to themes found in the Wisdom books. Revisit and recap the concepts presented by the text in “Wisdom Literature: Themes and Styles” and “Wisdom Books: A Unique Form of Spirituality,” (pages 203–210):
  1. Wisdom teachings helped to unify and strengthen the Jewish community, especially in the Diaspora or areas outside the homeland.
  2. The Wisdom books of the Old Testament are: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, Sirach and Wisdom.
  3. Jewish Wisdom literature was written in the post-Exilic period.
  4. Jewish Wisdom literature borrowed heavily from other cultures, especially Egypt and Greece because “wisdom is wisdom. . . .”
  5. Nonetheless, Jewish wisdom is unique. It maintains that “the beginning of wisdom is the fear of the Lord”—human wisdom is rooted in the understanding that God is our Creator.
  6. The use of contrasts was a popular wisdom literature style.
  7. A “sage” was a person honored for experience, judgment, wisdom.
  8. Authors of Jewish Wisdom literature were likely wealthy and experienced men of Israel.
  9. The book of Job challenges the standard beliefs of the time – that a good person is rewarded with health, wealth and happiness.
  10. Although Wisdom is sometimes called “Wisdom of Solomon,” it was written by a Jew living in Alexandria, Egypt and reflects a “Hellenistic” or Greek influence.

### *Break/Writing Exercise (about 15 minutes)*

- Join students for a break with refreshments.
- Assign students to do the journal assignment on page 210. They should offer their own words of wisdom but also refer to proverbs or wise teachings they’ve encountered in the Wisdom books.

## Part 2: Lesson (about 30 minutes)

*Text Reference: An Inward Journey: The Book of Psalms, The Rise of Apocalyptic Literature, Apocalyptic Writing in the Old Testament, Further Reflections (pages 211–222)*

- Show a ten to twelve minute segment of the video “Praying the Psalms” (Corpus Video) to focus in on the psalms as a type of wisdom literature that draws believers into prayer and worship. Sister Joan Chittister, O.S.B. discusses how to apply the Psalms to life.
- Review material on the origins of the Psalms from the text. Important points include:
  1. The Psalms, written over many centuries, were originally organized as five separate books.
  2. King David (ca 1040–970 B.C.) is the author of some psalms but almost two-thirds of the psalms were probably written between 520 and 333 B.C., long after David and long after the second Temple was built.
  3. Psalm 29 may be the oldest psalm since it alludes to Yahweh in a style similar to Canaanite poetry. Psalm 23, “The Lord, Shepherd and Host,” is one of the most popular.
  4. There are four main categories of psalms: Psalms of Lament; Psalms of Praise and Thanksgiving; Psalms of Instruction, and Liturgical Psalms. The Psalms of Instruction share wisdom literature themes but also include historical psalms which retell the history of the Jews.
  5. Today, the psalms help us to better understand the faith, life and longings of our Jewish fathers and mothers in faith. What’s more, many of them can still express our faith, life and longings.
- Distribute Handout 9B, “Kinds of Psalms,” and have students work in small groups. Have each group research either 1 and 2 (Psalms of Lament and Psalms of Praise and Thanksgiving) or 3 and 4 (Psalms of Instruction and Liturgical Psalms). (*Allow ten to fifteen minutes for this Scripture research.*)
- Conclude Part II Lesson by summarizing important things to know about apocalyptic literature:
  1. Apocalyptic literature dates from the same era as the Wisdom literature.
  2. Apocalyptic literature focuses not on history—what God *has done*—but on what God *will* do in the future. Some of it (called Eschatology) even describes the end times or “last things”: death, judgment, immortality, heaven, and hell.
  3. There are apocalyptic passages in many places in the Bible but the book of Daniel is the major Old Testament example of it; Revelation is the major example of apocalyptic writing in the New Testament.
  4. Written during periods of great turmoil, apocalyptic writings typically express an urgent longing for change, a warning about coming catastrophes, a chastisement by God and the end of history as we know it. Strange beasts were often used as symbols of new threats, and the writings appeared under a pseudonym to protect the author who criticized the political and social status quo.

## Prayer Experience (about 20 minutes):

- Begin the prayer by playing or singing together “The Lord Is My Light” by David Haas from “Gather” (GIA).
- Light the prayer candles and have students sit in silence for a few moments, attending to the flickering light of the candles.
- Read or have several students slowly read Psalm 19, “God’s Glory in the Heavens and in the Law.”
- Repeat the psalm’s last line: “Oh Lord, my rock and redeemer.” Holding a fist-sized rock, say: “God is still our rock, today. A rock is solid, unchanging, indestructible under most circumstances. We need a rock like God in our lives.” Pass the rock around the group, letting each one hold it for a few moments.
- Read or have a student read Thomas Merton’s modern psalm on page 222. It could be read against a background of appropriate instrumental music.

## Conclusion (5 minutes):

- Assign the Review and Reflection questions on pages 203, 205, 210, 215, 217, and 220.
- Have students read Chapter 10, “The Journey Leads to the Time of Jesus and Beyond” (pages 226–248) for the next session.