

Who are the most famous poets of all time? A brief look at the Internet suggests Shakespeare, Yeats, Homer, Dante, and Frost would make the list. Edgar Allen Poe, Maya Angelou, William Blake, certainly. King David, who lived more than three thousand years ago, is more widely read than all of those poets put together, but he seldom makes any famous poets list. Maybe if instead of Psalms he had called his works “poems” things would have turned out differently.

King David is famous for his psalms. My brothers and I are not so famous, though we wrote at least eleven psalms, some of which you will likely recognize. One of our best lines? Psalm 42, verse 1, “As the deer pants for the water, so my soul pants for you, O God.”

My brothers and I are the Sons of Korah. A good student of the Bible would instantly be wary of that statement. One of our distant grandfathers was Korah, a priest who led a rebellion against Moses. In punishment, God had the earth swallow Korah and all those associated with him.¹ It seems obvious from that account that Korah’s family would have died, too, and there would have been no descendants.

However, the Bible specifically states later that Korah’s sons did not die.² Seven generations later, the prophet Samuel arose from the line of Korah. Our clan were doorkeepers and custodians for the tabernacle, we were expert warriors under King David, and we became leaders of choral and orchestral music in the tabernacle. We were also important in the ceremonial services when the tabernacle was brought to Jerusalem by King David. We are living proof that you can overcome the misdeeds of your ancestors.

We were expert musicians, psalmists, and poets. It was only natural that we continued to be in charge of all things having to do with music, psalms, and poetry under King David’s successor, Solomon.

Solomon was a pretty good poet, he actually makes a few of the Internet’s best poet lists. He did not dedicate his poems to God like his father did. One of his longer poems is in the Bible and is often titled *The Song of Songs* or *The Song of Solomon*. It is a love poem between a man and a woman who are not yet married. Solomon wrote many love poems, but this is the only one that survived through the centuries. My brothers and I joke that he had to write a lot of love poems... he had 700 wives and 300 concubines!

¹ Numbers 16:28-35

² Numbers 26:9-11

In a way, that poem reflects the life of Solomon as he aged. The poem has nothing to do with God or his covenant with Israel, nor is it concerned about wisdom. Instead, it celebrates a sexually-charged relationship between two lovers.

Frankly, that love poem is nothing special, but many people have found analogies in it. Some see an allegory between God and Israel. Others see in it an analogy of Christ and his “bride,” the church.

Another of Solomon’s poems is also found in the Bible. It is usually entitled *Ecclesiastes*, which means “Teacher” or “Preacher.” He wrote this long poem when he was old, and a bit cranky. Solomon realized too late how poorly he had lived, and felt like life was futile. Well, it is futile when you disobey God to the extent he did.

When Solomon wrote the poem, he could barely remember what it was to be wise, but he still recognized God’s power.

There is a lot of wisdom in *Ecclesiastes*, but be careful in applying some of it to your life. Remember that he wasn’t the wisest man in the world when he wrote it. Be aware that there are... musings. Use wisdom with musings such as, “Everything is meaningless,” or the conclusion that the wise and the foolish both meet the same end...death.

Although there is no clear structure to the poem, it explores such themes as figuring out what is good for people to do while they live, what meaning...if any...is there in life, and what comes after life.

Ecclesiastes does provide modern people with a paradox. It does try to explore some of the deeper thoughts of life, In opposition to that, modern life often consists of asking a voice controlled computer intelligence to provide facts for shallow questions.

Just jump to the end of the poem and read, “Here is my conclusion about everything: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of all. For God will judge every word and deed, including the things that appear to be hidden, to see if it is good or evil.”³

A decent poet, yes, but that wasn’t Solomon’s best literary tool. Solomon was the best ever at proverbs! Proverbs are short words of wisdom type sayings that are clearly applicable to everyday life. He spoke three thousand proverbs, although only a fraction of those are recorded in the Bible. People loved his proverbs and wisdom. They came from all over the world to hear him speak them.⁴

The book of *Proverbs* contains proverbs from Solomon and other wise people.

³ Eccl. 12:13-14

⁴ 1 Kings 4:32-34

One of the best things about the book of *Proverbs* is you can find a proverb that fits nearly every situation. What parent or preacher doesn't have the need to quote, "Whoever loves instruction loves knowledge, but whoever hates to be corrected is stupid."⁵ You can't read even a few proverbs at random before you find something that applies to your life...or something you want to text to one of your friends.

Another thing about *Proverbs* that many people like is that Solomon didn't pull any punches, or avoid any subjects in order to be politically correct or be sensitive to people's feelings. After all, he was king and could do or say anything he wanted, and he was smarter than anybody else so who was going to challenge him. He talked about the dangers of adultery, the value of wisdom, how to discipline children, the silliness of drunkenness, and the waste of ignorance and immorality.

The book opens with its purpose. It is to be read to gain wisdom and understanding, to learn how to behave prudently and to do what is right, just, and fair. It is for the wise, and the foolish who wish to be wise. Its opening concludes with this famous line: "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge: but fools despise wisdom and instruction."⁶

Here are a few proverbs that might not go over so well in your society today...but they are still on point: trust in the Lord with all your heart and don't count on your own understanding,⁷ you destroy yourself if you commit adultery,⁸ laziness causes poverty,⁹ and whoever trusts in riches will fall.¹⁰

We sons of Korah were very sensitive to being wise or foolish. After all, our family is famous for our foolish ancestors. Through the generations, we have overcome that reputation, but we know we are only one or two decisions away from losing that reputation. Even if King Solomon chooses not to follow his own words, we will search them, weigh them, and do our best to act wisely.

Solomon's proverbs are not commandments from the Lord, but they are time-tested to be excellent guidelines for living a godly and productive life. If he had followed his own proverbs, he and his people would have been much better off.

How much better off are you? Let's see, I'll give you some famous lines, and you tell me if they are in the Psalms or Proverbs:

⁵ Proverbs 12:1

⁶ Proverbs 1:7

⁷ Proverbs 3:5

⁸ Proverbs 6:32

⁹ Proverbs 10:4

¹⁰ Proverbs 11:28

“Moderation in all things.” Nope, Aristotle promoted that.

“A rose by any other name would still smell as sweet.” Nope, Shakespeare wrote that.

“Do unto others as you would have them do unto you.” Jesus said that, but it is not in the Psalms or Proverbs.

“Spare the rod and spoil the child.” No, but Solomon wrote some things close to that.

“To thine own self be true.” No, Shakespeare again...in *Hamlet*.

“The Lord works in mysterious ways.” Comes from an old hymn, but not in the Bible.

“The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures; he leads me beside still waters. He restores my soul; he leads me in paths of righteousness for his name’s sake. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me; your rod and your staff comfort me.” Yes, yes indeed. The Internet’s unrecognized poet, King David, wrote that.