

ECCLESIASTES

“Walking Contrary to God’s Wisdom”

The book of **Proverbs** – as we saw in our study together last time – shows the joy and the blessings that come from walking according to God’s wisdom. And we saw how that Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived (*cf.* **1 Kings 3:12**), wrote that book of wisdom so that:

1. His son might avoid the tragedies of human wisdom.
2. His son might enjoy the blessings of Godly wisdom.

But sadly, King Solomon did not always follow the advice he gave to his son – the Bible tells us (*cf.* **1 Kings 11:1-4**) that Solomon married many “*strange women*” from foreign nations, whom the LORD God had commanded that the people of Israel should not marry. And the result of Solomon’s disobedience is found in ...

1 Kings 11:4 “... his wives turned away his heart after other gods ...”

So King Solomon wasted many years of his life walking according to the wisdom of this world – and this book of **Ecclesiastes** is Solomon’s record of those wasted years.

Now let’s begin our survey of this book of **Ecclesiastes** by noting that it ...

1. Contains 12 chapters.
2. Contains 222 verses.

I. The introduction.

A. The name.

In the Hebrew Bible, the title is *Qōhelet* – *i.e.* a rare term, that is found only in this book of **Ecclesiastes**. And it means, “*one who addresses an assembly; a preacher*”.

As we have seen before, this title is taken from the first verse which says ...

Ecclesiastes 1:1 “The words of the Preacher ...”

Jerome, in his Latin Vulgate (390-405 AD), called the book *Ecclesiastes* – *i.e.* a Latin title that is very similar in meaning found in the Hebrew. It means “*the speaker before an assembly*”.

That same title was adopted and brought over into our English Bible – so the name of the book is **Ecclesiastes**.

B. The penman.

As we have said many times before, we know that God Himself is the Author of this book (*cf.* **2 Timothy 3:16**).

However, in the first verse, the human penman is clearly identified for us – notice it again ...

Ecclesiastes 1:1 “The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.”

This is clearly King Solomon – and as we go through the book, we find there are other clues that are given which prove Solomon was the writer. For example, compare two passages of Scripture:

1 Kings 3:12 “... I (*i.e.* the LORD God) have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.”

Ecclesiastes 1:16 “I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all *they* that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.”

C. The date.

The date is hard to set because there are no references to historical events other than to personal aspects of the Preacher’s life. Now when we consider the life of Solomon, I believe there are five main points that we should mention:

1. He had started out walking in God’s wisdom.
2. His wives turned his heart from God.
3. He began to explore life from a humanistic perspective.
4. He was left totally frustrated and empty.

This is the testimony found in this book of **Ecclesiastes**.

5. Later in his life, he repented and turned back to God’s wisdom.

The book was probably written late in Solomon’s life – *i.e.* around 934 BC.

II. The purpose.

A. The historical purpose.

As we have already noted, this book chronicles for us the personal testimony of a man who wasted many years of his life seeking for a meaning and purpose in life while ignoring the wisdom of the LORD God.

B. The theological purpose.

This book proves the truthfulness of David's statement in ...

Psalm 16:11 "Thou wilt shew me the path of life: in thy presence *is* fulness of joy; at thy right hand *there are* pleasures for evermore."

In other words, real joy and lasting pleasures are only found when we are walking according to the wisdom of God.

III. The story.

Solomon's dad – *i.e.* King David – had written years before back in ...

Psalm 1:1-4 "Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper. The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind driveth away."

But Solomon had foolishly chosen to ignore his Dad's instructions. As a result, Solomon reaped in his life the very thing that had been promised.

As we mentioned earlier, there did come a day when Solomon repented – but that did not return to him the wasted years of his life that he had foolishly spent seeking for joy and happiness by:

1. Ignoring the wisdom of the LORD God.
2. Following the wisdom of the world.

The book may be divided into three divisions:

A. The thesis. **Ecclesiastes 1:1-11**

After identifying himself, Solomon stated his theme.

Ecclesiastes 1:2 "Vanity of vanities ... *all is* vanity."

“*Vanity*” is a key word that is used over and over again.

1. It is used 37 times in this book.
2. It means “*empty, worthless, or futile*”.

In other words, King Solomon – after personally examining everything the world has to offer – came to the conclusion that life without God is simply not worth living.

Since life “*under the sun*” – *i.e.* life from a human perspective – proved to be futile and disappointing, Solomon began with the question in ...

Ecclesiastes 1:3 “What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?”

Solomon then illustrates this by showing the endless, and apparently meaningless, cycles that are found in:

1. Nature – *cf.* **Ecclesiastes 1:3-7.**
2. History – *cf.* **Ecclesiastes 1:9-11.**

In both realms the same things happen over and over again – and that nothing ever really changes. It is ALL vanity!

But please understand that this conclusion that “*all is vanity*” came after a period of experimentation – so let’s notice ...

B. The proof. **Ecclesiastes 1:12-11**

The Preacher describes his quest for meaning and satisfaction in life by walking after the wisdom of the world. Yet, instead of find meaning and satisfaction, he made two startling discoveries:

1. Human wisdom produces disappointment.

In his quest for meaning and satisfaction in life apart from God, Solomon tells us how that he tried five things:

a. Philosophy.

Remember, he had received God’s wisdom – but God’s wisdom is held as foolishness in the eyes of the world. So Solomon wanted to learn the philosophies/wisdom of the world.

b. Laughter – *i.e.* entertainments.

c. Wine.

- d. Works.
 - i. He built houses.
 - ii. He built vineyards.
 - iii. He built gardens.
 - iv. He built orchards.
 - v. He built pools.

- e. Things.

1 Kings 10:23 “... king Solomon exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches ...”

Therefore, he was able to afford to do the following ...

Ecclesiastes 2:10-11 “... whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy ...”

But all of those things, which the world declares to be the source of real happiness, only produced emptiness and disappointment for Solomon. So he came to four disappointing conclusions:

- a. The fruits of man’s labors are ALWAYS left for others.
- b. The events of our lives are under the government of God’s sovereignty – and that is something that we can never know and our labors can never change.
- c. The ambitions of people are normally motivated by envy, greed and selfishness.
- d. The fruits of men’s labors can be lost.

- 2. Human wisdom produces ignorance.

Solomon found that human wisdom is naturally limited in its ability to understand many things – *i.e.* for example:

- a. Prosperity and adversity.
- b. Justice and wickedness.
- c. Women and folly – *i.e.* how evil women cause men to be fools.
- d. Wise men and rulers.
- e. What the future holds.

For example, every man knows he will die. But that leads to five questions, which human wisdom simply cannot answer:

- i. What is in the grave?
- ii. What is the time of my death?
- iii. What will happen after death?
- iv. What evil will come?
- v. What good will come?

Because of the disappointments and the ignorance that is natural for those who do not walk after God's wisdom, Solomon concluded with ...

C. The counsel. **Ecclesiastes 12**

Ecclesiastes 12:1 “Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth ...”

You see, while still a young man, Solomon had turned away from the wisdom of God – *i.e.* he began to follow the wisdom of the world. But it only brought him disappointment and confusion. Therefore, we see ...

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”

IV. The revelation.

The book of **Ecclesiastes** shows us the emptiness and perplexities of life that can only find their answer in a personal relationship with Jesus Christ – that is why the Lord Jesus said in ...

John 10:10 “... I am come that they might have life, and that they might have *it* more abundantly.”

Conclusion

May God help us to choose to walk faithfully in the wisdom of God so that we might avoid the disappointments/heartaches that come from trying to live our lives without God.