

ECCLESIASTES

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK

Ecclesiastes 1:1-3

INTRODUCTION

- The ultimate question that has been asked by man is, “What is the meaning of life?”, along with, “How did we get here?”, “What am I here for?”, and “Where am I going?”
- When trials and tragedy strike these questions raise their heads all the more, as people try to make sense of what has happened
- Is there more to life than eating, drinking, sleeping, working, then dying?
- These were the very questions asked by Solomon some 3000 years ago, he set out on a quest to answer those questions
- Here is a man who enjoyed riches beyond imagination; wisdom like no other man; anything he desired, he could have
- If anyone could find meaning and contentment in this life, it had to be him
- Here we have this “experiment” conducted and recorded by Solomon as to whether anything in this world can give satisfaction and meaning
- Solomon spent 40 years on top of the world as king of Israel, yet all he could say was that it was all vanity

I. AUTHORSHIP

- A. The evidence *for* the Solomonic authorship outweighs the evidence *against*.
1. The title of the book is “Ecclesiastes” or “The Preacher”
 2. The Hebrew word, *koheleth*, which is a convener, or one who speaks to the congregation
 3. There are some who say that the author of this book was an unidentified writer who penned it during the post exilic period, impersonating Solomon in writing it
 4. He calls himself the son of David. “*The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.*” (1:1)
 5. He calls himself the king over Israel in Jerusalem “*I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.*” (1:12) Only three kings could lay claim to that title: Saul, David, and Solomon
- B. The historical references in Ecclesiastes fit Solomon perfectly
1. He had great wisdom (1:16; 1 Kings 4:30)
 2. He had great wealth (2:8; 1 Kings 10:23)
 3. He had many servants (2:7; 1 Kings 9:20-21)
 4. He built many buildings (2:4-6; 1 Kings 7)
 5. He wrote many proverbs (12:9; 1 Kings 4:32)
 6. To claim that the author of Ecclesiastes was someone who simply impersonated Solomon requires a very low view of Scripture
- C. Solomon wrote three books in Scripture.

1. The Song of Solomon was written in the glory of Solomon's first love
 2. Proverbs was written at the height of Solomon's glory and wisdom
 3. Ecclesiastes was written later on in Solomon's life as testimony of his genuine repentance
- D. Solomon's reign is a type of the millennial kingdom when Jesus Christ will reign from Jerusalem
1. It was a time of peace and prosperity and when the kingdom's borders were largest
- E. Solomon's apostasy and recovery
1. Though he began his reign humbly seeking God's wisdom, by the end Solomon's heart was drawn away from Jehovah in his prosperity and he fell into idolatry
 2. The many wives he had taken for political reasons had served to corrupt his heart
 3. In 1 Kings 11, we read that his final years were miserable as God's hand turned against him
 4. After his death the kingdom was divided and it went downhill from there
 5. But Ecclesiastes seems to be written toward the end of Solomon's life as a sort of auto-biography, and perhaps it is with a touch of regret that he rehearses his journey to seek the meaning and purpose of life
 6. Though the historical books don't have any record of Solomon repenting at the end of his life, the closing verses of Ecclesiastes may indicate that he did return to the Lord in the end

II. THE AIM

- A. Ecclesiastes is a favourite book of atheists, fatalists, hedonists and cultists
 - 1. Because it is written from a worldly perspective, there are statements that are made in it that are not in accord with the rest of Scripture
 - 2. The error of “soul sleep” is taught from Ecclesiastes 9:5,6,10
 - a. The SDAs, JW’s, and Christadelphians teach that when a person dies physically, their soul “sleeps” until the resurrection.
 - b. The account of the rich man and Lazarus in Luke 16 shows what happens to the soul immediately after death
 - c. On the Mount of Transfiguration, Moses and Elijah both appeared with Christ
 - d. And Paul stated, *“We are confident, I say, and willing rather to be absent from the body, and to be present with the Lord.”* (2 Corinthians 5:8)
 - e. Solomon was writing from an “under the sun” perspective – from where we stand, in man’s wisdom, the dead appear to know nothing
 - 3. Epicureanism and hedonism (seeking sensual enjoyment and pleasure as chief pursuit) is taken from Ecclesiastes 8:15
- B. Definitions

1. Vanity of vanities

- a. Vanity means “emptiness, futility, vapour” and it occurs in the book 33 times
- b. Solomon looks at life under the sun and reckons that amounts to vapour – it’s empty and futile

2. Under the sun

- a. This phrase occurs 29 times in the book while “under heaven” occurs 3 times
- b. This is probably the most important phrase in the whole book, because it is the key that unlocks the understanding of the book
- c. It shows that the outlook of the preacher is one that is entirely worldly
- d. His perspective does not include God or things “above the sun”
- e. He focuses on the temporal aspects of life and seeks to understand them with a human wisdom

3. Another word of note is “God”

- a. One striking fact about this book is that Solomon never uses the name Jehovah (LORD) the personal name of God, but only Elohim (God), the generic term for God
- b. Again this emphasises the fact that the preacher’s search for meaning throughout the book is not in conjunction with a relationship with a personal God

C. Wise statements in Ecclesiastes

1. He hath made every thing beautiful in his time: also he hath set the world in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God maketh from the beginning to the end. (Ecclesiastes 3:11)
2. Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labour. (Ecclesiastes 4:9)
3. As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand. (Ecclesiastes 5:15)
4. For there is not a just man upon earth, that doeth good, and sinneth not. (Ecclesiastes 7:20)
5. Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth, while the evil days come not, nor the years draw nigh, when thou shalt say, I have no pleasure in them; (Ecclesiastes 12:1)

D. OUTLINE

I. THE PROBLEM DECLARED 1:1-3

A. Is life really worth living?

B. Problem – How to be satisfied and happy without God

II. THE PROBLEM DISCUSSED (1:4-12:12)

Solomon sought satisfaction in:

A. Science (1:4-11)

B. Wisdom and Philosophy (1:12-18)

C. Pleasure (2:1-11)

D. Materialism (2:12-26)

E. Fatalism (3:1-15)

F. Egoism or Deism (3:16-4:16)

G. Religion (5:1-18)

H. Wealth (5:9-6:12)

I. Morality (7:1-12:12)

III. THE PROBLEM DECIDED (12:13-14)

A. Fear God

- B. Keep His commandments
- E. The thesis for the book is laid out in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 1.
1. *“Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity. What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun?”* (Ecclesiastes 1:2-3)
 2. Is there a profit, an advantage, some value in this life on earth? Without God, there is not
 3. Ecclesiastes is essentially a commentary on the words of Jesus Christ, *“Jesus answered and said unto her, Whosoever drinketh of this water shall thirst again:”* (John 4:13)

III. APPLICATION

- A. Ecclesiastes is as relevant today as it was 3000 years ago when written
1. Ecclesiastes is much more than an interesting book about one man’s exploits in search of meaning in life
 2. Though it was written thousands of years ago, it could have been written yesterday because man is still asking the same questions, and using the same means to find happiness in life
 3. We can all identify with Solomon – some are still searching, while others have found the answer
 4. If people would just listen to Solomon they could save themselves a lot of heartache and misery
 5. He tells us that all those things he tried did not bring satisfaction

6. He went through all this so that we don't have to
7. That is why this book is such a great book for young people who are addressed directly in chapter 12
8. "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?" (Mark 8:36)
9. Solomon could be said to have gained the whole world, yet it did not bring happiness

B. We need the right perspective

1. Solomon's perspective was "under the sun"
2. We need to have a heavenly perspective (Colossians 3:2)

C. We need the right purpose

1. What is the meaning of life? The answer is found in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14
2. Life only has meaning and purpose when God is a part of it; apart from a relationship with Jesus Christ, there is no satisfaction
3. Apart from the fountain of living waters, everything else is a broken cistern that can hold no water (Jeremiah 2:13)