

STUDY NOTES

3-27-13

Ecclesiastes 1

"Solomon's Personal Experience"

OUTLINE

I. PROLOGUE TO THE BOOK

A. AUTHOR IDENTIFIED (1)

1. The words of the Preacher
2. The son of David, king in Jerusalem

B. THEME STATED (2)

1. "Vanity of vanities...vanity of vanities, all is vanity"
2. All is futile, useless, meaningless!

C. QUESTION RAISED (3)

1. "What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?"
2. This is the question the "Preacher" sought to answer

Prologue to the Book: (Verses 1-3)

The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem² ↻ Meaningless! Meaningless! ↻ says the Teacher. ↻ Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.³ What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun?

ECCLESIASTES 1:1

The author, Solomon (the "king of Israel," see 1:12), referred to himself as the Teacher, or leader of the assembly. He was both assembling people to hear a message and gathering wise sayings (proverbs). Solomon, one person in the Bible who had everything (wisdom, power, riches, honor, reputation, God's favor), is the one who discussed the ultimate emptiness of all that this world has to offer. He tried to destroy people's confidence in their own efforts, abilities, and righteousness and direct them to commitment to God as the only reason for living.

ECCLESIASTES 1:2

Solomon had a purpose for writing skeptically and pessimistically. Near the end of his life, he looked back over everything he had done, and most of it seemed meaningless. A common belief was that only good people prospered and that only the wicked suffered, but that hadn't proven true in his experience. Solomon wrote this book after he had tried everything and achieved much, only to find that nothing apart from God made him happy. He wanted his readers to avoid these same senseless pursuits. If we try to find meaning in our accomplishments rather than in God, we will never be satisfied, and everything we pursue will become meaningless.

ECLESIASTES 1:2

Solomon's kingdom, Israel, was in its golden age, but Solomon wanted the people to understand that success and prosperity don't last long (Psalm 103:14-16; Isaiah 40:6-8; James 4:14). All human accomplishments will one day disappear, and we must keep this in mind in order to live wisely. If we don't, we will become either proud and self-sufficient when we succeed or sorely disappointed when we fail. Solomon's goal was to show that earthly possessions and accomplishments are ultimately meaningless. Only the pursuit of God brings real satisfaction. We should honor God in all we say, think, and do.

II. FUTILITY OBSERVED IN THE CYCLES OF LIFE (1:4-11)

A. NOTHING SEEMS TO CHANGE (4-7)

1. Generations come and go, while the earth abides forever
2. The sun is constant with its rising and setting
3. The winds continue their whirling cycle
4. The water cycle also, as rivers run into the seas, and then through evaporation and rain return to the rivers again

B. NOTHING SEEMS TO SATISFY (8)

1. Despite all our labors, man is never truly satisfied
2. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing

C. NOTHING IS NEW UNDER THE SUN (9-11)

1. What will be done is that which has been done
2. If thought to be new, it is has been done in ancient times
3. We simply don't remember the past, nor will the future

remember the present

Nothing Seems To Change: (Verses 4-11)

⁴ Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. ⁵ The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. ⁶ The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. ⁷ All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again. ⁸ All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. ⁹ What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. ¹⁰ Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time. ¹¹ No one remembers the former generations, and even those yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow them.

ECCLESIASTES 1:8-11

Many people feel restless and dissatisfied. They wonder: (1) If I am in God's will, why am I so tired and unfulfilled? (2) What is the meaning of life? (3) When I look back on it all, will I be happy with my accomplishments? (4) Why do I feel burned out, disillusioned, dry? (5) What is to become of me? Solomon tests our faith, challenging us to find true and lasting meaning in God alone. As you take a hard look at your life, as Solomon did his, you will see how important serving God is over all other options. Perhaps God is asking you to rethink your purpose and direction in life, just as Solomon did in Ecclesiastes.

III. THE FUTILITY OF HUMAN WISDOM (1:12-18)

A. THE PREACHER DESCRIBES HIS SEARCH (12-15)

1. He was king over Israel in Jerusalem
2. He determined to use wisdom to seek and search all that has been done "under heaven"
3. A task that he understood God had given to all men, to challenge them
4. He summarizes what he found, having seen all the works done "under the sun"
 - a. They are vanity and grasping for the wind
 - b. For there is little one can do to make significant changes

B. THE PREACHER APPLIED HIS GOD-GIVEN WISDOM (16-17a)

1. He acknowledged the greatness and wisdom he had attained
2. He therefore sought to apply it to understand wisdom, madness, and folly

C. THE PREACHER CONCLUDES (HUMAN) WISDOM IS FUTILE (17b-18)

1. It was like grasping for wind
2. More wisdom and knowledge just increases grief and sorrow

The Futility of Wisdom: (Verses 12-18)

¹² I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³ I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens. What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind! ¹⁴ I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind. ¹⁵ What is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted. ¹⁶ I said to myself, ♠Look, I have increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge. ♠ ¹⁷ Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind. ¹⁸ For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief.

ECCLESIASTES 1:12-15

"What is wrong cannot be righted. What is missing cannot be recovered♠ refers to the ultimate perplexity and confusion that come to us because of all the unanswered questions in life. Solomon, writing about his own life, discovered that neither his accomplishments nor his wisdom could make him truly happy. True wisdom is found in God, and true happiness comes from pleasing him.

ECCLESIASTES 1:16-18

The more you understand, the greater your pain and difficulty. For example, the more you know, the more imperfection you see around you; and the more you observe, the more evil becomes evident. As you set out with Solomon to find the meaning of life, you must be ready to feel more, think more, question more, hurt more, and do more. Are you ready to pay the price for wisdom?

ECCLESIASTES 1:16-18

Solomon highlights two kinds of wisdom in the book of Ecclesiastes: (1) human knowledge, reasoning, or philosophy, and (2) the wisdom that comes from God. In these verses Solomon is talking about human knowledge. When human knowledge ignores God, it only highlights our problems because it can't provide answers without God's eternal perspective and solution.