

Ecclesiastes

Part One

The main purpose of this part of the Word of God, the Christian Bible, is to spare future generations the bitterness of learning through their own experience that life is meaningless apart from the Creator God.

The author is King Solomon, but we can see in the background a powerful influence of his father King David, who was a man of God and used by God in many ways to inspire humanity through his dedicated life to God and the inspiration of the many Psalms written by him.

Ecclesiastes was probably written about 935 BC late in the life of Solomon as he looks back on a life as king of Israel that started so well, [1 Kings 3:5-14; 1 Kings 4:29-34], but the influence of the many wives that were part of the alliances he made with other nations caused him to drift away from faithfulness to the only true God.

Wisdom is *only* effective when it is put into action.

Early in his life Solomon had the sense to recognise his need for wisdom, but by the time he asked God for wisdom to rule the kingdom he had inherited from his father David, he had already started a habit that would make his wisdom, given by God, ineffective for his own life.

1 Kings 3:1-3 [New King James] *“Now Solomon made a treaty with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and married Pharaoh’s daughter; then he brought her to the City of David until he had finished building his own house, and the house of the LORD, and the wall all around Jerusalem. Meanwhile the people sacrificed at the high places, because there was no house built for the name of the LORD until those days. And Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David, except that he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places.”*

This sealing a pact with Egypt by marrying the Pharaoh’s daughter was the first of hundreds of wives married for political reasons.

In doing so, Solomon went against not only his father’s last words, but also God’s direct commands.

Solomon’s action reminds us how easy it is to know what is right and yet not do it.

It is clear that God’s gift of wisdom to Solomon did **not** mean that he could not make mistakes.

Solomon had been given great possibilities as king of God’s chosen people, but with it came great responsibilities.

Little is mentioned in the Word of God about the last days of Solomon’s reign, Ecclesiastes probably records Solomon’s last reflections on life.

Although written almost 3,000 years ago, Solomon speaks of a human dilemma that is still relevant in our time.

In Ecclesiastes, Solomon takes us on a mental journey through his life, explaining how he tried, tested or tasted everything a human could yet find it in the end to be “*meaningless*,” that is useless, irrational, pointless, foolish and empty, an exercise in futility.

Remember these words are from a person who “*had it all*,” tremendous intellect, power and wealth.

In all Solomon's remarks relating to the futility of life there is a purpose, to lead people to seek true happiness and fulfilment in a relationship with the Creator God.

All the knowledge, human relationships, work and pleasure must be only in their proper place.

All these things are temporal and life must be seen in light of eternity.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 [New King James] *“The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. ‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher; ‘Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.’”*

Solomon does **not** introduce himself as the author, but attributes it to the One who placed the words in his mouth, the One who gave him wisdom as the son of King David and the present king in Jerusalem.

In Solomon's reign Israel was in its “golden age” but Solomon wanted the people to understand that success and prosperity do not last long.

Psalms 103:13-16 [New King James] *“As a father pities his children, so the LORD pities those who fear Him. For He knows our frame; He remembers that we are dust. As for man, his days are like grass; as a flower of the field, so he flourishes. For the wind passes over it, and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.”*

We as humans are very fragile but the Creator God and His care for us His creation is eternal.

Too often we focus on our Creator God as Judge and Lawgiver, ignoring His compassion and concern for us.

When God examines our lives He remembers our human condition.

Isaiah 40:6-8 [New King James] *“The voice said, ‘Cry out!’ And he said, ‘What shall I cry?’ ‘All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like the flower of the field. The grass withers, the flower fades, because the breath of the LORD blows upon it; surely the people are grass. The grass withers, the flower fades, but the word of our God stands forever.’”*

Humans are mortal, but God's Word, the Christian Bible, is eternal and unailing.

Human public opinion changes and is unreliable, but God's Word is constant.

Only in God's eternal word will we find lasting solutions to our problems and needs.

James 4:13-17 [New King James] *“Come now, you who say, ‘Today or tomorrow we will go to such and such a city, spend a year there, buy and sell, and make a profit’; whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapour that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. Instead you ought to say, ‘If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that.’ But now you boast in your arrogance. All such boasting is evil. Therefore, to him who knows to do good and does not do it, to him it is sin.”*

It is good to have goals in our human life, but all goals will be disappointing if we leave God out of them.

There is no point in making plans as though God does not exist, because our future is in His hands.

Put God's desires at the centre of your planning, He will never disappoint you.

This is the very core of what the Preacher is telling all humans.

All human accomplishments will one day disappear, and we must keep this in mind in order to live wisely.

If we do not, we will become either proud and self-sufficient when we succeed or greatly disappointed when we fail.

Ecclesiastes 1:3-11 [New King James] *“What profit has a man from all his labour in which he toils under the sun? One generation passes away, and another generation comes; but the earth abides forever. The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it arose. The wind goes toward the south, and turns around to the north; the wind whirls about continually, and comes again on its circuit. All the rivers run into the sea, yet the sea is not full; to the place from which the rivers come, there they return again. All things are full of labour; man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. Is there anything of which it may be said, ‘See, this is new’? It has already been in ancient times before us. There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of things that are to come by those who will come after.”*

Solomon goes direct to the heart of the matter of human life.

The world assesses life in terms of profit and loss, but what profit can a person win that they must not finally lose?

Luke 12:15-21 [New King James] *“And He said to them, ‘Take heed and beware of covetousness, for one’s life does not consist in the abundance of the things he possesses.’ Then He spoke a parable to them, saying: ‘The ground of a certain rich man yielded plentifully. And he thought within himself, saying, “What shall I do, since I have no room to store my crops?” So he said, “I will do this: I will pull down my barns and build greater, and there I will store all my crops and my goods. And I will say to my soul, ‘Soul, you have many goods laid up for many years; take your ease; eat, drink, and be merry.’” But God said to him, “Fool! This night your soul will be required of you; then whose will those things be which you have provided?” So is he who lays up treasure for himself, and is not rich toward God.”*

Jesus Christ is telling us that a good life has nothing to do with being wealthy, so be on guard against greed, that is a desire for what we do not have.

This is exactly opposite to what society usually says and advertisers spend millions on enticing us to think that if we buy more and more of their products, we will be happier and more fulfilled.

Human life as a whole is a vicious circle and the physical creation confirms this.

Every human “*progress*” is accompanied with regress in some form, human history remains the same, little more than a register of the crimes, follies and misfortunes.

Solomon is testing our faith, challenging us to find true and lasting meaning of life.

If we take a hard look at our life, as Solomon is doing to his in Ecclesiastes, we will come to the same conclusion as he did and see that obeying God’s Word and serving Him, by serving other human beings, is over all options for our life.

Perhaps as you study this series of articles God is asking you to rethink your purpose and direction in life, just as Solomon did in Ecclesiastes.

Ecclesiastes 1:12-18 [New King James] *“I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind. What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be numbered. I communed with my heart, saying, ‘Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge.’ And I set my heart*

to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind. For in much wisdom is much grief, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.”

The more we understand, the more pain and difficulty we experience.

For example, the more we know, the more imperfection we see around us as to how humanity uses the environment the Creator God has given us to live in.

The more we observe human response to relationship problems the more evil becomes evident.

All this is the result of humanity ignoring the wisdom that is available from God and relying on human generated “*wisdom.*”

James 3:13-18 [New King James] *“Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom. But if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth. This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic. For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there. But the wisdom that is from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, willing to yield, full of mercy and good fruits, without partiality and without hypocrisy. Now the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.”*

True wisdom can be measured by the depth of a person’s character. Just as you can identify a tree by the type of fruit it produces, you can evaluate your wisdom by the way you respond to all situations.

Lack of Godly wisdom leads to disorder, as we see in society around us, [James 4:1-4].

The wisdom that Solomon is talking about in these verses is the result of human knowledge, reasoning or philosophy which will only end in increasing pain.

This is because it cannot provide answers without God’s eternal perspective and solution.