

## Ecclesiastes 1

Today, I'd like for us to start a study in the book of Ecclesiastes. The title of this book... in the Hebrew Bible, the book is called "Koheleth," which means "preacher." You can read this in verse 1 where the speaker and the writer is referred to as "the preacher." This term suggests one who speaks to the assembly, and the translators of the Septuagint, the Greek version of the Old Testament, called it "ekklesiastes," which also means "preacher." This word is derived from "ecclesia" meaning "assembly."

A definition for "preacher" might be like this: somebody urging acceptance of an idea; somebody who makes an opinion or attitude known to others and urges them to share it. We also see that it could mean this: somebody giving advice on morals. This would be somebody who gives advice on morality or behavior in an irritatingly tedious or overbearing way. I don't know if I like that definition of a preacher, one who is irritatingly tedious in an overbearing way. I guess that happens on occasion, and we preachers have to be careful with that.

There are certain objectives in studying this chapter, Chapter 1 of Ecclesiastes, and first, I see that it's to consider the author, the theme, and underlying question of this book. And then I see that it's also to note the preacher's observations about the cycles of life and his conclusion regarding the value of human wisdom.

So notice with me if you would, first of all, in verses 1-3 we see the introductory statement to the book. First of all, in verse 1, the author is identified. It says there: *The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.* "The words of the preacher"... and Solomon, we know, was actually the son of David, so the preacher that's speaking

here, that's going to lead us through and tell us about Ecclesiastes, is the son of David and his name is Solomon.

The stated theme is seen in verse 2. It says there: *Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.* Simply put, it's saying, "Vanity of vanities, vanity of vanities, all is vanity"—in other words, all is futile, useless, meaningless.

This preacher, Solomon, the king, seems to be pretty depressed, as we look at this, but he's trying to get a point across. As we study the book of Ecclesiastes, we're going to find that King Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, is actually going to give us some good pointers for our lives.

The words "vanity," "vanities," and "vain" are all the same Hebrew words. These occur no less than 38 times in Ecclesiastes, almost as much as in the rest of the Bible put together. In verse 3 there's a question raised. It says there: *What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? What profit is there from all a person's labor, the man's labor in which he toils under the sun? And this is the question the preacher sought to answer here. He wants to answer this question. The phrase "under the sun" occurs 29 times in Ecclesiastes. If one's thoughts and motives are under the sun, then, indeed, everything is vanity.*

Each believer in Christ is exhorted to set their affection on things above, not on things on the Earth, according to Colossians 3:2. Certainly, it makes a difference whether you're saved or lost, but it makes little difference concerning the work. If a person is simply working for the things on this Earth, then "vanity of vanities, all is vanity."

Everything is going to pass away. Things are going to change, and we need to be working for the Lord. And that's what the preacher is trying to get across to us here.

As we look on, we see the cycles of life in verses 4-11. Notice with me if you would in verses 4-7, it seems to say that nothing changes. In verse 4, it says, *<sup>4</sup>One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.* <sup>5</sup>*The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.* <sup>6</sup>*The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits.* And verse 7 says, *All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.*

Generations come and go, the preacher is saying here, while the Earth abides forever, according to verse 4. And this is one of many biblical affirmations that God created the Earth to last forever. Like our mortal bodies, it must be made new again, but once renewed, it will abide forever.

Remember, the Bible tells us that we were created, we were born once, and we must be born again in order to live for eternity. And the Bible tells us that this body must be changed. It must be made incorruptible to inherit the kingdom of God. We're assured of that in the Word of God that we will inherit the kingdom of God, that our bodies will be changed.

The first promise of the new Heaven and new Earth is seen in Isaiah 65:17. It says, *For, behold, I create new heavens and a new earth: and the former shall not be remembered, nor come into mind.* God's

going to reform the Earth. He's going to make all things new.

In Isaiah 66:22, it says: *For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the LORD, so shall your seed and your name remain.* Speaking, of course, of Israel here and the Earth.

In Revelation 21:1, it says: *And I saw a new heaven and a new earth: for the first heaven and the first earth were passed away; and there was no more sea.* This means that, if you study the Word of God and if you've studied it for any length of time, you realize that the Earth is going to be changed, that all things are going to be made over.

It's just like the new birth. When we ask Jesus into our heart, the Bible says that we are born again, and one of these days that "born again" means that this body is going to be made over. We are going to receive a new body.

In II Peter 3:10, it says, *But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up.* There's the word "works" again. It's what we do for the Lord that's going to last.

Notice if you would the sun is constant with its rising and setting according to verse 5. And the terms rising and setting of the sun are scientifically pragmatic, in other words, philosophical, not unscientific figures of speech. And notice the winds continue their whirling cycle, according to verse 6, and this is a remarkable anticipation of the modern discovery of the world's great wind circuits in the global circulation of the atmosphere.

Remember, Ecclesiastes was written years before the scientists knew these things, but yet, the Bible under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit was written. God wrote it, and He is the one who created everything, so therefore He knew what the scientists were going to discover that these things were taking place, and this is the way God designed everything.

And notice something else, the water cycle also. As rivers run into the seas, and then through evaporation and rain, return to the rivers again, according to verse 7. And similarly, this is an excellent summary of the Earth's amazing hydrologic cycle as confirmed scientifically only in modern times.

The verses we see in verses 4-7 proclaim a constant. All things at present remain the same. There is a pattern of sameness.

And then verse 8: *All things are full of labour; man cannot utter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.* This seems to tell us that nothing seems to satisfy. Despite all of our labors, no matter how hard man tries, no matter how hard we try, we're never truly satisfied, according to verse 8.

In verses 9-11, it says this: *<sup>9</sup>The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun. <sup>10</sup>Is there any thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. <sup>11</sup>There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.*

There's nothing new under the sun, according to verses 9-11. What will be done is that which has been done, according to verse 9.

And if thought to be new, it has been done in ancient times, according to verse 10. It's already been done, and we simply don't remember the past, nor will the future remember the present. In other words, we have a way of just blocking things out, and sometimes we don't want to remember the past, and the people in the future, they don't want to know what has taken place.

Notice human wisdom is pointless; it's futile; there's no serious value, according to verses 12-18. And the preacher characterizes or describes his search in verses 12-15. First of all, he says: *<sup>12</sup>I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup>And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith. <sup>14</sup>I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. <sup>15</sup>That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.*

When we look at this, once again, the preacher characterizes or describes his search in these verses. He says all things are futile. Remember, we go back and we look. All things are futile if it's done apart from the glory of God, from doing what God wants us to do.

Verses 16-17 says this: *<sup>16</sup>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. <sup>17</sup>And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly....* God-given wisdom applied by the preacher is seen here. Solomon acknowledged the greatness and wisdom he had attained, and he therefore

sought to apply it to understand wisdom, madness, and folly.

In verse 17, the rest of that verse and through 18, it talks about human wisdom. He says human wisdom is pointless. *<sup>17b</sup>I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. <sup>18</sup>For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.*

And we stop there because this is where this chapter ends, and we're going to continue on in Chapter 2 later on, but remember, God loves you and He wants you to know Him as your Savior. Won't you ask Him to come into your heart today? "Lord, come into my heart. I receive You as my Savior."

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