

The Search for Fulfillment
An Introduction to Ecclesiastes
Reading: 1 Corinthians 1:18-25

Bethany Baptist Church
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The **OT book of *Ecclesiastes***’ opening statement (**1:1**) reads like the *title page* of a book. It spotlights Ecclesiastes’ *author & his credentials*:

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

You know who *that* is, *right?* ... **Solomon** – King Solomon. *David’s* son (by *Bathsheba*). United Israel’s *third king*. And, Solomon titles himself *the Preacher* – the speaker of *great words to great assemblies*.

What do you remember about *King Solomon*?

- Solomon, like his father, *ruled over Israel* for **40** years. **Forty** years of political & economic *peace & prosperity*.
- Solomon was incredibly *wise*! David knew his son was wise from an *early age*, but then God answered Solomon’s prayer & gave him *even more* wisdom. Solomon wrote *books* of wisdom. People came from all over to *hear* his wisdom.
- Do you recall the account of Solomon’s *incredible insight* into the human heart (**1 Kg 3**): two *harlots*, two *babies*? One infant dies, *smothered* under his *sleeping* mother, & she then *steals* the other. *Those 2 women go to war!* They bring their story to the king. (Now, this is before the days of **DNA** testing.) Wise King Solomon has an *equitable* solution: “*Bring me a sword.*” “*Divide the living child in two, & give half to one, & half to the other!*”
 - Says **one woman**, filled w/ compassion, “*Give the first woman the living child, & by no means kill him.*”
 - Says the **other**, “*Let him be neither mine nor yours, but divide him!*”
 - Says **Solomon**, “*Give the first woman the living child...*” We get it!
 - **1Kg 3:28** - *And all Israel heard of the judgment...and they feared the king, for they saw the wisdom of God was in him...*”
- *Despite his blessings & his wisdom*, Solomon *spiraled* into a disturbing spiritual *decline*! O, he *started off* well enough. He built the *Temple* in Jerusalem, realizing the dream of his father David. And his fabulous wisdom was a *gift of God*, because Solomon wanted to rule God’s people well.

- But *then* Solomon took an interest in things that God had *warned* against since the days of Moses: *horses, chariots, & foreign wives*. *Many* wives. **Seven** hundred wives & **three** hundred concubines!
 - **1 Kings 11**: *His wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was **not** loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David.*
 - Fancy *wheels & foreign women* – talk about a *mid-life* crisis!

Sum them up! *Wisdom, wealth, & wandering*. These **three** things add up to this: King Solomon, no doubt *sad & scarred* as he approached the end of his days, was the *perfect man* to write this soul-searching account!

Let's introduce *Ecclesiastes*' lessons.

Read **Ecc 1:1-11**; now turn the pages w/ me to **12:9-14**.

...pray...

How long has it been since you've read through Solomon's *documentary* – this famous account of one man's *search for meaning*? Let me give you a little of its *background*...

1. We'll start w/ the book's title: *Ecclesiastes*...? Where did *that* come from? It comes from an ancient *Greek* translation of the *Hebrew OT*, and it means, *The Preacher*. (The Hebrew word is *Qoholel*.) That word, *preacher*, will appear *time & again* in Solomon's story.
2. *King Solomon* wrote *Ecclesiastes*. He probably penned its lessons late in his *life & rule*, so around **930 BC**. → Almost **1000** years before Christ – **3000** years ago. We surveyed Solomon as we introduced this morning's message.
3. Bible teachers put *Ecclesiastes* on the **OT** bookshelf labeled *Wisdom Literature*. Alongside books like *Job & Psalms & Proverbs & Song of Solomon*. (Solomon had a hand in several of *those* books, too!)
 - a. *Wisdom*... *Ecclesiastes* is about *wisdom*. In general, *wisdom* is the ability to **apply** what you *know*. Specifically, *wisdom* is the ability to see & live life from *God's* perspective – to live *biblically*.
 - b. Do you remember what God says is the *absolute, ground-zero starting point* for wisdom? *The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom*. (Pr 9:10 – **Solomon!**)
 - c. That's *exactly* what Solomon discovered! No matter *where* you look, or *when*, or *how*, ... *the fear of God is still the beginning of wisdom*.
4. *Ecclesiastes* contains a lot of *key words & expressions* that Solomon uses over & over again. Looking for these words will help you *understand* what Solomon is trying to teach us.
 - a. Words like: *vanity, vexation, toil, wind, work, fool, wicked, death*.
 - b. **More** words, like: *wise, good, time, know, eat, profit, portion, memory, just, & sun*.

- c. Understanding some of Solomon's expressions – *up front* - is *absolutely essential*, or you'll completely *miss his point*:
- i. *Vanity (striving after the wind)*. There are *three flavors* of this word, & Solomon *tastes* them all! 1.) = *fleeting* (vapor) 2.) = *meaningless* (pointless); 3.) *incomprehensible* (unknowable) The *last* meaning – *incomprehensible* – is usually Solomon's *point*: **God** understands this; but **I** can't...
 - ii. *Under the sun (under heaven) 2x*. This expression is the *key* to unlocking Solomon's relentless quest for fulfillment. Those words (*under the sun*) are all over *Ecclesiastes* (**read** a few)! → **1:2-3, 1:9, 1:14, 2:11, 2:17, 3:1, 4:1, 5:18, 6:12 (many more)**.
 1. Some of that sounded kinda *gloomy*, didn't it? Why does so much of *Ecclesiastes* seem so *luke-warm*, or even *pessimistic*? Understanding *life under the sun* will help *unlock* *Ecclesiastes* for you!
 2. Here's how this *works* in the *king's account*:
 3. Solomon is drawing a *horizontal line* across the sky; his line passes right thru the sun. That line is traced across every page of *Ecclesiastes*. Everything **under** Solomon's line is completely *secular* & has little *concern or time* for God.
 4. Life is vain **under** *the sun* because life **under** *the sun* is life lived **w/o** *the fear of the LORD*. (**2x**)
(*brief pause*)

5. These *key terms & phrases* are often the building-blocks of the story's *themes & big ideas*. What are the *big ideas* in Ecclesiastes (→five) ?
- a. *Vanity* – (3 flavors: *futility, meaninglessness, incomprehensible*). I don't *understand* everything I see, I just don't *get it*... Some of the things I *do* understand turn out to be *disappointing & dissipating*.
 - b. *Temporary consolation*. **Not** everything is bitter. *Some* things bring *some* happiness for *some* people for *some small span of time*. But it **won't last**... Often man's answer is to move on to the *next consolation*.
 - c. *Life below the line (life under the sun)*. You *chase your dreams w/o factoring in God*, your dreams will *never* really bring *fulfillment*.
 - d. **The quest for fulfillment**. (→ *meaning*) What will make me *happy*? What will bring *lasting purpose* to my life? *The quest for fulfillment* is the *central theme* of Solomon's *soul-searching* documentary!
 - e. **Wisdom**. Life isn't *bad*. Despair *wouldn't* be Solomon's point! The **lesson** from Solomon's quest for fulfillment can be summed up as this: The *wise (godly) man & woman* fears God, and enjoys life as God's gift.
6. Those last **two** ideas of *quest & wisdom* define the *structure (outline)* of this timeless little book.
- a. **Ch 1–6** document Solomon's **quest**. The *Preacher* begins with a *poem* (1:2-11), and continues w/the *parade* of all kinds of vain, *under the sun* pursuits.
 - b. Then, **ch 7-12** record Solomon's **conclusions**. All leading up to life's *biggest lesson*. Will you turn w/ me to **Ecc 12:9-14** (note esp 13-14).

Fear God & keep His commandments! The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. Beloved, that is the priceless life-lesson Ecclesiastes has to offer.

When I read my Bible, I like to think about the author's "audience" – who was Solomon writing to, as he sat down to *sum-up* a lifetime of searching?

Read *Ecclesiastes* carefully, & I think you'll discover that Solomon was especially keen on communicating w/ *young men & women* (a lot like his *Book of Proverbs*).

11:9-10 – *Rejoice, young man, during your childhood, and let your heart be pleasant during the days of your young manhood. And follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes. Yet know that God will bring you to judgment for all these things.*

After all, Israel's king was grooming future *kings & leaders*.

Young people seem *especially* concerned w/thoughts of *meaning & fulfillment & the future*. But the young are also *idealistic & inexperienced*. They are *vulnerable*.

Young friends, *Ecclesiastes* was written as a warning to protect you. **Where** are the *answers* to your *questions*? **Who** knows the way to *joy & fulfillment & life-defining purpose*?

Solomon made the *journey* & Solomon came back, bruised & battered, but w/ *the answer*!

You come back, *young friends*, we'll explore his path, together!

...pray...

Are you looking for something? Meaning, mission...?

Jesus Christ is the way, the truth, & the life.

Christian, don't lose sight of that!

Unbeliever, turn & follow Him!