

Message #2**Ecclesiastes 1:1-2**

When it comes to a man like Solomon speaking on the subject of life, this was a man who had been there. This was no ivory tower lecture, this was a man who had seen it all, done it all and had it all. He was no theoretical crusader; this was a man who had taken a walk on the “wild side” and decided, by the Spirit of God, to tell us all about it.

ONE WHO IS IN A POSITION TO DISCUSS LIFE HAS CONCLUDED THAT EVERYTHING APART FROM GOD BEING AT THE CENTER OF IT IS VANITY !

Anything we do or pursue, apart from having God at the center of it, will leave us empty. It doesn't matter who we are, how much we have, or how much we accomplish; the end result of leaving God out of the center of things will be a total emptiness.

HEADING #1 – The identity of the writer. **1:1**

Way #1 – He is identified as the preacher. **1:1a**

The Hebrew word for “preacher” is “Qoheleth.” This particular word is the title of the book in the Hebrew Bible. The name “Ecclesiastes” is the Greek and Latin word for Qoheleth. In fact, the Septuagint begins this way—“Words of Ecclesiastou” or “words of the preacher or teacher.”

Now the word “Qoheleth” comes from a Hebrew root which means to call an assembly of people together in some public capacity for the purpose of addressing them (Gesenius, p. 726).

This title is critical to the book for it is referred to in several passages: 1:1, 2, 12; 7:27; 12:8, 9, 10. The “preacher” then was one who got the people together publically in order to give them instruction. In this case, it was instruction of a meaningful life.

Now of course, one leader in Israel's history who was known to do this kind of thing was Solomon (I Kings 8:1-2, 12ff; II Chron. 5:2-3; 6:1ff). It was not uncommon for Solomon to gather people together in order to give them instruction. Solomon is “Qoheleth,” Solomon is the “preacher.”

Now the message that the preacher wanted to communicate was not a message of pessimism nor was it some attempt to glorify a life that has wandered away from God. The message that the preacher wanted to communicate by using many of his own experiences as an example was, **apart from God being at the center of life, no matter where you go, what you do or achieve, it will leave you empty.** If you have a right relationship with God and are intent on obeying His Word, life will make sense and be meaningful. But if you do not have a right relationship with God and if you are not intent on obeying His Word, life will leave you empty.

Way #2 – He is identified as the son of David. **1:1b**

What immediately pops into our minds upon reading this is that this guy had the utmost status of Jewish royalty. This was a man born into a family that had a great history and heritage. This was not a man who did not have opportunity; the whole world was before him. David was a hero. He was the most glorious king ever in Israel's history. He had earned a powerful reputation that was known worldwide. He was a warrior, a scholar, a prophet, a poet, a priest and a king. David had it all and so did his son. This was a man, who by sovereign decree of God, was born into the highest ranked family in the world.

What we may observe is just because one is born into a great family does not mean one will wind up happy.

Way #3 – He is identified as king in Jerusalem. **1:1c**

As we have already observed, the only actual son of David, who was king who reigned in Jerusalem, was Solomon. As Dr. George Barton said in his famous commentary on Ecclesiastes, "These words were intended to designate Solomon" (p. 67).

Solomon had it all—position, power, possessions, prestige, prominence, pedigree, pleasure, and popularity. He had everything most people dream about. It was the ideal set up. Much of it was handed to him on a silver platter. But the one thing Solomon didn't automatically have was happiness. In spite of all the things he had, he was empty inside. He wandered away from God and he lost his meaning and fulfillment. As one writer said, for Solomon, life seemed to be "the emptiest and poorest thing possible" (Pulpit Comm., p. 24).

HEADING #2 – The theme of the writer. **1:2**

Now it is very clear from verse 2 that a key idea is being stressed five times—it is the word "vanity." Now this particular word is a key word of the book. The writer so wants to stress it here that he quadruples his point.

If we observe that the word is repeated often and that it begins the book and also strategically ends the book (12:8), there can be little doubt that this is a key to unlocking what the book is really about.

The word "vanity" is the Hebrew word "habel." The word literally emphasizes something as empty as a breath, a vapor or a mist (Gesenius, p. 214). The idea has to do with something that lacks substance, like a "nothingness." Michael Eaton says this describes something that is empty and unsubstantial. It carries with it the idea of being "meaningless" or "useless." This is an accurate description of what life means without God.

Now we cannot build an entire thesis statement based upon one word. Truth is there is a prepositional phrase that shows up nearly 30 times only in this book which is critical to unlocking the meaning; it is the phrase “under the sun” (1:3, 9, 14; 2:11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22; 3:16; 4:1, 3, 7, 15; 5:113, 18; 6:1, 12; 8:9, 14 (twice), 17; 9:3, 9 (twice), 11, 13; 10:5).

In several of these references, this prepositional phrase is directly linked to the word “vanity,” which legitimately, by way of repetition and association, gives us literary license to connect them (i.e. 2:11), in forming our conclusion.

The idea being communicated by the prepositional phrase “under the sun” is the idea of “life that is not being lived with a heavenly focus.” We could say the emphasis is on “living life in the world without a focus on heavenly things, without a focus on God.” We could say “under the sun” is synonymous with man trying to figure out life and live life without God. His thinking never rises above the sun to heaven, but stays under the sun on the earth.

The ultimate of emptiness, the ultimate of nothingness, the ultimate of an unsubstantial existence is trying to live life without God. Everything and anything will prove to be meaningless and empty if God is taken out of the equation. Life will seem futile and absurd without God. One’s existence will seem senseless. This will prove to be true for everything and anything. Life “under the sun” will clearly show “all is vanity.”

Without God at the center of life, it is all vanity. It is all empty. It is all futile. There will be no substance and no meaning. Life will be a nothingness. That is what the “preacher” had to say. Frankly, that is the message we need to hear today.