

# ECCLESIASTES — PART 1

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I am starting a review of the Book of Ecclesiastes. I last spoke on this in 2005!

It's a strange book in some ways (as we'll see). Somewhat like the Book of Job. Job is in the Bible ... but as we saw a few months ago ... it's not wise to rely on much of it for Christian living! Most chapters just contain the human opinions of Job and his friends — who all had to repent ultimately of their mistaken views.

Ecclesiastes is similar. It's in the Bible ... we can learn from it ... but need to treat its views with some caution.

### Ecclesiastes 1:1, 12

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

12 I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. (*Preacher in a public sense*)

**The Preacher — The Greek is “Ecclesiastes” ... the Hebrew is Qoheleth.**

It is believed by most people to be King Solomon. Solomon was one of David's sons ... but the only one who was king over Israel (as a whole).

### Ecclesiastes 1:2-3

2 “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher;

“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.” (*Pointless and futile*)

3 What profit has a man from all his labor

In which he toils under the sun?

**Vanity and futility!**

### Ecclesiastes 1:2 (ISV)

2 “Utterly pointless,” says the Teacher.

Absolutely pointless; everything is pointless !”

### **Ecclesiastes 1:2 (NET)**

2 “**Futile! Futile!**” laments the Teacher,  
“**Absolutely futile! Everything is futile!**”

It sounds like a pretty depressing start?! There is no point to life?

### **Ecclesiastes 2:17**

17 **Therefore I hated life** because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for **all is vanity and grasping for the wind.**

**I hated life! Suicidal?**

Hence ... **treat the words of this book with caution!!**

But how could King Solomon — the wisest man who ever lived — be in this frame of mind?

Let's review Solomon's life.

### **1 Kings 3:3-15**

3 And **Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David, except that he sacrificed and burned incense at the high places.**

4 Now the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place: Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.

5 **At Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream by night;** and God said, “Ask! What shall I give you?”

6 And Solomon said: “You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day.

7 **Now, O LORD my God,** You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in.

8 And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted.

9 Therefore **give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil.** For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?”

10 **The speech pleased the Lord**, that Solomon had asked this thing.

11 Then God said to him: “Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice,

12 **behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you.** *(You are going to be the wisest person who ever lived)*

13 And **I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor**, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days.

14 **So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments**, as your father David walked, **then I will lengthen your days.**”

15 Then Solomon awoke; and indeed it had been a dream. And he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the LORD, offered up burnt offerings, offered peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants.

### **God's first visit to Solomon.**

Solomon was very young. Probably a teenager? Maybe 15–18?

Very humble. Greatly blessed — with wisdom ... fame ... and prosperity.

**Not a long life at this stage. But it was available — but conditional.**

Solomon had incredible unlimited potential!

### **1 Kings 9:1-9**

1 **And it came to pass, when Solomon had finished building the house of the LORD and the king's house, and all Solomon's desire which he wanted to do,**

2 **that the LORD appeared to Solomon the second time**, as He had appeared to him at Gibeon.

3 And the LORD said to him: “I have heard your prayer and your supplication that you have made before Me; I have consecrated this house which you have built to put My name there forever, and My eyes and My heart will be there perpetually.

4 **Now if you walk before Me as your father David walked, in integrity of heart and in uprightness**, to do according to all that I have commanded you, **and if you keep My statutes and My judgments**,

5 **then I will establish the throne of your kingdom over Israel forever**, as I promised David your father, saying, ‘You shall not fail to have a man on the throne of Israel.’

6 **But if you or your sons at all turn from following Me, and do not keep My commandments and My statutes which I have set before you, but go and serve other gods and worship them**,

7 **then I will cut off Israel from the land which I have given them**; and this house which I have consecrated for My name I will cast out of My sight. **Israel will be a proverb and a byword among all peoples**.

8 And as for this house, which is exalted, everyone who passes by it will be astonished and will hiss, and say, Why has the LORD done thus to this land and to this house?’

9 Then they will answer, ‘Because they forsook the LORD their God, who brought their fathers out of the land of Egypt, and have embraced other gods, and worshiped them and served them; therefore the LORD has brought all this calamity on them.’ ”

### **A second visit!**

**Yet this visit includes a serious warning.** Perhaps God had already seen warning signs in Solomon’s life?

**Unfortunately ... Solomon ignored the warning. He raced off into rebellion and apostasy — BIG TIME!**

### 1 Kings 11:1-10

1 **But King Solomon loved many foreign women**, as well as **the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites**—

2 from **the nations of whom the LORD had said** to the children of Israel, **“You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.”**

Solomon clung to these in love.

3 And **he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart.**

4 For it was so, **when Solomon was old, that 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.

5 For **Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites.**

6 **Solomon did evil in the sight of the LORD**, and did not fully follow the LORD, as did his father David.

7 Then **Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab**, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for **Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon.**

8 And **he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods.**

9 **So the LORD became angry with Solomon**, because his heart had turned from the LORD God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice,

10 and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but **he did not keep what the LORD had commanded.**

God was angry with Solomon ... to whom He had appeared personally.

### 1 Kings 11:11-13

11 Therefore the LORD said to Solomon, **“Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant.**

12 Nevertheless I will not do it in your days, for the sake of your father David; I will tear it out of the hand of your son.

13 However I will not tear away the whole kingdom; **I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David**, and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen.”

Israel — the House of Israel —the 10 Northern Tribes —the majority of the nation — will be wrenched away from Solomon’s dynasty. Only a rump will remain (for David’s sake).

**Despite God’s judgment and the severe punishment ... there is no evidence that Solomon ever repented — NONE! He died in his rebellion — trying to kill God’s chosen servant. I suspect Solomon will be in the Lake of Fire?**

#### **1 Kings 11:41-43**

41 Now the rest of the acts of Solomon, all that he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon?

42 **And the period that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years.**

43 Then Solomon rested with his fathers, and was buried in the City of David his father. And Rehoboam his son reigned in his place.

He reigned for 40 years. So if he came to the throne as a teenager — say 15–18 —then he died in his mid fifties?

A comparatively young man? God had indicated that long-life was available provided that he remained faithful. He didn’t!

It seems that Ecclesiastes was written towards the end of Solomon’s life. He was in a very dark place spiritually. In rebellion to God. No future. Just an early death ... and no hope of Eternal Life. He was probably miserable in his sin... wracked with guilt ... and his writings reflect a spirit of futility and pointlessness.

**He is a good example (“bad example”) of what happens to a converted person who turns away from God’s Truth. They quickly lose their wisdom.**

But wouldn't Ecclesiastes be full of Solomon's great wisdom?

**Ezekiel 28:12**

12 "Son of man, take up a lamentation for the king of Tyre, (*possibly the one we know as Satan*) and say to him, 'Thus says the Lord GOD: "**You were the seal of perfection, Full of wisdom and perfect in beauty.**

A great spirit being — full of wisdom.

**Ezekiel 28:13-15**

13 **You were in Eden, the garden of God;** (*limits it somewhat*)  
Every precious stone was your covering:  
The sardius, topaz, and diamond,  
Beryl, onyx, and jasper,  
Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold.

**The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes  
Was prepared for you on the day you were created.**

14 "**You were the anointed cherub who covers;** (*who guards God's throne*)

**I established you;  
You were on the holy mountain of God;  
You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.**

15 **You were perfect in your ways from the day you were created, Till iniquity was found in you.**

The anointed cherub — in Eden.

**Ezekiel 28:17**

17 "**Your heart was lifted up because of your beauty;  
You corrupted your wisdom for the sake of your splendor;**  
I cast you to the ground,  
I laid you before kings,  
That they might gaze at you.

**You corrupted your wisdom! Even an anointed cherub!**

**Ezekiel 28:17 (NCV)**

17 ... **You ruined your wisdom!**

**Wisdom can be corrupted!**

**Ecclesiastes 1:1-3**

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

2 **“Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher;**

**“Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.”**

3 What profit has a man from all his labor

In which he toils **under the sun?**

**Vanity = futility ... uselessness. 38 times.**

**“Under the sun” — 29 times.** Used in a rather negative sense — here “below” Heaven ... a very materialistic world ... remote from God.

**This is the mind of a man who is without God ... knows that he is doomed. Sees no point in life!**

**This is not “wisdom” we can use ... but does show us the danger of turning away from God?**

**Ecclesiastes 1:4-7**

4 **One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever.**

5 **The sun also rises, and the sun goes down,**

And hastens to the place where it arose.

6 The wind goes toward the south,

And turns around to the north;

**The wind whirls about continually,**

**And comes again on its circuit.**

7 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.

Nature continues in cycles. Implied — we humans are unimportant — here today — and gone tomorrow!

#### **Ecclesiastes 1:9-10**

9 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.**

10 **Is there anything of which it may be said,  
“See, this is new”?**

**It has already been in ancient times before us.**

Gives his opinion. There’s nothing really “new”.

Many of Solomon’s “observations” are accurate. When he reports what he actually sees.

**But most of his opinions are deeply flawed and usually wrong!** This is one such opinion! Although some speculate that there might have been incredible technologies in ancient times (perhaps before the Flood)... as far as we know — there were no mobile phones ... laptops ... satellites ... internet etc in times past. They seem genuinely new?

#### **Ecclesiastes 1:12-13**

12 **I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem.**

13 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.

**Solomon’s key project. He is going to experiment ... and try everything life can offer! (Like the mind-expanding drugs of the 1960’s — LSD?)**

**He is separated from God. Has a spiritual vacuum. Can he fill it with human effort?**

#### **Ecclesiastes 1:14**

14 **I have seen all the works that are done under the sun;** and indeed, **all is vanity and grasping for the wind.**

It's all futile — a waste of time!

**Ecclesiastes 1:16-18**

16 **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.”** (Arrogant!)

17 And **I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly.** I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind. (*I'll try it all to see what I make of it!*)

18 For in much human wisdom is much grief,  
And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

A hint of arrogance? “I have attained greatness”. Boasts of his wisdom. **But true wisdom had been given as God's gift.** Solomon is now boasting of his carnal wisdom —badly corrupted?

Let's look at the proper attitude towards wisdom:

**Jeremiah 9:23-24**

23 Thus says the LORD:

**“Let not the wise man glory in his wisdom,  
Let not the mighty man glory in his might,  
Nor let the rich man glory in his riches;**

24 **But let him who glories glory in this,  
That he understands and knows Me,  
That I am the LORD,** exercising lovingkindness, judgment,  
and righteousness in the earth.  
**For in these I delight,” says the LORD.**

If really wise ... don't boast in it! **Boast of your relationship with God!**

There is more than one kind of wisdom:

**James 3:13-18**

13 **Who is wise and understanding among you? Let him show by good conduct that his works are done in the meekness of wisdom.**

14 But **if you have bitter envy and self-seeking in your hearts, do not boast and lie against the truth.**

15 **This wisdom does not descend from above, but is earthly, sensual, demonic.**

16 **For where envy and self-seeking exist, confusion and every evil thing are there.**

17 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.**

18 Now **the fruit of righteousness is sown in peace by those who make peace.**

It looks like Solomon may have moved away from the wisdom “from above” ... and was now living by “earthly ... sensual and demonic” wisdom? Not a healthy exchange.

**Perhaps the two key take-aways from Chapter one:**

- i. **If we turn away from God ... we can end up “losing our minds”**
- ii. **We need to read Ecclesiastes with considerable CAUTION!  
Solomon’s opinions are rarely helpful!**