

Note

Ecclesiastes – Part 1 of 1

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| Ecclesiastes Written by Solomon About 1000 BC | Part 1: (Eccl 1:1 -1:11) | Introducing the problem |
| | Part 2: (Eccl 1:12-8:17) | Exploring the problem under the sun |
| | Part 3: (Eccl 9-12:12) | Explaining the life in the hand of God |
| | Part 4: (Eccl 12:13-14) | The conclusion |

Summary

Ecclesiastes - Part 1 of 1.....3

Ecclesiastes was written by King Solomon – a man who had everything but found it all meaningless. Success is meaningless as in time we will be forgotten. All the pleasures of life are empty; even doing good is mere vanity. All the things of this world are pointless and the best we can do cannot satisfy us.

Only God can fill our souls. God is holy and He will judge every secret thing. However, Christ has paid the price for us and was judged in our place. He gives us peace and joy amidst suffering and fills the hole in our hearts. Anything done apart from God is vanity.

Transcript

Ecclesiastes – Part 1 of 1

Today, we come to one of the strangest books in the Bible, Ecclesiastes.

First, the name sounds strange already. This book follows Proverbs, which is a very logical book. I didn't have to explain much, so much common sense in it.

But when you read this book, most Christians get confused. What is this book really about?

Is it a spiritual book?

Is it to encourage me? But I feel discouraged after I read it.

Is it about God helping me? But no, it seems like it's very fatalistic, like life is meaningless.

We read Psalms earlier. And Psalms, almost any age can appreciate it. Proverbs, probably similar. But Ecclesiastes, I think young people will find this book is like, "What is all this book about?"

This book may probably be read by people in midlife crisis, who say, "What is life about?" Maybe. But younger people read this and just don't bother.

The word "Ecclesiastes", what does it mean? It's a direct translation of the Hebrew title for this book, "Kohelet". "Kohelet" is the Hebrew word for "a man that attracts people to come and listen to him", usually a Teacher or a Preacher.

Sometimes, in the English Bible, we see "Ecclesiastes", then below that they put "the Preacher". The word "ecclesiastical" means "related to the Church", that's the meaning. "Those are ecclesiastical matters, those are political matters." "Ecclesiastical" refers to the Church, because the Church is the teaching organization that teaches people about God, about life. So, Ecclesiastes is a book about a Preacher or a Teacher. I believe, this is Solomon. But we don't know.

The first line in the book says, “the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.” The son of David is Solomon, right? Of course, he had a lot of other sons, but, it says, “he was king”. Only Solomon was a son, that was king.

And also, it goes on to describe that this king, this son, had everything. Honestly, he was a man that, literally, had everything he wanted:

- o He had brains, he had wisdom.
 - o He understood science, he understood agriculture.
 - o He built irrigation works, he built buildings.
 - o People from all over the world came to seek his wisdom and his advice.
 - o He did great business with Egypt and other countries.
 - o He was one of the richest men that ever lived.
 - o He was a great musician, he wrote a thousand songs.
 - o He had entertainers in his court.
 - o Literally, he was the man who had tasted everything.
- So, he's the right guy to write this particular book.

The question is, if you look at the beginning of this book, it says here, that he and the author seem to be two different people. It says, “the Preacher saith, ‘Vanity of vanities’”. The Preacher? The Teacher? Isn't the author also the same guy? We don't know. Maybe Solomon just didn't want to make it look like, “I said this... I said this...” So, he writes as if he is the author, but as if the Preacher is a different person. Maybe, we don't know. Some people say, “The author is anonymous, maybe writing about Solomon”. I don't think so. I think it's the same person and he's probably the writer writing about himself in the third person: “the Preacher said this, Preacher said that”.

We see here the word “vanity” in the English Bible. In the King James Bible and many Bibles, the word “vanity” appears 30 times. Some translations use the word “meaningless”. Meaningless-30 times. The word is a translation of the Hebrew word “Hevel”. “Hevel” simply means “smoke” or “a vapor”. What does “smoke” or “a vapor” describe? It's so beautiful. When you see smoke, it's so temporary. After a while, smoke is gone. Or a vapor, it disappears.

Number one, it speaks of something very temporary; it comes and it goes.

Number two, it speaks of an enigma. Smoke can look very thick. But when you try to grab it, there's nothing there. It can almost look solid. But there's

nothing inside it. It's an enigma, it looks substantial, but actually, it's empty. It is a description of life in this world. So temporary, you come, you go. You build your reputation, you build your business, you build your health, your life and everything. You think, "That's it man, it's solid." Then the business collapses, [in a snap] just like that. Your reputation can go, your health can go, everything can just "poof". It's nothing, it's a paper tiger, an empty shell.

So, this is a beautiful description of life on Earth:

Ø Temporary.

Ø Looks so important.

Ø Looks so significant.

Ø But actually, it's so "nothing".

Another phrase you will see, is the phrase "under the sun". It happens 28 times in this one book, and is found nowhere else in the entire Bible. You must understand the context of this book. There are people who read it and say, "You mean, life is so meaningless?" Yeah, if all you live for is the life "under the sun", not the next life, then, my friend, life is very meaningless, very temporary. Before you know it, you're old, you're dead and gone. Everything you thought would give you such great joy didn't give you the joy you anticipated.

Ask any billionaire. "When I make my first billion, I'll feel so satisfied." And when they hit the first billion, "Nothing there." So, they try a second billion and it's still, "Nothing there." It's smoke. It's the same, like fame.

Actresses, they want to be so popular and when they get so popular, "What does it all mean?" Nothing! And then they take pills and hang themselves and they die. Because, if you live just for whatever you can get "under the sun", it is so meaningless.

You must understand, when Solomon wrote this he did not understand, like you and I, believers, that there is an eternity for sure. There is a new Heaven, there's a new Earth, there's an eternity we are going to inhabit-we are sure of this as a believer. If you're not sure, you're not a believer, simple as that. A believer doesn't need to know everything in the Bible. He doesn't need to know what "Ecclesiastes" means. But he needs to know that he has everlasting life, not life "under the sun" So, you and I have this clear understanding, and when we read this we ask, "What is Solomon talking about? Why is he so negative about life? Fatalistic about life? Why is he saying, 'life is so meaningless'?" Because, he's living life "under the sun".

As an Israelite in those days, they had no clear confidence, (not to say that they don't understand, don't have some glimpse of it), that they will go to be with God forever. They're not clear on that. They believe in "Sheol"; the Hebrew word "Sheol", the "place of departed people, departed spirits, some dark place". In the New Testament it translates as "Hades"; that's the Greek version of that unknown, waiting, dark room where you go to and wait for goodness knows what. Maybe a Day of Judgment that will weigh your good and your bad? And, nobody feels confident his good is really good, if we all know ourselves. So, when you read this, you must understand, it's all written by a man who is just looking at life on earth "under the sun".

The author, probably Solomon himself, summarizes the entire book at the beginning, Chapter 1 verse 2, and at the end, Chapter 12 verse 8, in exactly the same way: "Vanity of vanities, all is vanity", "Hevel of hevel, all is hevel". Smoke. That's all it is. Everything "under the sun" is just that.

The whole body of this book begins with a poem about time. That is found in Chapter 1 and verse 3 to verse 11. It's a thing about time.

"One generation passes along, another generation comes; but the earth abides forever." Time.

So, it begins by this little poem, about eight verses, about how time goes on and on, like a cycle.

You come into life.

You think you're going to be a big deal here.

You work so hard to build your empire, to build your reputation, your possessions.

And then, you pass away.

You know what? The next generation totally forgets about you. As time goes by, you're just forgotten, however great you are.

Think of all the great men in China, all the great men in the world. Who do you know? A few guys, you just know their names and that's it. What do you care about them? Nothing! The empires they built, "poof", it's smoke. The companies they built, bankrupt, years and years ago. The inventions they built, already disrupted, nonsense, it's obsolete.

So, it tells us that, whatever is done "under the sun", time will just make it become, totally, "hevel". Gone. Smoke. Poof. It's all gone.

The last poem is about death. That is found in Ecclesiastes 11:7 to Ecclesiastes 12:7. It talks about life and then at 12 verse 7 it says, “you go to the dust”. So, here you are, you come in, thinking, “I’m going to do this, do this.” Sooner or later, you’re gone. Either the cycle of life makes everything you do forgotten, irrelevant, or you just die and you become irrelevant.

So, basically, the two poems tell us that men have come to this earth, ‘One generation passes away, another comes; but the earth abides forever’.

The mountain looks down at all these things. You build a building. After a few generations, it collapses. Another guy builds another building, thinking, “This is the monument of monuments”, it goes.

The mountain’s been there forever, just looking down, it abides. And men just come by, his things come by, his dreams come by and they’re all just gone. The mountain abides, forever.

Can you see the picture? How transient. We don’t think we are that transient, 70 years. But when you think of a mountain, it’s been there since Adam, all these things are just passing away. All of it is smoke and vapor.

And then, it goes on to say this. There’s a lot of things that’s said but some of the things are very pertinent. Of course, we’re not going into detailed study. This whole Beautiful Book series is not about detailed study. It’s to see how one book fits into another book and how all books point to God, not every detail in it. This is not an in-depth study. But one of the pertinent things is that, all the things you build, somebody else is going to inherit it. A monument, an invention, whatever you build, somebody else is going to use it and won’t care a hoot about you. Doesn’t even know who you are! Your grandson may be benefiting from something you left behind. He doesn’t know your name, he doesn’t care. You ask him to go to the grave and mourn for you, he’ll drag his feet. “Who is this guy I’m supposed to sweep the grave for?!”

So, it tells us, everything you do, somebody else is going to inherit it. They don’t care a hoot about you, they even use the things you do for the opposite purposes. Misuse what you do. You invent something, he uses for something else. You earn money for good, he uses for evil. Life becomes so meaningless.

And then, the writer says, the teacher says, "Because life is so meaningless, I know all this is going to be left to my children who are going to forget about me, my grandchildren who don't even know who I am, I might as well enjoy pleasure."

So, he enjoys pleasure. And then he says, "It's even worse. The so-called pleasure I had, is so empty. The food I ate, after a while, I get so sick of it. Everything is so empty." And then he says, "At least, you do good. It is, like, "light excelling darkness". Doing good, rather than folly, is like having light. Excel.

In other words, though you do good things, it's vanity. Doing dumb things is bigger vanity, oh my goodness. So, there are only two choices in life "under the sun":

- 1) vanity from good things, and
- 2) double vanity, "XL size", from doing dumb things.

So, in other words, all things are dumb, pointless, done "under the sun".

As you read all this, it's kind of depressing, and yet there's quite a lot of practical wisdom about life, about rethinking some of the things. We all come into the world thinking, "I'm going to make a difference. As a young man, I'm going to change the world. I'm going to make the world a better place." At the end of it all, you thought you achieved something so great. It's probably so insignificant, so unvalued by the world. And definitely, unremembered by anyone.

At the end of it, the mountain is still there. But who is the guy who did this or did that? I don't know. Go to any tourist site. Look at a mountain, the mountain's there. You say, "Who are the famous men that lived here?" I don't know. And frankly, I don't care. Earth abides.

Some things are more solid and some things are, like vapor.

So, what is the conclusion of this Teacher, this Preacher, at the end of all this [sighing]?

What is his conclusion?

Just enjoy the simple things of life.

Enjoy your family. Enjoy your friends.

Enjoy a good meal. Family, friends and food. That's it.

All the rest, don't dream too much. You'll be disappointed.

The pleasures of life are the daily, simple pleasures.

Just appreciate those daily blessings.
Be thankful for those daily blessings of life.
Fresh air. Great friends. That's it.

Sounds very much like an encouraging book.

And then, in Chapter 12 verse nine, the author again - maybe, still Solomon - says, "Do you know why the Teacher said all these things? Do you know why the Preacher said all these things? To warn you."

And then, Chapter 12 verse 12, slips out, "My son, listen to me, my son". I think, it was Solomon trying his best to teach his son, maybe Rehoboam, not to do the worthless things he did, which he thought was so big deal. Solomon, he spent his life building the biggest buildings and getting the best instruments and inventing the best things. And at the end, he said, "My son, listen to me. All of this is vanity."

So, I see this book, as a book, like, if you just read up to here, "What in the world is this book? Then what am I supposed to do in this world? Do nothing, hang around?" That's also vanity. Because folly, doing nothing, is worse than doing something good.

In other words, the best we can do in this world, cannot satisfy us. There's a big gap there.

You thought, "Pleasure would satisfy", it didn't.
You thought, "Success would satisfy", it didn't.
You thought, "Possessions would satisfy", it didn't.
You thought, "Power would satisfy", it didn't.

There's a gap, there's a hole.

Solomon was filled with everything in his hands, in his pocket. But he was not fulfilled in his heart. You see, this tells us.

When it comes to the last two lines of this book, it tells us the "missing ingredient" of life. Power, possessions, pleasures is not the ingredient to satisfy the human soul.

Solomon had everything, he was not satisfied!
How can you be satisfied with what you have? No way.

Last two verses. Let us hear the conclusion.

Chapter 12 verse 13... of the whole matter.

You've read 12 chapters. Let's hear the conclusion:

“Fear God, keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.”

Last two verses... There's an empty hole.

What is Solomon's advice to his son? Fear God! The only One who can fill your heart - not your pocket, not your belly, not your ego, not your eyeballs, not your ears with music - your soul, is God. Nothing else in the world (because Solomon had everything) can fill it up. So, that sounds like grave advice for Rehoboam his son, or whoever.

But, listen carefully, the last verse, you thought, “Solomon got it right”, but Solomon did not. The last verse, "For God shall bring every work into judgment,
with every secret thing, whether it be good or whether it be evil.”

Fear God. God can fill your soul, but, let me tell you that: though God can fill your soul, God is a Holy God. Everything in your life - secret things, your eyeball, in your ear, on the tip of your tongue, in your thoughts, your anger in your heart - everything will be brought into judgment. And the book ends there. This is called a hanging conclusion. “You tell me after 12 chapters, life cannot satisfy, then you say, ‘God can satisfy’, and the next word is, ‘He will judge you’.”

So, what have you learnt from this book?

Well, I've learned that life:

It can never be a filling of my soul.

I can never be satisfied with anything “under the sun”.

It can tickle me, it can amuse me, it can entertain me for a while. It can soothe me for a while,

but it can never fill my soul, only God can.

Firstly, remember, God alone can fill you.

Number two, remember, God is Holy, He will judge. It doesn't matter whether you are a king or whoever, He will judge in every secret thing. That's a hanging conclusion.

You think Solomon died a happy man?

I don't think so. I don't blame him. He never had Christ. He had no clarity like you and me. You can say, "God will judge every secret thing". But I can tell you, "Christ paid the price for me. He was judged in my place." I can say that, "The last line is not hanging for me. God will judge every secret thing and I thank God, He has already judged my sins at the Cross." How different, how satisfied we can be in this God, Who loved me and gave His Son for me.

Do you know, generations didn't have that? You and I, as believers, we have this amazing truth. So, let's learn some things about God here. Only He can fill your soul. But if you don't have Christ, how can you even believe this God is your Friend, Who will fill your soul, not the Judge who will judge you one day for every secret thing you have done?

There's a lot of things to learn about God here.

God doesn't give us all the joys and pleasures on this Earth. Believe me, He can give you peace in your heart. You can be suffering as a Christian, but you still have peace and joy. With peace, that hole in your heart is filled.

But it's so different from the kind of "Christianity" today, that "if you got God, everything would be fine". No, this God gives us a satisfaction in us and an eternal life.

So, I hope that it'll help us all to rethink life. We think we can find satisfaction, we can find our fulfillment in life with things done on the Earth. Anything done on earth apart from God, is vanity. Hevel. Smoke. You do anything for God, "your labor is not in vain in the Lord". Do it for God. But, remember, God is a Holy God. And old Solomon realized this. In the last line, he writes "Son, remember this, God will judge you. He is a Holy God."

So, I hope that we will see in this book,
we have a Holy God.

And if we have Christ,

He is the One that can satisfy our soul to brimming.

We don't need all the power, possessions and pleasures.

We have God to satisfy us.

Now and for all eternity, not smoke.

May God bless you.

I hope this will help you rethink, because many people still think, "I'm a Christian, but if I just do this, I will be so satisfied." Learn from Solomon: Only God, truly, can fill to the full, your heart.

God bless you.