

## ECCLESIASTES: Introduction and Chapter 1

*Teacher: John M. Brown, Flatwoods church of Christ, Wednesday Bible Class, August 2009*

### INTRODUCTION:

**TITLE:** “Ecclesiastes” from a Greek word meaning “Preacher” – Hebrew word **KOHELETH**, meaning “an assembler; one who convenes”

**AUTHOR:** Solomon

**DATE:** about 935 BC – chronologically, it appears Solomon wrote Song of Solomon in youth, Proverbs in middle-age, and Ecclesiastes in older age.

### **THEME:**

1. Ecclesiastes is a difficult book: it is often portrayed as pessimistic, but it must be understood in the context of what Solomon is striving to set forth – note his *quest* (1:13 & 2:3) and his *conclusion* (12:14).
2. Solomon had wisdom, knowledge, wealth, power, and sensual pleasure, but he shows in Ecclesiastes that these things are not the measure of man and do not bring ultimate satisfaction or purpose.
3. This book is poetic philosophy to illustrate the essentiality of remembering God.
4. We see the folly of living for the fleshly life only, and that *materialism* (the philosophy that the natural life is all that exists) is folly and futility; when one comprehends the futility of the flesh, one becomes more aware of responsibility toward God and the importance of preparation for the eternal state.
5. What the natural man can expect is death and judgment (12:7, 14); thus man’s quest for happiness, purpose, and fulfillment must be realized in something more than the affairs of this life only.

**KEY WORD:** VANITY, from Hebrew, **HEBEL**, meaning that which is empty, transitory, temporary, unsatisfying; that which passes quickly.

### **A BRIEF OUTLINE:**

- I. THE VANITY OF MATERIALISM, chapters 1-2
- II. THE VANITY OF VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE, chapters 3-5
- III. THE VANITY OF RICHES, chapters 6-8
- IV. MAN’S DEPENDENCE ON GOD, chapters 9-12

## CHAPTER ONE

### I. THEME, 1:1-3

- A. Identification of the author: “Preacher...son of David, king in Jerusalem” (1:1, 12, 16).
- B. Theme of the book: “Vanity of vanities...all is vanity.”
  - 1. “vanity” = futility; meaningless; fleeting; incomprehensible.
  - 2. “profit” = that which is gained from one’s labor.
- C. Man’s profit “under the sun” (this phrase appears 30 times in the book)
  - 1. All man’s labor in this life is temporal, transitory, fleeting.
  - 2. Compare Psalm 39:5-6; Romans 8:20-21; 2 Peter 3:10; 1 John 2:15-17

### II. THE ENDLESS CYCLES OF LIFE, 1:4-11

- A. Generations come and go, but the earth remains.

*(on the earth abiding “forever,” note that the word “forever” is from the Hebrew OLAM, meaning “long duration; age-lasting – not “eternal” – compare Genesis 17:18; Exodus 12:14; Numbers 25:13).*

- B. The natural elements continue, independent of man: sun, wind, rivers.
  - 1. Man’s marvels at God’s creation, without fully comprehending it.
  - 2. Man’s knowledge of natural laws change, but not the laws themselves.
  - 3. “No new thing under the sun” – man finds new uses for God’s creation (Genesis 1:28), but doesn’t create something new from nothing himself.

### III. THE VANITY OF HUMAN WISDOM, 1:12-18

- A. Solomon gave himself to seeking wisdom: *it was a wearisome task!*
  - 1. Concerning works done under the sun, there is never complete satisfaction.
  - 2. “*vanity and vexation*” – a continual seeking, but never fulfillment.
  - 3. Verse 15: despite man’s best efforts, there is difficulty (if not impossibility) in resolving or understanding some matters in life.
  - 4. Solomon is driven to examine himself – he had greater blessings than all his predecessors (*see 1 Kings 3:12; 4:29-31; 10:7, 23*).
  - 5. “wind” = that which man desires in life and strive for cannot be held onto (1:14, 17: 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 5:16; 6:9; cf. James 4:14).
- B. Note carefully verse 18: *think of contemporary applications of this truth!*