

5-Day Study

Tracking Solomon's thoughts through

Ecclesiastes

with
Lisa Baker

WELCOME

The Bible shares these two of the many wonderful truths about King Solomon:

1. He loved the LORD (1 Kings 3:3)
2. He had greater wisdom than all other men (1 Kings 4:31; 2 Chronicles 9:22)

God's Word tells us Solomon was a young man when he became king over the united nation of Israel (1 Kings 3:7). Solomon showed great humility when he asked God for wisdom and understanding, and God was pleased to add to him riches and honor (1 Kings 4:29-34).

But riches and honor most likely led Solomon to pride, and he wrote, "Pride goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall" (Prov. 16:8). Solomon fell hard. Scholars agree Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes close to the end of his life, after he had experienced all of life's travails, temptations, and indulgences.

God's Word shares a disturbing truth about Solomon after he became king; he loved many foreign women (700 wives and 300 concubines) and clung to them, thus flagrantly disobeying the Lord's command to not enter into marriage with them. The late Dr. R. C. Sproul taught, "Under David the Golden Age (of Israel) took place, and under his son, Solomon, that gold began to tarnish just a little bit. And then after the death of Solomon, the kingdom turned to rust."

For five days, we will follow Solomon's train of thought throughout Ecclesiastes. What was he thinking? Or better yet, what was God thinking we needed to learn and heed?

Father,

Train our hearts to follow You fully and joyfully as we ponder and pray through Solomon's reflections of life under the sun vs. life under heaven. Your wisdom is better than gold. Bless us with growth in the grace and knowledge of our Savior, Jesus Christ. Amen.

DAY 1

1 S T E S 1 A S T E S I S I E S I E S E C C L E S T I A S T E S 1

The Inauguration of Wisdom

“I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem. And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind”

(Ecclesiastes 1:12-14).

Ecclesiastes is the Greek and Latin translation of the Hebrew word, *Qoheleth*, which means “one who calls or gathers” the people. Specifically, it denotes the one who speaks to the congregation — the preacher. All internal evidence points to Solomon as the book’s author (Ecclesiastes 1:1, 12; 12:9; 1 Kings 2-11).

We can call Ecclesiastes the pain-filled autobiography of a man who was wise yet misused his wisdom to follow his heart (Jeremiah 17:9). Before you begin the study of Ecclesiastes 1, pray and then read through the whole book so you have a good overview of Solomon’s thought process.

King Solomon poured his heart out in this book, and the conclusion about life under the sun is summed up in his statement, “Vanity of vanities ... vanity of vanities! All is vanity” (Ecclesiastes 1:2). This declaration gives us a compulsion to regard what Solomon experienced and why he came to that sad conclusion. Even in his debauchery, Solomon knew wisdom because he acknowledged it (1:16), he applied his heart to know it as well as madness and folly (1:17), and he determined, “For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow” (Ecclesiastes 1:18).

His was a willful experiment, so to speak, into what life on “the other side” looks like. And we get the benefit of the lesson without the heartache of experience (unless we too choose to follow such a path).



Reflection and Application

1. James 1:5-6 tells us if anyone lacks wisdom, he is to ask God in faith and God will generously grant him his request. Solomon asked the Lord for understanding and wisdom and because that request pleased God, He also gave Solomon riches and honor. How do you think those extras influenced Solomon?
2. Have you ever tried to “catch” the wind? Location and weather permitting, spend some time outside and ponder what Solomon felt as he described everything that is done “under the sun.”
3. Why do you think Solomon said, “It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with”?
4. List some ways wisdom can be misused (e.g., a wise man may think he needs no counsel).

Father God,

Our hearts are so fickle and easily distracted by what this world seems to offer as treasure. Help us to heed Your Word through the lessons we learn from Israel’s wisest king — lessons that point us to Christ and to His admonition from Matthew 6:20, that we “lay up for ourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal.” Amen.



DAY 2

2 S E T S A S I S T E S E C C L E S T I A S T S E S

Vanity and Despair

*“I said in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.’ But behold, this also was vanity”
(Ecclesiastes 2:1).*

The great literary master, Ernest Hemingway, rejected Christianity, despaired of life, and came to the (wrongful) conclusion nothing transcendent exists. As pastor/writer, William Boekestein states, “Hemingway loved Hemingway.” His psychological issues aside, he finally reached his conclusion and committed suicide.

King Solomon seemed to teeter on the edge of full-on despair. But unlike Hemingway (or any worldly person), Solomon not only acknowledged God as sovereign but turned to Him for understanding even in the midst of his exclamations that, “All is vanity!” Solomon cried that phrase twenty-seven times throughout Ecclesiastes, but he eclipsed that with speaking of God thirty-nine times. Only the word, heart, is mentioned more (forty times). Surely the nature of our hearts is tied closely to our understanding of God.

Solomon purposefully set out to taste of the world’s pleasures. We can discern the pleasures of which he spoke were not godly pursuits of enjoyment, for he deemed them “vanity.” Solomon ate; he drank; he built gardens and buildings; he acquired many possessions (including land, slaves, and gold). He kept himself from nothing.

Within his pondering and experiences, he concluded the same thing happens in wisdom and in folly (death), so he “hated life” (Ecclesiastes 2:17).



Reflection and Application

1. If you have ever purposely chosen to attend to an ungodly pursuit of enjoyment, what was the result?
2. Why do you think Solomon — even though he knew the Lord — hated life?
3. As we read this chapter, Solomon seemed a torn man, on one hand he acknowledged the goodness of the Lord and on the other, the vanity of life. Verse 24 gives us greater insight into Solomon's heart. How did this verse display his faith in God?

Sovereign Lord,

Your Word is so rich with truths about You and about how life in Your name far surpasses anything the world can offer. Help me to know You more and praise You for giving me life in Your name. Amen.



DAY 3

3-4 TESTESIASTESIELCE

The Viewpoint of God's Sovereignty

*"Keep your heart with all vigilance,
for from it flow the springs of life"
(Proverbs 4:23).*

Chapter three begins looking at life based on God's will, not man's vain pursuits. Solomon turns from despair to acknowledgement of the Lord's sovereignty and provision. Solomon answers the premise he posed in 1:12-14 about the business God has given to man when he says, "I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with" (3:10). Solomon acknowledges everything happens according to God's perfect will and in His time. In chapter three, we read this beautiful truth, "He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, He has put eternity into man's heart" (3:11).

Solomon still bemoans wickedness, yet he also acknowledges all judgment belongs to God, who will judge the righteous and the wicked. "I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for there is a time for every matter and for every work" (Ecclesiastes 3:17).

In chapter four, Solomon leads us to contemplate the wickedness and foolishness that pervades humanity apart from true faith in God. He saw the oppressed and the oppressors, and he thought on the final ends of both. But on the path to a foolish man's end come the various vanities, covetousness, striving for riches, etc. As Solomon ponders these, he writes proverbs adjuring one to not go solo as fools do (see 4:5). He instructs us that "two are better than one, for they have a good reward for their toil" (4:9).

Toil is a big theme for Solomon, for what toil is vanity and what toil reaps eternal rewards? Think (as did Solomon) on the value of two people toiling together. Not only is the workload less, but the counsel between the two benefit both for the toil and for each laborer. Then think on the One who gives us our work.



Reflection and Application

1. Proverbs 25:28 says, “A man without self-control is like a city broken into and left without walls.” Solomon wrote that proverb; do you think he reached the point of no self-control? What verses in Ecclesiastes support your answer?
2. Read Jeremiah 17:9. What viewpoint is considered here?
3. Why is suicide, while tragic, the ultimate act of self-absorption?

Father,

Thank You that You are sovereign. Help me understand what You would have me do with this mind, talents, and gifts You've given me. Help me serve You well all the days of this life You've given me.

Amen.



DAY 4

5-11 ECCLESIASTES

Turning to the Lord in Reflection and Proverbs

“Behold, what I have seen to be good and fitting is to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of his life that God has given him, for this is his lot”

(Ecclesiastes 5:18).

We learned earlier that Solomon wrote over 3,000 proverbs, and we get to enjoy a number of them within chapters 5-11. In these chapters, Solomon leans heavily toward understanding God’s plan for humanity. He also contrasts the foolish person with the wise (he experienced both, yes?). He’s elevated his thoughts from wondering about the vanity of human labor to accepting the good of our God-given toil. He calls our work a gift from God and we can enjoy the “fruits” of our labor as we enjoy the One who gives us our toil.

In 7:15, Solomon says in his vain life he has seen everything. He says we should enjoy a balance and not be overly righteous nor be a vigorous fool. In 8:16-17, Solomon says he applied his heart to know wisdom, “then I saw all the work of God.” That’s the key for us.



Reflection and Application

1. If you journal while reading the Bible, make sure you keep track of all the truths, promises, works, and ideas God reveals to you as you process His Word. A treasure lies within what the Spirit teaches you for His glory and your good. What will you do with what He is teaching you through Ecclesiastes?
2. Work is good; we first learn this in Genesis as the Lord had Adam work the garden, i.e., to serve God (Genesis 2:15). At what do you toil? Read Colossians 3:23-24 as you consider your answer.

Father,

You are good all the time. No matter what goes on in our short lives here on earth, we have the great privilege of serving You with the work You've given us. I praise You and worship You. Amen.



Reflection and Application

1. What does it mean to live life “under heaven?”
2. Read John Bunyan’s classic, *The Pilgrim’s Progress* and reflect upon what you’ve learned while reading *Ecclesiastes*.

Lord God Almighty,

Thank You for giving me everything I need to live a holy life — a godly life. Help me to help others with counsel and encouragement as I point them to Your Word. In Jesus’ name I pray.

Amen.

NOISY TUNES

As we read the account of Solomon, we marvel that one so wise could come to such an end. How can a man imbued with God-given wisdom throw himself into the wiles of the evil one by disregarding God's commands and live a life seemingly filled with debauchery (all the wives and concubines, the false worship, etc.)?

People disregard advice from a person of no experience. Therefore, let's not be too quick to judge Solomon based on human understanding. It's easy for us to discount a person who gives advice with no experience in the matter (e.g., a single man who gives parenting advice to a new father). God gave Solomon unmerited favor when He added honor and riches to his request for wisdom and understanding. But God also knew what would happen.

Ponder this: Had Solomon not experienced the life we read about in the pages of Scripture; we wouldn't have the lessons we so desperately need.

*Lisa Loraine Baker is the multiple award-winning author of **Someplace to be Somebody**. She writes fiction and nonfiction. In addition to writing for the Salem Web Network, Lisa serves as a Word Weavers' mentor and is part of a critique group. She also is a member of BRRCC. Lisa and her husband, Stephen, a pastor, live in a small Ohio village with their crazy cat, Lewis.*

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