

Ecclesiastes 1

“VANITY OF VANITIES”

AN INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

Introduction:

1. Solomon’s life of devotion to God and service to Israel began to fall apart with his marriages to many foreign, idolatrous women.
2. The wisest man began to live like a fool – rejecting the wisdom of God for the folly of a human and carnal mindset.
3. The book of Ecclesiastes records the “wisdom” of Solomon as he sought for meaning and purpose in life without the wisdom of God.
4. It is the great experiment of his life – and a powerful warning to all mankind.

I. Introduction to the Book of Ecclesiastes

- A. Author – Solomon (1:1, 12) *{No other person fits this description.}*
- B. Relation to other books of wisdom literature:
 1. Job – *the problem of suffering*
 2. Proverbs – *the need of true wisdom for life’s troubles and temptations*
 3. Ecclesiastes – *the meaning of life and vanity of life without God*
 - a. Consider that the answers Solomon was seeking had already been given in the book of Proverbs.
 - b. Solomon had wisdom, but he did not apply it in his own life!
- C. Theme – “Vanity of vanities; all is vanity” (1:2).
- D. Key Words –
 1. Vanity (38 times) – “Emptiness, transitory; breath or vapor”
 2. Under the Sun (29 times) – Limited to the present, physical world
 3. Vexation of spirit (9 times) – Literally, “Striving after wind”
- E. Context
 1. It is important to remember that Solomon is writing of human existence when one is disconnected from God and godly wisdom.
 2. Solomon was seeking to find a purpose in life apart from God.
 3. All that he writes must be understood in this context!
 - a. 2 Corinthians 5:7 – Solomon was walking by sight.
 - b. Hebrews 11:1 – Solomon was focusing only on the visible.
 - c. James 3:13-17 – Solomon was exercising human wisdom.
 4. Note that this does not mean a total rejection of God (atheism), but a rejection of God’s wisdom.
 5. When this context is not considered, error can be taught (cf. 3:19).

II. The Theme of Ecclesiastes (Ecclesiastes 1:1-2, 12-14)

- A. The name “Ecclesiastes” comes from the Greek; but the Hebrew word is *koheleth* and means, “One who calls an assembly.”
- B. Thus, the “preacher” announces his theme: “All is vanity!”
- C. This is not a mere suggestion, but the conclusion reached after searching out “all things that are done under heaven.”
- D. Thus, this book records Solomon’s great scientific experiment and the conclusions reached.