

**A PERSONAL
VERSE-BY-VERSE COMMENTARY**

ECCLESIASTES

By

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**Eccl. 1:1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.
Eccl. 1:12 I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.**

These two verses seem to establish pretty clearly that Solomon, the son of David who inherited the throne of Israel from his father, is the author of this book. When God gave him the opportunity to ask for anything he wanted, he asked for wisdom. That pleased God so much that he not only gave him wisdom but riches and honors as well.

1Kings 3:11-13 "And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee. And I have also given thee that which thou hast not asked, both riches, and honour: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days."

Because he was blessed with so much, the next verses make you really sit up and take notice. This King who wanted for nothing according to the world's standards was not a happy person.

Eccl. 1:2 Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.

It was interesting to notice that the root word for "vanity" included "vain in expectation." Doesn't that really get to the heart of the matter? Our culture functions on the premise that money, possessions and self-indulgence translate to happiness and fulfillment. That is a false expectation.

Eccl. 1:3-7 What profit hath a man of all his labour which he taketh under the sun? *One* generation passeth away, and *another* generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever. The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose. The wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; it whirleth about continually, and the wind returneth again according to his circuits. All the rivers run into the sea; yet the sea is not full; unto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they return again.

As Solomon observed life around him, he couldn't help but think: How does one really benefit from all the energy and hard work he invests in life? Man lives, works and dies; his son lives, works and dies; etc. The earth, sun and all the forces of nature continue the same for every generation. What is the purpose or meaning to life in the whole scheme of things?

Eccl. 1:8 All things *are* full of labour; man cannot utter *it*: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing.

In this verse Solomon seems to be saying that we never feel like we have enough; we always want more. In application to today's world, one might say that no

matter how many new technology gadgets, clothes, cars, etc., that we get, we are always wanting newer and better and more.

Eccl. 1:9-11 The thing that hath been, it is *that* which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and *there is no new thing* under the sun. Is there *any* thing whereof it may be said, See, this is new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us. *There is no remembrance of former things; neither shall there be any remembrance of things that are to come with those that shall come after.*

Yes, this is the source of that common saying: “There is nothing new under the sun.” I think the focus of Solomon’s thoughts is centered on the actions of men; he is talking about things men do. Though men may invent new ways of doing things, there isn’t much new with regard to what men want to achieve in life. Men have always had to work to provide for their families. Men have always sought to better their way of life. Men have always sought to increase their understanding of science and nature. Men have always sought to attain power and influence over one another. Men have always expressed their creativity in music, art, and writing. Though technological achievements have greatly increased the productivity and/or ability to achieve in these endeavors, the basic goals of men have not changed. In the end, what has been accomplished?

Solomon also observed that we tend to function in the “now.” Evidently, he felt his generation had learned very little from the past experiences of their forefathers and didn’t expect it would be any different with the generations that would follow him. What a pertinent observation regarding today’s world. Though we have many more resources available than ever before to enlighten us regarding mistakes that have been made by those who have gone before us, whether nations or individuals, we seem to think that we can utilize the same weak morals and poor principles and achieve a different result. We never seem to learn from our predecessors.

It is more in line with that last train of thought that this verse seems to have specific prophetic implication. History tends to repeat itself and in the process provides types or examples of things yet to come. This is another amazing example to me of the omniscience and omnipotence of God. I can express this truth in words, but I can’t really understand how it is possible. He established a plan to accomplish His purposes that took into account the choices and actions of billions of men throughout history without violating their freedom to make those choices and act accordingly.

Eccl. 1:13 And I gave my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all *things that are done under heaven: this sore travail hath God given to the sons of man to be exercised therewith.*

Wisdom is the ability to use knowledge with skill and discernment to the best purpose. I think Solomon is saying that he didn’t just try to amass knowledge; he tried to utilize what he learned for good. Specifically, I think he was trying to

understand the actions of men both in satisfying self and in relationship to others.

I like the way the CJB worded the last part of this verse: What a bothersome task God has given humanity to keep us occupied!

Eccl. 1:14-15 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit. That which is crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

From his viewpoint, which he believes is all-encompassing, Solomon sees no purpose in life. In context, the reference is to the works of men. The thought seems to be that no matter how much we accomplish, it is never enough. It's like—The more you know, the more you know you don't know. The more you do, the more you see there is to do.

Eccl. 1:16-18 I communed with mine own heart, saying, Lo, I am come to great estate, and have gotten more wisdom than all *they* that have been before me in Jerusalem: yea, my heart had great experience of wisdom and knowledge. And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit. For in much wisdom is much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.

As noted earlier, Solomon was very wise and very wealthy. He was basically quoting God's words to him in declaring himself to be the wisest of all who had preceded him in Jerusalem.

1 Kings 3:11–12 “And God said unto him, Because thou hast asked this thing, and hast not asked for thyself long life; neither hast asked riches for thyself, nor hast asked the life of thine enemies; but hast asked for thyself understanding to discern judgment; Behold, I have done according to thy words: lo, I have given thee a wise and an understanding heart; so that there was none like thee before thee, neither after thee shall any arise like unto thee.”

Solomon is at a point in life where he is looking back and making assessment. It seems to me that he is saying that he made an effort to experience both wisdom and self-indulgence and could find no satisfaction in either. He concludes that wisdom produces grief and more knowledge produces sorrow; in other words, neither provides true satisfaction because both result in showing you how much more there is to know and understand.

I think it is important to note that Solomon is relating his endeavors to achieve earthly wisdom and knowledge, and therein is the problem. Earthly wisdom and knowledge leave one empty and unfulfilled without application to spiritual benefit for eternity. This brings to mind the words of Jesus as recorded by Matthew.

Matthew 16:26 “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul?”