

**Men** *of the* **Word**

# Searching for Significance

A Study in  
Ecclesiastes

Wednesdays, 7–9 pm  
Worship Center



# The Wisest of Fools

---

Ecclesiastes 1:1



## Why Ecclesiastes?

- Charles Bridges: “The Book of Ecclesiastes has exercised the Church of God in no common degree. Many learned men have not hesitated to number it among the most difficult Books in the Sacred Canon.”
- Richard Belcher: “Ecclesiastes is one of the most difficult books of the Bible. It has been called ‘a baffling book,’ ‘alien among the other books of the Old Testament,’ ‘the most problematic of the whole Hebrew Bible,’ and “an embarrassment to the Old Testament.”
- “The black sheep of the Bible.”

# Ecclesiastes' Tensions

Optimism

“seize the day”  
(2:24; 5:18; 8:15)

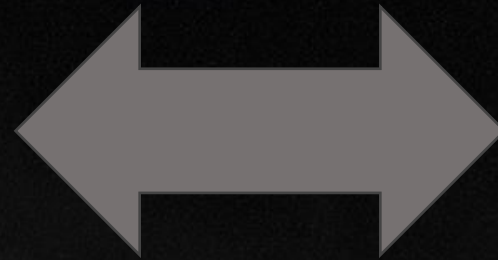
Creation as good

Fruitfulness

Dominion

Enjoyment

Life



“vanity of vanities”  
(1:2;12:8)

Creation as cursed

Futility

Powerlessness

Denial

Death

Pessimism



“It is not the kind of book that we keep reading until we reach the end and get the answer, like a mystery. Instead it is a book in which we keep struggling with the problems of life, and as we struggle, we learn to trust God with the questions even when we do *not* have all the answers.”

—Philip Ryken





# ECCLESIASTES, or the Preacher.

## C H A P. I.

1 The Preacher sheweth that all humane courses are vaine: 4 Because the creatures are restless in their courses, 9 They bring forth nothing newe, and all olde things are forgotten, 12 And because he hath found it so in the studies of wisdom.



He wordes of the Preacher, the son of David, King in Jerusalem.

2 \* Vanitie of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanitie of vanities, all is vanitie.

3 \* What profite hath a man of all his labour which hee taketh vnder the Sunne:

4 One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: \* but the earth abideth for ever.

5 The Sunne also ariseth, and the Sunne goeth downe, and \* hasteth to the place where he arose.

6 The winde goeth toward the South, and turneth about vnto the North: it whirleth about continually, and the winde returneth againe according to his circuits.

7 \* All the rivers runne into the sea, yet the Sea is not full: vnto the place from whence the rivers come, thither they \* returne againe.

8 All things are full of labour, man cannot vnderstand it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the eare filled with hearing.

9 \* The thing that hath beene, it is that which shall be: and that which is done, is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing vnder the sunne.

10 Is there any thing, whereof it may be sayd, See, this is new: it hath

been already of olde time, which was before vs.

11 There is no remembrance of former things: neither shall there bee any remembrance of things that are to come, with those that shall come after.

12 \* If the Preacher was king ouer Israel in Jerusalem.

13 And I gaue my heart to seeke and search out by wisdom, concerning all things that are done vnder heauen: this soretrauall hath God giuen to the sonnes of man, || to be exercised therewith.

14 I haue seene all the workes that are done vnder the Sunne, and behold, all is vanitie, and vexation of spirit.

15 \* That which is crooked, cannot be made straight: and † that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

16 I communed with mine owne heart, saying, Loc, I am come to great estate, and haue gotten \* more wisdom, then all they that haue beene before me in Jerusalem: yea my heart † had great experience of wisdom & knowledg.

17 \* And I gaue my heart to know wisdom, and to know madnesse and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.

18 For in much wisdom is much griefe: and hee that increaseth knowledg, increaseth sorrow.

## C H A P. II.

1 The vanitie of humane courses in the workes of pleasure, 12 Though the wise be better then the foole, yet both haue one euent, 18 The vanitie of humane labour, in leauing it they know not to whom, 24 Nothing better then ioy in our labour, but that is Gods gift.

I said in mine heart, See to now, I wil proue thee with mirth, therefore enioy pleasure: and behold, this also is vanitie.

2 I said

# The Book's Title

- Hebrew: קהלת – *Qoheleth*, “Preacher”
- Septuagint: Ἐκκλησιαστής – *Ecclēsiastēs*, “member of the assembly”
- One of the five books of the *wisdom literature* of the Old Testament:
  - Job
  - Psalms
  - Proverbs
  - Ecclesiastes
  - Song of Songs





# ECCLESIASTES, or the Preacher.

## CHAP. I.

1 The Preacher sheweth that all humane courses are vaine: 4 Because the creatures are restless in their courses, 9 They bring forth nothing newe, and all olde things are forgotten, 12 And because he hath found it so in the studies of wisdom.



he wordes of the Preacher, the son of David, King in Jerusalem.

2 \* Vanitie of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanitie of vanities, all is vanitie.

3 \* What profite hath a man of all his labour which he taketh vnder the Sunne:

4 One generation passeth away, and another generation cometh: \* but the earth abideth for ever.

5 The Sunne also ariseth, and the Sunne goeth downe, and \* hasteth to the place where he arose.

6 The Winde goeth toward the South, and turneth about vnto the North: it whirleth about continually, and the Winde returneth againe according to his circuits.

7 \* All the riuers runne into the sea, yet the Sea is not full: vnto the place from whence the riuers come, thither they \* returne againe.

8 All things are full of labour, man cannot vnter it: the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the eare filled with hearing.

9 \* The thing that hath beene, it is that which shall be: and that which is done, is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing vnder the sunne.

10 Is there any thing, whereof it may be sayd, See, this is new: it hath

been already of olde time, which was before vs.

11 There is no remembrance of former things: neither shall there bee any remembrance of things that are to come, with those that shall come after.

12 \* The Preacher was king ouer Israel in Jerusalem.

13 And I gaue my heart to seeke and search out by wisdom, concerning all things that are done vnder heauen: this soretrauell hath God giuen to the sonnes of man, || to be exercised therewith.

14 I haue seene all the workes that are done vnder the Sunne, and behold, all is vanitie, and vexation of spirit.

15 \* That which is crooked, cannot be made straight: and † that which is wanting cannot be numbered.

16 I communed with mine owne heart, saying, Loc, I am come to great estate, and haue gotten \* more wisdom, then all they that haue beene before me in Jerusalem: yea my heart † had great experience of wisdom & knowledge.

17 \* And I gaue my heart to know wisdom, and to know madnesse and folly: I perceiued that this also is vexation of spirit.

18 For in much wisdom is much griefe: and hee that increaseth knowledge, increaseth sorrow.

## CHAP. II.

1 The vanitie of humane courses in the workes of pleasure, 12 Though the wise be better then the foole, yet both haue one end. 18 The vanitie of humane labour, in leauing it they know not to whom. 24 Nothing better then ioy in our labour, but that is Gods gift.

I said in mine heart, See to now, I wil proue thee with mirth, therefore enioy pleasure: and behold, this also is vanitie.

2 I said

# The Book's Author

- **1:1** – “The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.”
- **1:12** – “I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.”
- **12:9–10** – “In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly.”





## I. A Skillful Speaker

“The words of the Preacher,  
the son of David, king in  
Jerusalem.”

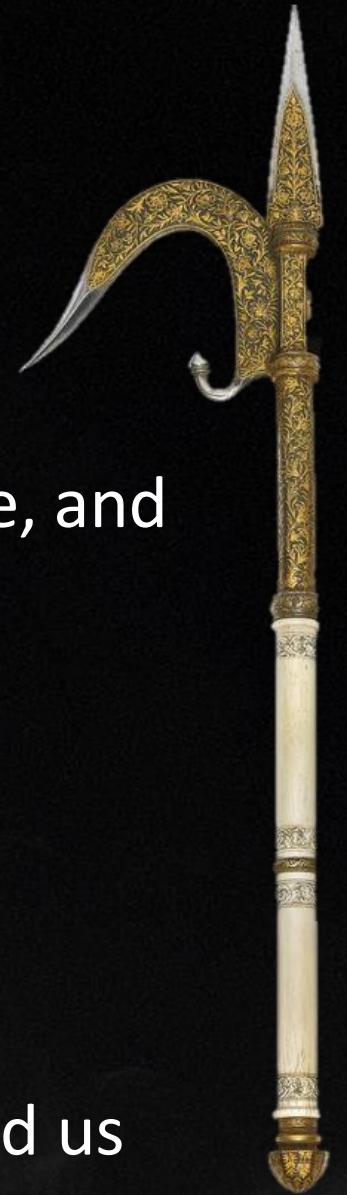
—Ecclesiastes 1:1



- Hebrew *Qoheleth*, “Preacher/Teacher” – a self-designation, nickname.
- Used three times in the introduction (1:1, 2, 12), once in the middle (7:27), and three times in the conclusion (12:8, 9, 10).
- Derived from the Hebrew verb *qāhal* which means “to call together, assemble, collect” . . . either as: (1) *an assortment of things* (“one who gathers wisdom”); or (2) or *an assortment of people* (“one who gathers an assembly to address or teach them”).
- **Ecclesiastes 12:9–10** – “In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. The preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly.”



- Ecclesiastes is an *address*—a formal, sincere, persuasive collection of speeches woven together to bring about one desired response (12:13–14).
- It is intended to be a “goad” (12:11), to prick and to provoke, and ultimately, to persuade.
- Ecclesiastes forces us to deal with issues we know exist but refuse to contemplate.
- So perplexing are these issues that it takes a teacher of extraordinary insight, skill, experience, and credibility to prod us to action.





“to gather together the desponding people of God from the various expedencies to which they have resorted, in consequence of the inexplicable difficulties and perplexities in the moral government of God, into the community of the Lord, by showing them the utter insufficiency of all human efforts to obtain real happiness, which cannot be secured by wisdom, pleasure, industry, wealth, etc., but consists in the calm enjoyment of life, in the resignation to the dealings of Providence, in the service of God, and in the belief in a future retribution, when all the mysteries in the present course of the world shall be solved.”

—Christian D. Ginsberg, *Coholeth*, 16–17





## II. A Royal Descendant

“The words of the Preacher,  
the son of David, king in  
Jerusalem.”

—Ecclesiastes 1:1



- “Son of David” recalls the *Davidic Covenant* (2 Samuel 7).
- “Son of David” also recalls *David’s Transgressions* (2 Samuel 11–24).
- **2 Samuel 12:24–25** – “Then David comforted his wife Bathsheba, and went in to her and lay with her; and she gave birth to a son, and he named him Solomon. Now the LORD loved him and sent word through Nathan the prophet, and he named him Jedidiah for the LORD’s sake.”
- Solomon was David’s *second* son with Bathsheba, but his *tenth* son overall.
- Although the son of a sin-stained union, Solomon is uniquely identified among David’s sons as “loved by Yahweh” (“Jedidiah”).





### III. A Checkered Monarch

“The words of the Preacher,  
the son of David, king in  
Jerusalem.”

—Ecclesiastes 1:1



- **Ecclesiastes 1:12** – “I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.”
- Only one of David’s descendants fits this description: *Solomon*—the last king who ruled over the united tribes of Israel, from Jerusalem.
- **1 Kings 1:28–30** – “Then King David said, ‘Call Bathsheba to me.’ And she came into the king’s presence and stood before the king. The king vowed and said, ‘As the Lord lives, who has redeemed my life from all distress, surely as I vowed to you by the Lord the God of Israel, saying, “Your son Solomon shall be king after me, and he shall sit on my throne in my place”; I will indeed do so this day.’”



- **1 Kings 2:1–4** – “As David’s time to die drew near, he charged Solomon his son, saying, ‘I am going the way of all the earth. Be strong, therefore, and show yourself a man. Keep the charge of the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the Law of Moses, that you may succeed in all that you do and wherever you turn, so that the Lord may carry out His promise which He spoke concerning me, saying, ‘If your sons are careful of their way, to walk before Me in truth with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’”



- Solomon displayed both sinful compromise and sincere commitment.
- **1 Kings 3:1–4** – “Then Solomon formed a marriage alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt, and took Pharaoh’s daughter and brought her to the city of David until he had finished building his own house and the house of the LORD and the wall around Jerusalem. The people were still sacrificing on the high places, because there was no house built for the name of the Lord until those days. Now Solomon loved the LORD, walking in the statutes of his father David, except he sacrificed and burned incense on the high places. The king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place; Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.”



- **1 Kings 3:5** – “In Gibeon the LORD appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, ‘Ask what you wish me to give you.’”
- **1 Kings 3:6–9** – “Then Solomon said, ‘You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. Now, O LORD my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?’”



- **1 Kings 3:10–14** – “It was pleasing in the sight of the LORD that Solomon had asked this thing. God said to him, ‘Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days. If you walk in My ways, keeping My statutes and commandments, as your father David walked, then I will prolong your days.’”



- **1 Kings 4:29–34** – “Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore. Solomon’s wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men, than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was *known* in all the surrounding nations. He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005. He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall; he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish. Men came from all peoples to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom.”



- 1 Kings 8 – Solomon’s dedication of the temple – is one of the mountain-peak chapters of the Bible.
- **1 Kings 8:56–60** – “Blessed be the LORD, who has given rest to His people Israel, according to all that He promised; not one word has failed of all His good promise, which He promised through Moses His servant. May the LORD our God be with us, as He was with our fathers; may He not leave us or forsake us, that He may incline our hearts to Himself, to walk in all His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His ordinances, which He commanded our fathers. And may these words of mine, with which I have made supplication before the LORD, be near to the LORD our God day and night, that He may maintain the cause of His servant and the cause of His people Israel, as each day requires, so that all the peoples of the earth may know that the LORD is God; there is no one else.”



- **1 Kings 11:1–6** – “Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the sons of Israel, ‘You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, for they will surely turn your heart away after their gods.’” Solomon held fast to these in love. He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away. For when Solomon was old, his wives turned his heart away after other gods; and his heart was not wholly devoted to the Lord his God, as the heart of David his father had been. For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians and after Milcom the detestable idol of the Ammonites. Solomon did what was evil in the sight of the LORD, and did not follow the LORD fully, as David his father had done.”



- **1 Kings 11:9–13** – “Now the LORD was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice, and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not observe what the LORD had commanded. So the LORD said to Solomon, ‘Because you have done this, and you have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom from you, and will give it to your servant. Nevertheless I will not do it in your days for the sake of your father David, but I will tear it out of the hand of your son. However, I will not tear away all the kingdom, but I will give one tribe to your son for the sake of My servant David and for the sake of Jerusalem which I have chosen.’”



- From that moment, Solomon's glory begins to vanish, and he will hit rock bottom.
- Solomon is made to taste of the *vanity* of life—the *emptiness* of all he had achieved: *wisdom, wealth, fame, and power*.
- He solidifies his place in history as manifesting in one person exceptional blessing and exceptional folly.
- **1 Kings 11:41–43** – “Now the rest of the acts of Solomon and whatever he did, and his wisdom, are they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon? Thus the time that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was forty years. And Solomon slept with his fathers and was buried in the city of his father David, and his son Rehoboam reigned in his place.”



- During his life, Solomon contributed most of Proverbs and all of Song of Songs, Psalm 72 and 127, and Ecclesiastes.



- Solomon becomes the quintessential figure to write about the true source of significance in this life. He had experienced this search looking up *from the bottom* of folly's ash-heap.





## IV. A Beseeching Prophet

“The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd.”

—Ecclesiastes 12:11



- Although the main character, Solomon is not the hero of his own story.
- Charles Bridges: “One thing is clear—he has not written a line in this book that tends to give one particle of palliation of his sin. The whole treatise has a sad character about it—a mournful commentary—mainly a book of confession.”
- Solomon consistently points to another—to the “Creator” (12:1), to the “One Shepherd” (12:11), to the “God” who is to be feared and obeyed in everything (12:13).
- **Ecclesiastes 12:13–14** – “The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.”



“It may be simply stated—to solve the problem, ‘which from the day when Adam fell has been the great enquiry among men’; and on which philosophy could throw no light—‘Who will show us any good?’ (Psalm 4:6). It is to bring out into clear view the chief good—the true happiness of man, *in what it does not consist*—not in the wisdom, pleasures, honors, and riches of the world—*in what it does consist*—the enjoyment and service of God. Beggars we are, with all the riches of the Indies, without Him. He is the substitute for everything. Nothing can be a substitute for Him.”

—Charles Bridges



“The men of Nineveh will stand up with this generation at the judgment, and will condemn it because they repented at the preaching of Jonah; and behold, something greater than Jonah is here. The Queen of the South will rise up with this generation at the judgment and will condemn it, because she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon; and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.”

—Matthew 12:41–42



“Alas, poor Solomon! The strongest man that ever lived, namely, Samson, was the weakest of men; and the wisest man that ever lived was, perhaps, the greatest, certainly the most conspicuous, fool. How different is our Lord! There is no infirmity in Christ, no folly in the incarnate God. The backsliding of Solomon finds no parallel in Jesus, in whom the prince of this world found nothing though he searched him through and through.”

—Charles Spurgeon