

## **Ecclesiastes Chapter 1**

### **1:1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.**

This verse validates the fact that this is Solomon.

The matters of the book are the crucial issues for Solomon's faith.

They resemble the subject matter of (Psalms 39; 49).

Preacher means "one who addresses an assembly" (as 12 verse 9 reflects).

The Preacher is the title of one who gathers the assembly together for instruction.

He is identified as the son of David, king in Jerusalem, hence Solomon.

The matters of the book are the crucial issues for Solomon's faith.

They resemble the subject matter (of Psalms 19; 49).

### **1:2 Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all [is] vanity.**

Vanity is the key word of the book and the refrain "all is vanity" its theme.

There have been many attempts to translate this word: "futility," "meaninglessness," "emptiness," "breath", nothingness," "absurdity," and so on.

The word means "that which is futile or worthless, of no value or profit."

"Vanity", in the above Scripture, means emptiness, or something transitory.

In other words, it is like sighing, because there is nothing to hope for.

It speaks of hopelessness.

Vanity seems to be the keynote for this entire book.

Solomon is looking back, and believes that his life has been in vain.

As Solomon observed life, he saw little that exhibited profit and accomplishment.

The word all in the expression all is vanity must not be taken to mean everything in the universe for these reasons.

1. The author's observations are clearly limited to what is "under the sun" or observable;
2. The negative conclusions always grow out of observable phenomena as the expressions "I saw," "I have seen," "again I saw," and so on, exhibit;
3. "Vanity" is never predicated of God, God's work, God's revelation, or man as man;

4. Specific realities are commended by Solomon in such a way as not to be considered vanity or the fear of God, enjoyment of life, and proper use of wisdom.

“Vanity of Vanities”:

This is Solomon’s way of saying “the greatest vanity”.

### **1:3 What profit hath a man of all his labor which he taketh under the sun?**

The implied answer to this rhetorical question is that there is no profit for man in his work.

This supports the idea that “vanity” refers to a lack of profit, value, or worth.

Under the sun is used 29 times in this book and denotes the sphere of Solomon’s observations.

"Under the sun" is an expression he uses often.

It has to do with things of this earth.

The phrase appears to describe daily life.

This is such a strange statement for a man with all the advantages that Solomon had.

Of earthly Old Testament people, Solomon was the wisest man that ever lived.

God showered him with great wealth and fame, because he asked for neither.

The statement he makes here, is appropriate for mankind as a whole.

It seems we work our life away and at the end of the road, when we look back over our life, many of us think; what was this all about?

Many people wonder what they have accomplished toward helping society.

“Profit”: Advantage to or gain from one’s labor.

This is a very important and repeated word for Solomon.

Solomon looks at the fleeting moments of life and the seemingly small gain for man’s activity under the sun.

The only lasting efforts are those designed to accomplish God’s purposes for eternity.

“Labor” is not just one’s livelihood, but all of man’s activity in life.

### **1:4 [One] generation passeth away, and [another] generation cometh: but the earth abideth for ever.**

(In verses 4-11), the ceaseless cycles of nature illustrate the futility of life.

The amazing thing is that the earth goes on, but man, the height of God's creation, passes into eternity with no remembrance.

Solomon's observations are very true about the generations passing.

It was not, however, the intention of God for man to die.

Man brought death of his body, when sin entered the picture in the Garden of Eden.

The spirit of man can live on in the new man in heaven.

On this earth, the life span of a person is just under 100 years, and then the children take over.

The earth has lasted a very long time, and would have been the permanent dwelling place of Adam and Eve had they not sinned.

We know that Moses wandered with the children of Israel 40 years, until that generation, who disobeyed God, died off.

The next generation went into the Promised Land.

The essence of this comparison is permanence/impermanence without "profit" or "advantage."

The observer perceives life as an endless cycle of activity which by itself, does not bring security or meaning to man's experience.

**1:5 The sun also ariseth, and the sun goeth down, and hasteth to his place where he arose.**

This just speaks of the continuation of day and night upon the earth.

One day follows another, on and on, but they are each separated by a period of night.

The sameness is interrupted by the opposite sameness.

It seems endless to Solomon.

**1:6 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.**

This speaks of the movement of the wind, which seems to be in a never ending cycle.

This truly speaks of our orderly God, but Solomon sees futility in even the change of the wind.

**1:7 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.**

Solomon can see no results from the endless running of the rivers into the sea.

The truth is that the water is drawn by the sun, and replenishes the earth with rain.

If he is speaking of the Dead sea, which is actually the lowest point on the earth, it seems to absorb the flow off and turns into solids.

I believe he really is saying, that water somehow goes back to its origination point and starts again.

To Solomon, it seems like an endless cycle.

#### Verses 8-11

These are a summary of sorts.

Solomon looks at the effect of repetitious, enduring activity in God's creation over many generations as compared to the brief, comparatively profitless activity of one man which fails to produce an enduring satisfaction, and he concluded that it is wearisome.

Another harsh reality comes with the realization that nothing is new and nothing will be remembered.

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

There is no way for man to speak every word.

Even the fact of man's education to be able to speak properly, is work.

The more one speaks, the more he is aware there is more to learn, to speak better.

The eye never tires of looking.

No one with sight decides they would rather be blind.

The same is true with hearing.

No one who can hear chooses to be deaf, because they are tired of hearing.

These are continuous things in our lives, until the day we shed this body of flesh.

It seems the more we see, the more we want to see.

**1:9 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.**

Solomon says it is like treading water.

We are getting nowhere fast.

Solomon sees life as a never-ending circle of events.

It seems in all of this, that Solomon would like to improve the situation around him.

He finds he is not able to do that, and it leaves him with a feeling of futility.

He believes that each generation faces the very same problems of life that the generation before them did.

It is as if all that he does is in vain.

**1:10 Is there [any] thing whereof it may be said, See, this [is] new? it hath been already of old time, which was before us.**

This certainly did seem to be the case for thousands of years.

Even in our time, some things are the same.

Our people have gotten so far away from God, He is almost sorry He created them.

Luke 17:26 "And as it was in the days of Noah, so shall it be also in the days of the Son of man."

Our generation has seen more real change, however, than any generation in history.

For thousands of years men rode horses to get to their destination.

Just in the last 100 or so years, the automobile and airplane have become a more useful way to get from point to point.

The computer age that we are in now, is another break-through with knowledge.

This is a fulfillment of that very thing.

Daniel 12:4 "But thou, O Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book, [even] to the time of the end: many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall be increased."

**1:11 [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.**

"No remembrance" means a written record or some other object which serves as a reminder of these events, people and things will be short lived.

This really is saying that one generation seems not to learn from the mistakes of the generation before them.

They come along and get involved in the very same sins their fathers did.

One really good reason for this is we do not study our Bible enough, and learn what they did wrong.

(From chapter 1:12 to chapter 6:9): This section records Solomon's ill-advised quest for greater wisdom.

### **1:12 I the Preacher was king over Israel in Jerusalem.**

(In verses 12-18), we find that Solomon had, as no other figure in history, the time and means to undertake such a study.

Vexation of spirit (verse 14), occurs seven times in the book and contains the idea of fruitlessness or futility.

Even Solomon's wisdom (verse 8), did not suffice to solve life's ultimate questions.

This is the first of several passages in the book that emphasize wisdom's limitations, whereas Proverbs emphasizes wisdom's benefits.

This is speaking of the 40 years that Solomon reigned as king.

This probably is spoken toward the end of Solomon's reign as though he is looking back over his reign as king, as if he failed as king.

### **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.**

When God offered Solomon a gift, Solomon asked for wisdom to lead his people.

God granted that wish.

1 Kings 3:12 "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."

The following is one of Solomon's comments.

Proverbs 2:2 "So that thou incline thine ear unto wisdom, [and] apply thine heart to understanding;"

Solomon sought the secret of life through earthly wisdom.

The secret of life is found in Jesus Christ.

He is Life.

"Wisdom": Solomon's use of the term, in typical Hebrew fashion, is more practical than philosophical and implies more than knowledge.

It carries notions of ability for proper behavior, success, common sense and wit.

“This sore travail”:

Means man’s search to understand is at times difficult, yet God given.

“God”:

The covenant name.

“Lord”, is never used in Ecclesiastes, However, “God” is found almost 40 times.

The emphasis is more on God’s sovereignty in creation and providence than His covenant relationship through redemption.

**1:14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all [is] vanity and vexation of spirit.**

One aspect of life’s vanity is its fleeting character.

Like the wind, much of what is desirable in life cannot be held in one’s hand.

1 Kings 4:30-32 "And Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the children of the east country, and all the wisdom of Egypt." "For he was wiser than all men; than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, and Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol: and his fame was in all nations round about." "And he spake three thousand proverbs: and his songs were a thousand and five."

Solomon soon forgot that he built the temple in Jerusalem.

It seems that even that had not given him fulfillment for his life.

It is as if he is saying my life of work was in vain.

**1:15 [That which is] crooked cannot be made straight: and that which is wanting cannot be numbered.**

This is speaking of the events in a person's life.

It is as if we have no control of our destiny. This is definitely a cause for a person to seek Jesus Christ as his Savior.

It is saying that all his efforts to save himself are in vain.

With no necessarily moral implications being made, these words measure wisdom as the ability to resolve issue in life.

In spite of man’s grandest efforts, some crooked matters will remain un-straightened.

**1:16 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.**

Solomon's wisdom was a gift from God.

The same is true with all of us.

Knowledge is accumulated learning, but wisdom is a gift from God.

We see from the following Scriptures, that Solomon's wisdom and knowledge was given to him by God, and that it far excelled every other person on the earth.

1 Kings 3:12-13 "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 honor: so that there shall not be any among the kings like unto thee all thy days."

He was appreciative of all of this, but still, this did not fill that need that each of us has, until we are in fellowship with Jesus.

**1:17 And I gave my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly: I perceived that this also is vexation of spirit.**

All of the wisdom in the world cannot bring peace, unless the person, who has it, uses it to come to Christ as his Savior.

When Solomon depended on empirical research rather than divine revelation to understand life, he found it to be an empty experience.

On his search for bringing peace to his world, Solomon married many women.

This was folly.

It did not bring peace.

It brought false gods of these women.

His quest for peace, at any cost, brought the worship of false gods into his land.

All such attempts, aside from God, fail.

Only Jesus (King of Peace), can bring the peace Solomon searched for.

**1:18 For in much wisdom [is] much grief: and he that increaseth knowledge increaseth sorrow.**

The expected outcome of wisdom is success.



Success, in turn, should bring happiness.

But Solomon concluded that there were no guarantees.

This grieves the one who places his hope in human achievement alone.

1 Corinthians 3:18-20 "Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you seemeth to be wise in this world, let him become a fool, that he may be wise." "For the wisdom of this world is foolishness with God. For it is written, He taketh the wise in their own craftiness." "And again, The Lord knoweth the thoughts of the wise, that they are vain."

The more we understand about the society we live in, the more troubling it is.

This is certainly the case with Solomon, as well.

In that sense, the more we know, the more we grieve.

Isn't this especially true today?

### **Ecclesiastes Chapter 1 Questions**

1. Who penned Ecclesiastes?
2. What does "Ecclesiastes" mean?
3. What does the penman express, over and over, in this book?
4. Who was the penman's father?
5. Where was he king?
6. What does verse 1 validate?
7. What does "vanity", in theses Scriptures, mean?
8. What is vanity like in these Scriptures.
9. What does Solomon look back and believe about his life?
10. What were some of the advantages that Solomon had?
11. The statement Solomon makes, in verse 3, is appropriate for \_\_\_\_\_ as a whole.
12. What is an expression Solomon uses so often in this book?
13. Man brought death of his body when?

14. The life span of man on this earth is just under \_\_\_\_\_ years.
15. Why did Moses wander 40 years in the wilderness?
16. What is verse 5 saying?
17. What does the wind, in verse 6, speak of?
18. All the rivers run into the \_\_\_\_\_.
19. What is the lowest point of the earth.
20. The eye is not satisfied with \_\_\_\_\_.
21. Solomon sees life, as a never ending \_\_\_\_\_ of events.
22. Why do we not learn from the mistakes of those other Bible characters?
23. How many years did Solomon reign?
24. When God offered Solomon a gift, what did Solomon ask for?
25. Whose wisdom did Solomon's wisdom excel?
26. How many proverbs did Solomon speak?
27. How many songs did he write?
28. Solomon's \_\_\_\_\_ was a gift from God?
29. What is knowledge?
30. What did God give Solomon, besides wisdom?
31. Who can bring the peace that Solomon sought for?
32. The wisdom of this world is \_\_\_\_\_ with God.