

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 5-13-12 PM NOTES  
ECCLESIASTES  
#23 in Series, "The Glory of God in the Old Testament"

**Ecclesiastes 1:2 (NKJV)** "'Vanity of vanities,' says the Preacher; 'Vanity of vanities, all *is* vanity.'"

**Ecclesiastes 12:13 (NKJV)** "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all."

**John 10:10b (NKJV)** "I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly."

I. The Problem Declared (1:1-18)

A. An Empty Life (V1-3)

**Luke 5:5 (KJV)** "we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing:"

**1 Kings 11:1-4 (NKJV)** "<sup>1</sup> But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, *and* Hittites-- <sup>2</sup> from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, 'You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.' Solomon clung to these in love. <sup>3</sup> And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. <sup>4</sup> For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David."

**1 Kings 11:9 (NKJV)** "So the Lord became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice".

B. An Earthbound Perspective (1:4-18)

II. The Solution Sought (2:1-10:20)

A. Through Worldly Pleasures (2:1-11)

**Ecclesiastes 2:1 (HCSB)** "I said to myself, 'Go ahead, I will test you with pleasure and enjoy what is good.' But it turned out to be futile."

1. Laughter (2:2)

2. Alcohol (2:3)

**Ecclesiastes 2:3 (HCSB)** "I explored with my mind how to let my body enjoy life with wine and how to grasp folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom—until I could see what is good for people to do under heaven during the few days of their lives."

3. Building (V4-6)

**1 Kings 7:1 (NKJV)** “But Solomon took thirteen years to build his own house; so he finished all his house.”

**2 Chronicles 8:4-6 (NKJV)** “<sup>4</sup>He also built Tadmor in the wilderness, and all the storage cities which he built in Hamath. <sup>5</sup>He built Upper Beth Horon and Lower Beth Horon, fortified cities *with* walls, gates, and bars, <sup>6</sup>also Baalath and all the storage cities that Solomon had, and all the chariot cities and the cities of the cavalry, and all that Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, in Lebanon, and in all the land of his dominion.”

4. The Accumulation of More Wealth (v7-10)

**2 Chronicles 9:27 (NKJV)** “The king made silver *as common* in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedar trees as abundant as the sycamores which *are* in the lowland.”

B. Through Human Wisdom (2:12-17)

C. Through Human Labor (2:18-26)

D. Through General Observation (3:1-5:20)

**Ecclesiastes 3:11b (NKJV)** “...He has put eternity in their hearts”.

E. Through Practical Morality (6:1-8:17)

**Ecclesiastes 8:17 (HCSB)** “I observed all the work of God [and concluded] that man is unable to discover the work that is done under the sun. Even though a man labors hard to explore it, he cannot find it; even if the wise man claims to know it, he is unable to discover it.”

III. The Search Concluded (9:1-12:14)

A. The Problem Reviewed (9:1-10:20)

1. Solomon Treated God’s Word Casually

**Deuteronomy 17:16-19 (NKJV)** “<sup>16</sup>But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the Lord has said to you, ‘You shall not return that way again.’ <sup>17</sup>Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself. <sup>18</sup>Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from *the one* before the priests, the Levites. <sup>19</sup>And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes”.

**Ecclesiastes 10:1 (NKJV)** “Dead flies putrefy the perfumer’s ointment, and cause it to give off a foul odor; *So does* a little folly to one respected for wisdom *and* honor.”

2. Solomon Turned His focus from God to the Gifts of God

“He abandoned fellowship with the giver in order to play with the gifts”

- Ed Young Sr.

B. The Problem Solved (11:1-12:14)

“Youthful sins lay a foundation for aged sorrows”

- Charles Spurgeon

“When you fear God, you fear nothing else; if you do not fear God, you fear everything else.”

- Oswald Chambers

FIRST BAPTIST CHURCH, 5-13-12 PM

ECCLESIASTES

#23 in Series, “The Glory of God in the Old Testament”

I can think of no other book of the Old Testament that is more relevant to graduating Seniors than the book of Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is a book about meaning in life, about contentment, and especially it is a book that contrasts two worldviews. Through the years, Ecclesiastes has been admired as a great literary work by many who are considered experts in the field of literature. Ernest Hemmingway admired Ecclesiastes and integrated it into many of his books including *The Sun Also Rises*. Herman Melville, the author of *Moby-Dick* used the book of Ecclesiastes in his book *Redburn*. In addition to experts in literature, in the late 60's a rock group called “The Byrds” took much the text of their song, *Turn, Turn, Turn* from the book of Ecclesiastes.

Solomon, the son of King David is traditionally considered the human author of Ecclesiastes. I have read arguments for and against his authorship, and I see no reason to doubt it. The book states that he is the author Solomon had the means to have experienced the things the author of the book experienced. The mystery is, how could the same man write the book of Proverbs and then write the things he wrote in some sections of Ecclesiastes. We will solve that mystery when we take a look at Solomon's life.

By way of introduction, I need to say some things about inspiration of the Bible and how the book of Ecclesiastes expounds some philosophy that is not true and disagrees with the rest of the Bible. I want to make clear that I believe that the whole Bible – all 66 books are inspired by God (that word “inspired” means “God breathed”). I believe that the Bible is infallible and inerrant – all of it. How can we say Ecclesiastes is inspired by God and yet it says some things that are not true? When we say that the Bible is inspired, we are saying that what we have in the Bible is exactly what God wanted us to have. When we say that the Bible is inerrant and infallible, we are saying that it is infallible and

inerrant in the purpose for which God intended it. The intended purpose of Ecclesiastes is to contrast a worldview that leaves God out and a Biblical worldview. The literary approach in Ecclesiastes is technically called “antithetical parallelism”. Solomon switches between two opposite ways of looking at life. Here is an example: **Ecclesiastes 1:2 (NKJV)** “‘Vanity of vanities,’ says the Preacher; ‘Vanity of vanities, all *is* vanity.’” The word “vanity” is translated “meaningless” in the NIV and “absolute futility” in the HCSB. Contrast that to **Ecclesiastes 12:13 (NKJV)** “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all.” In 1:2 he says that everything is vanity, emptiness, meaningless, and absolute futility. In 12:13 he says that life only makes sense when we fear God and keep His commandments. Are both of those statements true? They are both truly representing two opposite worldviews. Here is why this is so important. Some cults take some of their weird doctrines from statements in Ecclesiastes that Solomon makes when expressing a non-biblical worldview. That is why it is so important to see every passage in the Bible in its context. When one is reconciled to God through the Lord Jesus Christ, is all vanity, meaningless, and absolute futility? No! Jesus said in **John 10:10b (NKJV)** “I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly.” The Scripture is inspired and inerrant and infallible in its purpose and the purpose for Ecclesiastes is to show the difference in a worldview that leaves God out (a naturalistic worldview) and a biblical worldview, both of which Solomon held at different times.

## I. The Problem Declared (1:1-18)

### A. An Empty Life (V1-3)

The word translated “vanity” or one of its forms is used 35 times in Ecclesiastes. Solomon obviously had a problem when the word he chooses to summarize life means empty, meaninglessness, and absolute futility. Solomon’s view was echoed in the opening statement of a book by Scott Peck (that I don’t recommend): “Life is hard and then you die”. The famous attorney Clarence Darrow, best remembered for defending the science teacher in Dayton who taught evolution, was somewhat like Solomon in a part of his life. Darrow had worldly success, wealth and fame, but left God out of his life. Darrow in a candid moment looked back on his life and said, “There is a statement in the Bible which summarizes my life” He then quoted **Luke 5:5b (KJV)** “...we have toiled all the night, and have taken nothing...”

To understand how Solomon came to the conclusion that all was vanity, we must look at his life. Solomon was the second son of David by Bathsheba (the first one that was conceived while she was still married to Uriah died). He led a life of privilege and was trained and mentored by the godly prophet Nathan. It seems that as a young man when Solomon was anointed King to succeed His Father David, he walked with God. Not long after he became King God appeared to him and offered Solomon anything he wanted. Solomon chose ruling, governing wisdom. It was in those early years that he wrote the beautiful lyrics we read in The Song of Solomon (next week’s study). A little later he wrote most of the inspired proverbs we find in the Book of Proverbs. In mid-life we see something that begins to happen to Solomon. He has possibly more wealth than any other man who has ever lived. He had a relatively peaceful kingdom and great prestige among the nations. Slowly Solomon forgot where the blessings came from and why he existed. We read about his fall in **1 Kings 11:1-4 (NKJV)** “<sup>1</sup> But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites,

Edomites, Sidonians, *and* Hittites-- <sup>2</sup> from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, 'You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods.' Solomon clung to these in love. <sup>3</sup> And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. <sup>4</sup> For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as *was* the heart of his father David." **1 Kings 11:9 (NKJV)** "So the Lord became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice".

As we will see in the last part of Ecclesiastes, it seems that late in life Solomon repented and came back to the Lord. In fact the book of Ecclesiastes was written late in Solomon's life to show the futility of a life that just leaves God out, and it was written to reveal what was of ultimate importance.

#### B. An Earthbound Perspective (1:4-18)

In these verses we see the conclusions that result from a worldview that is naturalistic, a worldview that leaves God out. Life here is pictured as endless cycles [Read 1:4-6, 9]. Solomon seeks more wisdom, but now that he has turned away from God he come to the depressing conclusion in 1:17-18 [read].

Solomon's problem was an empty life that resulted from an earthbound perspective – a naturalistic worldview that leaves God out.

## II. The Solution Sought (2:1-10:20)

If worldly wisdom just brings grief and increasing sorrow (1:18), then Solomon decides to try to find meaning in other places.

### A. Through Worldly Pleasures (2:1-11)

Perhaps no one since Solomon has had the means and opportunity to dive so deeply into sensual pleasure as he did. It is as if God gave him all these means to indulge his flesh to show us that this path does not bring contentment and meaning in life. **Ecclesiastes 2:1 (HCSB)** "I said to myself, 'Go ahead, I will test you with pleasure and enjoy what is good.' But it turned out to be futile." Let's look at all that he tried.

1. Laughter (V2) – In today's culture, it would be the situation comedies, the clubs with the stand-up comedians, and the funny movies. When the laughter fades, we recognize that the emptiness is still there.

2. Alcohol (V3) – **Ecclesiastes 2:3 (HCSB)** "I explored with my mind how to let my body enjoy life with wine and how to grasp folly—my mind still guiding me with wisdom—until I could see what is good for people to do under heaven during the few days of their lives." He is saying, "I didn't want to get drunk; I wanted to keep my wits about me. I just wanted to cheer my spirit." When the booze wore off, the emptiness returned.

3. Building (V4-6) – Maybe if he left behind monuments to himself of what he had built, the feeling of discontentment might go away. We see the splendor of what Solomon built in 1 Kings 7 and 2 Chronicles 8. **1 Kings 7:1 (NKJV)** "But Solomon took thirteen years to build his own house; so he finished all his house." This passage goes on to detail the splendor of the palace. **2 Chronicles 8:4-6 (NKJV)** "4 He also built Tadmor in the wilderness, and all the storage cities which he built in Hamath. <sup>5</sup> He built Upper Beth Horon and Lower Beth Horon, fortified cities *with* walls, gates, and bars, <sup>6</sup> also Baalath and all the storage cities that Solomon had, and all the chariot cities and the cities of the cavalry, and all that Solomon desired to build in Jerusalem, in Lebanon, and in all the

land of his dominion.” That is all in addition to the temple and all of its splendor. Building didn’t help the discontent.

#### 4. The Accumulation of More Wealth (V7-10)

He had large numbers of servants, livestock, gold, silver, and so much more. We are told in **2 Chronicles 9:27 (NKJV)** “The king made silver *as common* in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedar trees as abundant as the sycamores which *are* in the lowland.” He had 700 wives and 300 concubines (1 Kings 11:3).

After all the laughter, the alcohol, the buildings, and the wealth he made an assessment in Eccles 2:11 [Read].

#### B. Through Human Wisdom (2:12-17) [Read V12]

Notice the first words, “Then I turned”. He is ready to go a new direction. Pleasure was not doing anything for him anymore. Then he sees human wisdom in light of death. [Read 2:13-16]. Wisdom is better than ignorance, but the worldly wise and the ignorant both end up dead!

#### C. Through Human Labor (2:18-26)

As Solomon looks at all he has accomplished and accumulated, he recognizes that he is just going to leave it to others and who knows what they will do with it [Read 2:18-19a].

#### D. Through General Observation (3:1-5:20)

In this section, Solomon continues the theme that life is vanity, meaningless, and emptiness. We see the main reason that nothing under the sun can satisfy in **Ecclesiastes 3:11b (NKJV)** “He has put eternity in their hearts...” The reason that nothing here on earth can truly satisfy is that we were made for God. He has put eternity in our hearts.

There is example after example in this section of why life is vanity when God is left out. We are really no better off than the animals [Read 3:19]. In chapter 4, Solomon begins to envy the dead [Read 4:1-3]. In chapter 5 Solomon shows the disappointments of silver and a good crop [Read 5:10-11].

Interspersed in this section, Solomon slips in some truth from a Biblical worldview. Remember, he has come back to the Lord in his latter years as he writes this book. Some examples of the difference a biblical worldview makes are the passage about eternity in our heart (3:11).

#### E. Through Practical Morality (6:1-8:17)

This section very much resembles the book of Proverbs. There are many wise sayings, but there is a pessimism that surrounds the passage. Let me give you a few examples [Read 6:3, 7; 7:15; 8:15]. We see a summary of sorts in **Ecclesiastes 8:17 (HCSB)** “I observed all the work of God [and concluded] that man is unable to discover the work that is done under the sun. Even though a man labors hard to explore it, he cannot find it; even if the wise man claims to know it, he is unable to discover it.” This section ends in frustration and futility.

### III. The Search Concluded (9:1-12:14)

#### A. The Problem Reviewed (9:1-10:20)

Before we see Solomon’s return to the Lord, let me summarize where he went wrong and became this cynical, pessimistic, sarcastic, miserable man that Ecclesiastes describes. Oh how we need to all learn from this!

1. Solomon Treated God’s Word Casually – He knew well the law of Moses that gave some specific instructions to the kings that one day he knew Israel would have. In **Deuteronomy 17:16-19 (NKJV)** “<sup>16</sup> But he shall not multiply horses for himself, nor

cause the people to return to Egypt to multiply horses, for the Lord has said to you, 'You shall not return that way again.'<sup>17</sup> Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he greatly multiply silver and gold for himself.<sup>18</sup> "Also it shall be, when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, that he shall write for himself a copy of this law in a book, from *the one* before the priests, the Levites.<sup>19</sup> And it shall be with him, and he shall read it all the days of his life, that he may learn to fear the Lord his God and be careful to observe all the words of this law and these statutes". These commands to the future king were clear. The king was to treat them seriously – write them out himself, read them daily so that he fears God and obeys God. Solomon didn't do that. In 2 Chronicles 1:14 we are told that Solomon had 12,000 horses and 1,400 chariots. The king was not to multiply wives and yet Solomon had 700 wives. The king was not to multiply silver and gold for himself and Solomon probably had more silver and gold than any man who ever lived. He treated God's Word casually. I warn you that this will never be done without consequences. Take the word of God seriously.

2. Solomon Turned His Focus from God to the Gifts of God – God promised Solomon great riches because he had asked for governing wisdom. But it seems that Solomon became enamored with the riches and forgot God. One man said, "He abandoned fellowship with the giver in order to play with the gifts" (Ed Young Sr.). God allowed Solomon to serve as an object lesson for the fact that the stuff God gives can never substitute for God Himself.

#### B. The Problem Solved (11:1-12:14)

In chapter 11, Solomon is exhorting us to live by faith in God. We see a movement from a naturalistic worldview that leaves God out to a God saturated worldview. In 11:1-6 Solomon is exhorting us to stop waiting for perfect circumstances and to trust God. God honors those who trust Him. In 11:9-10 Solomon warns younger people that there is coming a judgment and even though it seems so far away it will come. Do you see how God is entering in to his thoughts and plans?

In Chapter 12, Solomon ties it all together [Read 12:1]. The word "remember" means more than to just call to mind. It means to act decisively; to consider with the intention of obeying. The time to walk with God is to start in your youth. So often young people who grow up in the church after High School decide to what we used to call "sow a few wild oats". Solomon screams out, "No! I've been there and done that. It is vanity, emptiness and a total waste of life." Spurgeon used to say that "Youthful sins lay a foundation for aged sorrows." So many of the major decisions that set the direction of our life are made when young – spouse, friends, vocation. Don't leave God out! You will end up saying "Vanity of vanities; all is vanity".

In verses 13-14 we see the bottom line [read]. Oh the regret Solomon must have agonized with. He had the fear of God early in his life and he turned away from it. To fear God is to worship God with a sense of awe and reverence, and then to obey Him because we know that He is holy and never overlooks or winks at disobedience. Oswald Chambers said, "When you fear God, you fear nothing else; if you do not fear God, you fear everything else."

#### CONCLUSION

What is your worldview? Is it centered on God and His Word or does it just pretty much leave God out? If you leave Him out, however "successful" you are by the world's standards, you will never come close to Solomon. Listen to this man: When you leave God out, even if you accomplish your goals – it will be emptiness, vanity, and absolute

futility. (2922)