

## 2105 - [00]-INTRODUCTION - Ecc 1.1-11

**WHY STUDY ECCLESIASTES?** Because it is part of Holy Scripture, and it needs to be study **as a unit** - not a verse here or there! We need to know the **context!** God has given it to us as a **gift to help** us!

It **rings true** to every honest heart! Its truths burn into our conscience - even although we do **not like** the message! The Book is **painfully honest!** It deals with the particular problems of our **21st** Century World! Look at the subjects: the **emptiness** of life (Tom Hanks after Oscar 'I'm dreading when the lights go out and the people go home'!!) **Insecurities** of the **rich, intelligent, famous, powerful** - underneath the facade there is fear/dread!

**Temptation** (peer pressure for students to conform to the sex/drugs and 'norms' of life!) **suffering** (who doesn't suffer?); and most of all it talks of **confusion!** Our society does **not know** how to handle the confusion of our society. Our solutions only compound the problems! Its answers only **aggravate** the wounds it was meant to heal. Our Young people are desperately needing help/advice - but our secular society (from social workers to agony aunts) are not able to improve things. The secular philosophies behind the agencies are not helping!

For me the most important reason for studying this Book is that it is **REALISTIC!** A spade is a spade! There is **no pretending** things are what they are not. Sin is sin - not an indiscretion or a misjudgment! In Ecclesiastes, life is **not** 'a walk in the park'. Life can be very painful - and the pain can be very sore. We all get our share of troubles - some get more than others! Some very much more!

In Ecclesiastes, there is the **realistic truth** of the **violation of justice** - but Solomon is quick to tell us *do not be amazed at the matter* [5:8]. The Guildford Four, The Birmingham Six incarceration of innocent people is terrible - but true. But even in God's Kingdom - don't be surprised at seeing injustices in the Church! There is no point in denying it - God **does allow** it to happen - and happen often!

Another **realism** we find in Ecclesiastes is his repeated reference to **Bad** things happen to **good** people - and **good** things happen to **bad** people! Really annoying - but it is a **fact**. *there are righteous people*

*to whom it happens according to the **deeds** of the **wicked**, and there are **wicked people** to whom it happens according to the **deeds** of the **righteous**. I said that this also is vanity [8:14] Ecc helps us how to cope with such things and to make **sense/meaning** out of life!*

Ecclesiastes is **frank** about the **image-makers** of our society and the **manipulators** of the weak and vulnerable, and the **exploiters** of the poor/needly as portrayed on the TV/media! Ecclesiastes corrects the **misrepresentations** and **myths** of sex/drugs being something good!

**THE AUTHOR** - *the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem and I, the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem [12]*

There is a host of verses which **confirm it to be Solomon**. Luther says in 'Table Talk' - 'To tell the truth, this book was **not written** by Solomon **himself** with his **own** hand' - however 'but the words heard from his own mouth by others, were finally arranged by the learned men, as we now have them' [Leopold p15]. It is amazing how many **critics** dismiss a piece of writing or a phrase from someone because the author did not have that style of grammar or that turn of phrase - when of course the author could be quoting from someone else!

The word Solomon means **peace!** There are **no vowels** at all in the original Hebrew. Its the same word as Shalom! Same consonants! He calls himself 'The Preacher' = 'qoheleth', one who addresses an assembly (OT congregation). A President. Many think the best word is **Professor!** He certainly was a **student** and wrote many books.

Solomon was undoubtedly a **philosopher!** That is clear from this book alone! He composed poems and proverbs. **3,000 proverbs...** **10005 songs** [1Kin 4:32]. Solomon learned and wrote as he went along life journey! He noted things as soon as he recognised them to be what they were. Wrote the Song of Solomon in his **youth!** He wrote Proverbs in his **middle-age!** And Ecclesiastes in his **old age!** Only someone with the **experience** and **knowledge** of the 'highs' and 'lows' of life could write such a book as Ecclesiastes.

This Book then was written **after** Solomon's **backsliding**. *I find something **more bitter than death** : the woman whose **heart is snares and nets**, and whose hands are **fetters** [7:26].* Solomon is writing from sad and bitter experience. Here is someone who has **tried**

**everything** this world can offer - and found it wanting (lacking in what it promised)! Here is a man who has been where many people wanted to be, and many people have been, and and was bitterly disappointed. But he has tremendous **advice** for us - he can **help** us in the midst of life's troubles. He can help us with the **priorities** of life. Solomon has **learned** from his griefs and troubles. Solomon wants **you/I** to **avoid** the **difficulties** he made for himself. He wants to **spare** you the troubles and sorrows he got himself into. He too has the **answer** for each and everyone of us regarding **this life+afterlife!**

**The PURPOSE of the BOOK** - To tell us life is **meaningless!** *Vanity of vanities. All is vanity.* What a statement! Does he really mean that this wonderful world is all completely vain? That there is **nothing** here that is good and has meaning and purpose? The life of work, nature, wisdom, achievements...etc, etc... **all pointless?**

**Yes** he does - but as we see again and again in the Book, meaningless **without God!** No one, but no one, can be fulfilled and find true and lasting satisfaction without God. Nothing can fill the void in man's heart but God Himself. As Augustine said 'Man is restless until he finds rest in You'. So the main purpose of the Book is to **direct us** to the **Creator** and **Sustainer** of our lives - God. *The end of the matter; all has been heard.* (We have **studied it all** - there is nothing more to say) except '*Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man* [12:13]. **This** is what we were made for! As our Catechisms tell us: 'Man's chief end is to glorify God and to **enjoy Him** forever'! We were made for God - not ourselves!

Solomon confirms this by asking a question, *What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?* [3] The answer: 'Nothing - there is **no profit** at all, at all - if he does not have God at the **centre** of his life! Jesus said it too *For what does it **profit** a man to gain the whole world and to forfeit his life?* [Mar 8:36]. **APP** It is **natural** for man to ask the question once he has grown to years of understanding **What is the purpose of life? **Why** am I here? **Where** am I going? Why is there pain, sorrow, grief, problems? The whole of life is fraught with many questions. Even the great philosopher Immanuel Kant had to admit that 'Two things fill my mind with ever new and increasing wonder and awe, the more often and more intensely the**

reflection dwells on them, the starry heavens above and the moral law within? Creation and conscience. The fact that we live in a world where justice is flouted, evil goes unpunished, and virtue is unrewarded, Kant had to acknowledge that there must be a world beyond, where wrongs will be righted by a moral, omnipotent and omniscient Being who is perfectly just. Solomon here draws our attention to 4 aspects of life which challenge us re life without God!

(1) **What is the Purpose/Meaning of Time as it marches on?** *A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever* [4]. What is the purpose/meaning of people living on earth. **Where** do they go? They must go **somewhere!** **Why** did they come? Our parents, grandparents, the old filmstars, footballers, politicians! Is life just an **entertainment** - if so, for whom?

(2) **What about Creation?** *The sun rises and the sun goes down... the wind blows to the south and goes around to the north...All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full* [5-7]. What keeps the world going round? The seasons come and go! Who keeps them going? Who **controls** them? Why not a **tsunami every day?**

(3) **The Yearning of Human Nature** - *the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing* [8]. **Man aspires** - why? Because he is made in the image of God. God has given mankind the senses, gifts, talents for **using**, and he knows cries out within himself for fulfilment. Have we not all said 'If I had **that**, then I would be satisfied - but after having it for a while - we're not satisfied!?' *All things are full of weariness* [8a]. We want something **more/new!**

(4) **We must learn from History!** Without God, there is **nothing new under the sun...Is there a thing of which it is said, 'This is new'?** *It has been already in the ages before us... There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things* [9-11]. Despite all our inventions/technology - things are just the same. The problem is mankind himself, his **sin!** Mankind does **not learn** from history. We thought we would learn from the Enlightenment philosophers - but we get **Auschwitz, Holocaust, 9/11, ISIS.** Only **God** can give us something **new**, **Christ's Good News**, *Behold, I make all things new! Behold, I create a new heavens...a new earth*