

PREACHING THROUGH ECCLESIASTES AND SONG OF SOLOMON

The word "Ecclesiastes" is the Latin translation of the Hebrew *Koheleth*, meaning "preacher" or "Convener of the assembly." The title appears in the first verse of the book. Based on the experience of Solomon, son of David, King of Israel, it gives his observations concerning the futility of all that men count worthy in this present life, and concludes, "Fear God, and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of men" (12:13).

You will find in the book many wise sayings, some of which have found their way into the common speech of men.

A deep uncertainty about that which lies beyond the grave is felt when God is left out of the picture. This results in a pessimistic attitude which contrasts sharply with the confidence that Christians have because of Christ's victory over death.

The book reminds us of the ultimate power of God, and the frailty of all things which do not have their foundation in Him.

ANALYSIS OF THE BOOK

- Chapters 1-3 The indulgences of the flesh in pleasure, and of the mind in wisdom, are a "striving after wind."
- 4-10 Solomon's experience shows certain evils to be avoided, and guides toward a more meaningful and happy life.
- 11,12 Ultimate trust in God and obedience to Him is the only sure way.

The Song of Solomon, is titled in Hebrew "The Song of Songs, which is Solomon's." It appears to have been used in celebration of the marriage of Solomon with his favorite wife, "The Shulamite." It is a series of long songs, alternating parts sung by the bridegroom to his bride, by the bride to her husband, and by an attendant chorus of maidens. This is the Bible's tenderest romantic literature. It has been used by the Jewish nation to sing of God's tenderness toward His chosen people, Israel, and it is used by Christians to speak of Christ's love for His bride, the Church (compare Ephesians 5:23-24). In the time of Christ the Song of Solomon was read at the Passover season, to remind

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them of God's tenderness to Israel, and Ecclesiastes was read at the Feast of Tabernacles, its somber reminders giving balance to the otherwise merry observances of this most joyous of Jewish festal seasons.

Solomon's youthful love for his bride is reflected in the Song; the practical wisdom of his mature years in the Book of Proverbs; and the somber conclusions of his old age in Ecclesiastes.

Sermon Outlines Provided:

"The Preacher" (Eccl. 1:1; 12:9-14)

"Solomon and Jesus: Vanity and Victory" (Eccl. 2:1-11)

"Of Sowing and Reaping" (Eccl. 11:1-7)

"The Shade of the (Apple) Tree" (Song of Solomon 2:3-6)

Other Suggested Sermon Topics:

"The Cord Not Quickly Broken" (Eccl. 4:7-12)

"Wisdom in the House of God" (Eccl. 5:1-7)

"The Crackling of Thorns" (Eccl. 7:1-10)

"Life's Answer to Death" (Eccl. 9:4-10; I John 3:1-3)

"The Days of Thy Youth" (Eccl. 11:9-12:8)

QUESTIONS OVER ECCLESIASTES AND SONG OF SOLOMON

1. What did the writer of the Book of Ecclesiastes set his mind to do? (1:13, 17)
2. What was Solomon's conclusion about all the activities his hands had done? (2:11, 17)
3. What problems will he who loves money have? (5:10-17)
4. What is better than the shouting of a ruler? (9:17)
5. How difficult is it to know the activity of God? (11:5)
6. Who wrote the Song of Songs? (1:1)
7. How did Solomon arrive on his wedding day? (3:6-11)
8. How did Solomon describe the beauty of his beloved? (4:1-7)
9. How did Solomon's beloved describe him? (5:10-16)
10. Of what people was Solomon's beloved? (6:13)
11. Whom did Solomon desire and why? (7:10)
12. How strong is love? (8:6-7)

PREACHING THROUGH ECCLESIASTES

THE PREACHER

(Ecclesiastes 1:1; 12:9-14)

INTRODUCTION — A strange kind of preacher.

- A. *Koheleth*—“caller, congregator, preacher”—becomes the name of the book.
- B. Not used elsewhere in the Bible.
 - 1. Does not offer sacrifices as a priest.
 - 2. Does not approach the prophet’s office. Speaks of God from experience; not as preacher of the Gospel.
- C. The peculiar connection with Solomon.

I. WHAT MAKES A PREACHER? Must not limit to pulpit orators.

- A. A heart full of something that needs to be said—a great conviction. “Woe is unto me if I preach not the gospel” (I Cor. 9:16).
 - 1. Not necessarily great ability—“Too many authors; too few preachers.” The new generation of preachers comes frequently from the work of men having moderate ability.
 - 2. “In the hundred years after the New Testament was written, there is no record of a single outstanding preacher. But Christianity was spread by ordinary people, telling the story of the love of Christ to those whom they met in the circle of their friends and acquaintances.”
- B. Desire to share one’s conviction with others.
 - 1. The “every man to his own taste” person will never make a preacher.
 - 2. With Solomon, it may have been a desire to leave a lasting impression. If so, he succeeded here better than anywhere else.
 - 3. In the Christian: a love of his fellow man, and interest in his welfare.

II. THE ACTIVITY OF THE PREACHER.

- A. He still taught wisdom—Nothing else needs to be done so persistently.

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1. Those who have heard have not understood.
2. There are others who have not heard.
3. Those who have heard and understood have forgotten—it comes undone.

B. He still studied.

1. "Pondered, and sought out, and set in order many proverbs"—(Methods).
2. Sought to find out words of truth—acceptable words—(Material).

C. The words of the wise are as goads—he will not seek to please men.

1. If he speaks only good, it does not mean that evil is not present. (A. Campbell, accused of being unkind in excoriation of denominationalism: "The physician is not less benevolent when as a surgeon he amputates a limb than when he administers an anodyne—yet there would be a manifest difference in his spirit and temper in the judgment of a spectator who did not enter into his views and motives in these two actions.")
2. If all things were right, there would be no need of preaching (Acts 2:37).
3. "No salvation without condemnation."

III. THE MESSAGE OF THE PREACHER.

A. Fear God—reverence, respect, awe, worship.

1. Of the lion-torn corpse beside the road, "It is the man of God who was disobedient to the word of the Lord" (I Kings 13:26).
2. For Christians this is a hymn of praise for His love.

B. Keep His commandments—for Christians "All authority hath been given unto Me" (Matt. 28:18).

CONCLUSION —

Judgment will reveal obedience and disobedience. "The Father hath committed all judgment unto the Son" (John 5:22).

SOLOMON AND JESUS:
VANITY AND VICTORY

(Ecclesiastes 2:1-11)

INTRODUCTION —

Life a labyrinth, or maze—what path will bring us out right? Solomon made deliberate scientific experiments in many ways. As Edison, he “knew a hundred things that wouldn’t work.” Men profit by Edison’s experience, not repeating his false starts—but many are repeating Solomon’s experiments daily.

I. THE CONTRAST OF CONCLUSIONS.

- A. Solomon—“All is vanity”—emptiness—futility—“chasing after wind.”
- B. Jesus: “For of His fulness we all received, and grace for grace” (John 1:16). Growing up in Christ. “Till we all attain unto the unity of faith, and of the knowledge of the Son of God, unto a fullgrown man, unto the measure of the stature of the fulness of Christ” (Eph. 4:13, ASV).

II. THE CONTRAST OF THE METHODS.

- A. Solomon—self centered—seeking to have. “I will prove thee” “I made ME great works” “I gather ME silver.”
 - 1. “Whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them.” Self indulgent, deliberately seeking happiness. —He did at last conclude, “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (12:13).
- B. Jesus started where Solomon left off: “I must be about my Father’s business” (Luke 2:49). “I came not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me.”
 - 1. God-conscious rather than self-conscious.
 - 2. Set a new pattern for life:
 - Not what we have, but what we are;
 - Not what we receive, but what we give;
 - Not what enters in, but what proceeds out;
 - Not how we are served, but how we serve.

III. THE SPECIFIC CONTRASTS.

A. Mirth.

1. Solomon sought laughter—pleasure—wine—folly. (The experiment is being repeated daily and nightly in every house of entertainment.) They are sad places next morning.
2. Jesus was a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief. "Blessed are ye that weep now, for ye shall laugh" (Luke 6:21). "Woe unto you, ye that laugh now! For ye shall mourn and weep" (Luke 6:25). "Verily, verily, I say unto you, that ye shall weep and lament, but the world shall rejoice; ye shall be sorrowful, but your sorrow shall be turned to joy" (John 16:20). (He knew tears, but never remorse.)

B. Material accumulation.

1. Solomon said, "I made me great works"—houses, vineyards, gardens, parks, pools. (Among the worthier efforts of man, but definitely limited in scope.)
2. Jesus said, "A man's life consisteth not in the abundance of the things which he possesseth" (Luke 12:15). "The foxes have holes, and the birds of the heaven have nests, but the Son of man hath not where to lay his head" (Luke 9:58). "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt" (Matt. 6:20).

C. Servants.

1. Solomon had men—maids—servants born in the house (Matt. 20:25-28).

D. Wisdom.

1. "I applied my heart to know wisdom—" (1:17) "My wisdom remained" (I Cor. 1:26-31).
2. (Christ's wisdom known for its depth and height, not breadth.)

CONCLUSION —

"To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of eternal life" (John 6:68).

PREACHING THROUGH ECCLESIASTES
OF SOWING AND REAPING
(Ecclesiastes 11:1-7)

INTRODUCTION —

The changing point in the sonnet of Ecclesiastes. That which goes before is introduction—the unaided work of men's hands is vain. There follows the conclusion—that in the providence of God life is still worthwhile. Thesis: Be diligent—you don't know which part of your diligence will be rewarded. Give—not every gift will bring joy; some will, and you don't know which. Plant—not every seed will grow; some will, and you don't know which.

“He that observeth the wind shall not sow; and he that regardeth the clouds shall not reap.” Agricultural terms—Those who are overly afraid of doing something wrong will not do anything at all.

I. IN BUSINESS AFFAIRS.

“It may get too hot to work; think I'll wait and see.”

- A. Cast your bread upon the waters—sow grain on the water that irrigates the field.
- B. Parable of the talents—It has a spiritual meaning but it is a business parable. The man's only sin was that he did nothing (Matt. 25:14-30).

II. IN BENEVOLENCE.

- A. Red Cross drive—some will not support it, fearing some money may be misused—What are you *supporting*? Not, what are you avoiding?
- B. Scene of the judgment (Matt. 25:31-46). “I was hungry and ye gave me no meat”: “What have we done to deserve to be cast into outer darkness?” “Nothing—and by doing nothing you deserve it!”

III. IN CITIZENSHIP.

- A. The breakdown of law enforcement. Officers discouraged by lack of co-operation. Citizens discouraged by lack of success. Where a principle is at issue, those who weakly watch and offer no assistance to either side have

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no part with the valiant. "To be indifferent to error or to any evil is to give great comfort and encouragement to error and evil. And in such circumstances, indifference is not neutrality. In such circumstances, indifference is an active evil."—*Richard L. Evans*. "The probability that we may fail in the struggle ought not to deter us from the support of a cause we believe to be just."—*A. Lincoln*.

IV. IN CHURCH WORK—SPIRITUAL APPLICATION OF THE TALENTS.

- A. One won't speak or lead in prayer for fear of being laughed at. Better the man who replied, "With my meager ability and training I am serving God the best I can; how about you?"
- B. The apostle Peter spoke up—he said many wrong things—but we're glad he spoke.
- C. So sin goes unrebuked. The sorrowing go uncomforted; The wandering continue to wander; because Christians, afraid they'll say the wrong thing, say nothing.

V. MOST DAMAGE IN MATTER OF EVANGELISM.

- A. Who is successful? Not those of great training, but those with a holy boldness.
- B. Fear of driving away—
 - 1. But how about the multiplied thousands who perish in the fearful silence?
 - 2. Pray to speak as we ought to speak.

VI. THE BELIEVER WHO WILL NOT ACCEPT CHRIST FOR FEAR HE CAN'T HOLD OUT.

- A. You can never hold on to what you don't take hold of.
- B. Two things we will guarantee—
 - 1. You will do some things wrong.
 - 2. With diligence you will plant what God can bring to fruition.

CONCLUSION — Revelation 21:8.

Greatly begin! though thou have time
But for a line, be that sublime—
Not failure, but low aim, is crime. — *Lowell*.

PREACHING THROUGH SONG OF SOLOMON
THE SHADE OF THE (APPLE) TREE
(For Senior Citizens Day)
(Song of Solomon 2:3-6)

INTRODUCTION — We enjoy refreshment in the shade.

- A. The bride in Solomon's Song speaks of both shade and nourishment in praising her beloved as like "the apple tree among the trees of the wood."
- B. The reference suggests the experience of other Biblical characters in the shade of various trees.

I. ADAM'S TREES IN THE GARDEN OF EDEN.
(Gen. 3:6-11)—A PLACE OF HIDING.

- A. Having eaten of the forbidden fruit, he knew guilt.
- B. Shade and darkness beckoned to attempted escape.
- C. He learned the futility of hiding from God (See Psalm 139:7, 11, 12).

II. ABRAHAM'S OAKS OF MAMRE. (Gen. 18:1-15)—
PLACE OF HOSPITALITY.

- A. He welcomed to the comfort of shade.
- B. He offered the companionship of friends.
- C. He provided the best of food for his guests.
- D. He received honor and reward from God himself.

III. ELIJAH'S JUNIPER TREE. (I Kings 19:1-8)—
PLACE OF REST AND REFRESHMENT

- A. Depression and exhaustion sent him there.
 - 1. He suffered the backwash of high victory at Mt. Carmel, like the undertow of a great wave.
 - 2. He suffered the physical exhaustion of a long journey in flight from Jezebel.
- B. Rest and refreshment sent him on his way.
 - 1. Sleep worked its own measure of restoration.
 - 2. Food, divinely given, provided strength.
 - 3. Renewed assignment sent him on God's business.
 - 4. These values are presently available in a shady place among friends.

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IV. THE GREEN TREES OF IDOLATRY. (II Kings 16:4)—PLACE OF WORSHIPING THE CREATION WORLD MORE THAN THE CREATOR.

- A. Danger of prizing the gift more than the Giver.
 - 1. Shade trees treasured in a parched land.
 - 2. The association with Father Abraham and Mamre may have been tempting.
 - 3. In any case idols were worshiped "under every green tree."
- B. False worship (false sense of values) brought condemnation. — Esp. of prophets Isaiah and Jeremiah.

V. JONAH'S BRUSH ARBOR AND VINE. (Jonah 4) PLACE OF FRUSTRATION AND INSTRUCTION.

- A. Disappointed that his prediction of Nineveh's fall had not been fulfilled, Jonah felt personally rejected.
 - B. He erected a brush arbor for shade, and God raised a vine to assist.
 - C. The vine destroyed, Jonah's depression intensified.
 - D. God gave a suntanned Jonah instruction in God's way.

VI. NATHANAEL'S FIG TREE. (John 1:43-51)—PLACE OF DISCOVERY.

- A. As God had discovered Adam hiding among the trees, so Jesus "saw" Nathanael in his place of relaxation.
- B. That discovery keyed Nathanael's discovery of Jesus as Messiah.

VII. GOD, NOT TREES, IS THE ULTIMATE PROTECTIVE SHADE.

This, in prophetic figure, says Song of Solomon 2:3-6.

- 1. "The Lord is thy keeper: The Lord is thy shade upon thy right hand. The sun shall not smite thee by day, nor the moon by night" (Psalm 121:5).
- 2. The Lord's presence sustains and nourishes. ("Jesus, Lover of My Soul")

CONCLUSION —

Prophecy fulfilled in the Tree of Life (Rev. 22:1-5). Fruit every month, and leaves for healing. Thus sustained, His people "shall reign for ever and ever" (v. 5).