

Should the Book of Ecclesiastes Be in the Bible?

Written by Dr. Harold R. Carpenter -



Dr. Harold & Myrna
Carpenter

TEXT: Ecclesiastes 1:1-13

1 The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem: 2 "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." 3 What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? 4 Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. 5 The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. 6 The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. 7 All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again. 8 All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. 9 What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun. 10 Is there anything of which one can say, "Look! This is something new"? It was here already, long ago; it was here before our time. 11 There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow. 12 I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven (Ecclesiastes 1:1-13, NIV).

Introduction:

A pessimist is one who wears suspenders when he has a perfectly good belt. A pessimist is one who has an inclination to emphasize adverse aspects, conditions and possibilities or to expect the worst possible outcome. This morning we are considering a book which is extremely pessimistic. So much so that I was asked this week why it is even included in the Bible. Good question! But there is also a good answer!

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Winston Churchill said of this book; It is ". . . a riddle wrapped in a mystery inside an enigma." So, let's see if we can unwrap the mystery and solve the riddle and thus clear up the enigma of this book today.

One part of the problem may lie in the translation that we grew up with. The King James translation that renders the Hebrew word *hebel* as vanity. In our common usage today this word means having an inflated pride in oneself or filled with conceit. Actually the Hebrew word means worthlessness, meaninglessness, emptiness, or futility.

I. The Writer of the Riddle

A. Ecclesiastes comes from the Greek word *Ekklesiastes* that in turn comes from the Hebrew word, *Qoheleth*, meaning "the preacher or leader/speaker of the Assembly."

B. Solomon, the son of David and king in Jerusalem set out to find the meaning of life by exploring the philosophies by which men try to live. He not only explored them, he tried them.

C. Solomon was well qualified to conduct the search:

1. He had brains, power, fame, time, and money (Oh yes, I almost forgot women).
2. He had already reached the pinnacle of success
 - a. The kingdom was at its largest extension.
 - b. He built the temple that even his father had been unable to do.
 - c. The kingdom was united.
 - d. He had it all!
3. But he wrote:

2 "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." 3 What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? (Ecclesiastes 1:2-3, NIV).

D. Solomon could very well represent the average American today: 1. We have so much but we feel so empty. 2. We ask ourselves the question "Is there a key to joy in life? Is life worth living?"

II. The Search for Meaning

A. **Knowledge:**

"I devoted myself to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under heaven" (Ecclesiastes 1:13, NIV).

1. We live in the information age.
 2. Knowledge is power and secures wealth.
 3. If we can only understand something we can conquer it.
 4. We can unlock the secrets of the universe, but we still can't find happiness!
- B. **Pleasures:**
"I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure" [Wine, women, and song] (Ecclesiastes 2:10, NIV).

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1. If ever there was a man who delighted in the sensuous pleasures of life it was Solomon.
2. I think the sensuousness of our society today would make even Solomon blush.

a. Sex sells:

Victoria's Secret lingerie

Serenity panty liners

Dove soap's 2000 body parts. b. Sex draws an audience and builds the ratings:

Q: Why do the producers show such degraded sensuous programs?

A: Because they attract the most viewers! c. Personal pleasure comes before all else. C. **Pos sessions:**

4 I undertook great projects: I built houses for myself and planted vineyards. 5 I made gardens and parks and planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. 6 I made reservoirs to water groves of flourishing trees. 7 I bought male and female slaves and had other slaves who were born in my house. I also owned more herds and flocks than anyone in Jerusalem before me. 8 I amassed silver and gold for myself, and the treasure of kings and provinces. I acquired men and women singers, and a harem as well--the delights of the heart of man. 9 I became greater by far than anyone in Jerusalem before me (Ecclesiastes 2:4-9, NIV).

We live in a society which values men by the wealth they possess:

1. The \$45 million dollar home on the market in Los Angeles
2. Bill Gates on one side and the Gettys on the other side
3. A \$35 million fixer-upper across the street
4. Check today's Springfield newspaper for a bargain-priced home at only \$1,295,000
5. The man at the grocery store this week who did not have time for church and God because his goal in life is to make money, lots of money and to be wealthy.
6. I think the rich fool of Luke 12:20 now lives in the United States.

D. **Labor:**

18 I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. 19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the work into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. 20 So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. 21 For a man may do his work with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then he must leave all he owns to someone who has not worked for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune. 22 What does a man get for all the toil and anxious striving with which he labors under the sun? 23 All his days his work is pain and grief; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is meaningless (Ecclesiastes 2:18-23, NIV).

1. We identify who we are with what we do.
2. We justify our existence with what we accomplish.
3. Job comes before family, home, and Church.
4. The bottom line is that you are not indispensable:

You could be a secretary who takes shorthand!

You could be a typewriter repairman!

You could be an instructor in WordPerfect! 6. Is it any wonder Solomon wrote:

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2 "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless." 3 What does man gain from all his labor at which he toils under the sun? (Ecclesiastes 1:2-3, NIV).

III. The Message of the Riddle Revealed

A. Knowledge is meaningless!

"For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief" (Ecclesiastes 1:18, NIV).

B. Pleasures and possessions are meaningless!

"Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun" (Ecclesiastes 2:11, NIV).

C. Is everything meaningless?

1. No! Wisdom and joy will last **if** you take it from the hand of God.

2. The man who pleases God is given the gift of joy!

24 A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work.

This too, I see, is from the hand of God, 25 for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? 26 To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and

happiness... (Ecclesiastes 2:24-26, NIV).

12 I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. 13 That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil--this is the gift of God. 14 I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him (Ecclesiastes 3:12-14, NIV).

5. Only the Eternal God can satisfy the longing of our inner beings:

11 He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. 12 I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live (Ecclesiastes 3:11-12, NIV).

CONCLUSION:

Enjoyment and fulfillment do not come from things, but from a right relationship with God.

Solomon tried it all and found it meaningless.

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His conclusion can be summed up in two verses:

1 Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them"--

13 Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole [duty] of man. 14 For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil (Ecclesiastes 12:1, 13, NIV).

The message of Solomon to America and to the Church is that we must get our priorities right:

Wealth does not bring happiness.
Knowledge does not give meaning.
Power does not bring satisfaction.
Labor does not bring fulfillment.

Listen to the words of Jesus in Luke 9,

23 Then he said to them all: "If anyone would come after me, he must deny himself and take up his cross daily and follow me. 24 For whoever wants to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for me will save it. 25 What good is it for a man to gain the whole world, and yet lose or forfeit his very self? (Luke 9:23-25, NIV).

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This is the outline of the sermon Dr. Harold Carpenter preached 6 July 2003. Dr. Carpenter and his wife served as missionaries for twenty years. Dr. Carpenter also taught missions for twenty years at Central Bible College. He now serves as Pastor of Fair Grove Assembly of God, Fair Grove MO.

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In Essentials: Unity; In non-essentials: Liberty; In all things: Charity—Peter Meiderlin

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