

# The Book of ECCLESIASTES

(Solomon's Last Sermon)

**TITLE:** Ecclesiastes means "The Preacher". It is a sermon and personal testimony of a great preacher.

**AUTHOR:** Solomon. He was the son of David, king in Jerusalem, Ecc.1:2. He was king over Israel in Jerusalem, Ecc.1:12. After Solomon, the kings in Jerusalem did not rule over Israel, but only over the tribes of Judah & Benjamin. He sought after wisdom (Ecc.1:13) and did great works (Ecc.2:4-9), showing again that this was Solomon, 1 Kings 10:23.

**TIME:** Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes when he was an old, backslidden man, 1 Kings 11:4-8, in about 935 B.C. The tone and spirit of the sermon was negative and sorrowful, because that was what was in the heart of Solomon. The writings of Solomon reveal what was working in his heart during the different stages of his life:

\* Proverbs 1-9 contains much of the teachings of his parents, Prov.1:8. Solomon had some good preparations as a child. He was continually encouraged to seek after wisdom (Prov.4:1-9) so when he was young man, he asked for (and received) wisdom, 1 Kings 3:5-12. Solomon was also continually warned by his parents, David & Bathsheba, about the dangers of strange women, Prov.5:1-14, 6:20-35, 7:1-27. This was a family iniquity he had to keep himself from, Ex.34:7, .

\* The Song of Solomon was written when he was a young king (he still had only 140 in his harem, S. of Sol.6:8, and many of these were probably only political alliances). It shows the purity that was still in his life.

\* Proverbs 10-29 were written by Solomon during his middle years, 1 Kgs.4:20-34 and are full of godly wisdom.

\* Ecclesiastes was written after Solomon had already become the greatest and richest king, having done great works, 1 Kgs.10:14-29, Ecc.2:4-9. But he had lost his relationship with God, and the joy of his salvation, Ecc.1:2. Because Solomon did not follow the warnings of his parents, he let his heart be turned away from the Lord in his older years by his evil foreign wives & concubines, 1 Kings 11:1-8. He became disillusioned, carnal, and full of unbelief, Eccl.7:28. He had 1,000 wives and concubines, but could no longer find even *one* good one!

**THEME:** "All is Vanity". Vanity means "meaningless, empty, useless". The words "vanity, vanities, and vain" are used 38 times in the book. The number 38 speaks of the years that the Israelites wandered uselessly in the wilderness. Solomon's life had lost all purpose and meaning, like the wandering Israelites. "Under the sun" is repeated 28 times, showing his natural perspective or sight (compare Ecc.9:11 & Rom.9:16). Also he wrote "vexation of spirit" 10 times, "grasping for the wind" 9 times, "travail" 8 times, and "labor" 23 times. Solomon had gained much sorrow and carried many burdens.

**THE DOCTRINE** of Ecclesiastes is full of mixture, some good and some bad. For example, Solomon changed his good wisdom of Proverbs 10:7 into the corrupted wisdom of Ecc.2:16. See also Prov.3:13 / Ecc.1:18, Prov.22:6 / Ecc.2:18-19, Prov.14:23 / Ecc.1:3, Prov.23:31-32 / Ecc.2:3. Yet the book is part of the inspired, pure, Word of God! The Bible sometimes reveals truth by exposing error. Some things said in the Bible must be correctly judged, before we can learn what God wants to teach us (such as with the mixed counsel of Job's 3 friends- *ex: Job.4:17-21*). *Also, Lk.4:10-11*. The book of Ecclesiastes shows us the heart of a backslidden preacher, *what he feels and says*. We can learn important truth by understanding what happens in a heart that starts to backslide! Some lessons for us are:

\* The condition of our heart will influence what we preach, Mt.12:34. When you go through difficult times in your spiritual life, you must cry out to God not only for yourself, but also that your ministry will remain pure.

\* The condition of our heart will be imparted and multiplied to those we preach and minister to, Prov.18:21. Solomon had a divided heart (1 Kings.11:6), which eventually lead to a divided kingdom, 1 Kings 11:11-13.

Solomon spent 7 years building the Temple, but he also spent 13 years building his own palace, 1 Kings 6:38-7:1. In the kingdom of Judah there were 7 good kings and 13 bad kings, showing that the same mixture that was in Solomon's life was imparted and multiplied to his kingdom.

\* We need to pay close attention to the teachings and warnings that come out of our mouth, because many times they are for the preacher more than for the congregation! The most often repeated warnings in Solomon's writings are against avoiding evil women, yet he married many of them. He preached about our need for self control (Prov.16:32, Prov.25:16) but he did not personally do it, Ecc.2:10. He warned about the danger of becoming a proud, unteachable leader (Ecc.4:13) but that is what he became! Wisdom does not protect us against destruction unless we also obey it! Preaching the truth does not help us unless we practice what we preach, Jam.1:22, 1 Cor.9:24-27, Mt.23:1-3.

\* Mixture in our life must be removed (Ecc.10:1) or it will destroy our ministry and life. Solomon knew that it was important to catch the little foxes that want to destroy the fruit of the vines, S. of Sol.2:15. This speaks of the works of the flesh that try to destroy the life of Christ within us, Jn.15:5. But Solomon had no self control (Ecc.2:10) and it led him to become spiritually empty and barren, seeing only vanity.

\* Ministry does not satisfy. Solomon was one of the world's greatest religious leaders as a preacher, author, leader, counselor, administrator, songwriter, and church builder. But God never intended for our ministry to take the place of our relationship with God, S. of Sol.1:6, Jer.2:13. That alone can truly satisfy the desires of the human heart, Ps.16:11.

\* A person who is backsliding will turn to natural substitutes for spiritual things. He substituted: human love instead of God's love (1 Kings 11:1-4); wine instead of being filled with the Spirit (Ecc.2:3, Eph.5:18); the praise of man instead of the praise of God (Ecc.2:9, 1 Kings 11:9); earthly riches instead of heavenly treasures (Ecc.2:4-9, Mt.6:19-21). A preacher can be naturally successful and busy, long after his relationship with God has grown lukewarm, Rev.3:17-18. Beware of substituting activity for fruitfulness! Big projects, growing ministries, and building programs can be very dangerous for your spiritual life, 2 Kngs.6:1-5, Mk.4:18-19, S. of Sol.1:6. Trying to accomplish great works can also burden the people, and can lead to a church split, 1 Kings 12:1-20.

\* Natural success and prosperity does not satisfy. Solomon was the richest, most powerful, wisest, and most famous man on earth! He had the most wives and concubines! He had everything (Ecc.2:3-10) yet he had nothing that lasted, Ecc.2:11, 1:2-3, 11:8-9. Paul lost everything he had (Phil.3:7-8), yet he gained everything, 2 Cor.6:10, Col.2:10, Mt.16:25.

\* Solomon turned back to the Lord in his old age (Ecc.12) but was never fully restored from his bitterness and carnality. His last sermon showed that his heart was still overwhelmed by the vanity, vexation, and burdens that his backsliding had produced. Solomon is in heaven, but he lost so much of the eternal rewards that he should have gained, 1 Cor.3:11-15.

#### A SIMPLE OUTLINE:

Introduction: All is Vanity, Ecc.1:1-2

Main body: Proofs that All is Vanity, Ecc.1:3-12:12

Conclusion: Fear & Obey God, Ecc.12:13-14