**Ecclesiastes**

Imagine an assembly of Jewish people as they listen to King Solomon discuss an important problem. Solomon is the “Preacher” in this assembly (1:1–2, 12; 7:27; 12:8–10), and the topic he is discussing is this: “Is life really worth living?” Can you think of a more practical subject? And can you think of a better person to discuss it? For Solomon was the wisest of the kings, a man whose wisdom and wealth enabled him to experience a full life.

**The Problem Declared (1–2)**

“Is life really worth living?” This is the question that Solomon is debating. In 1:1–3 he states his first conclusion: life is not worth living because life is full of vanity (emptiness). Then he states his reasons:

1. **Man is only a cog in a big wheel (1:4–11).** What is man compared to the vastness of the world? Everything in nature continues, century after century, but man is here for a brief space of time, then he dies. It all seems so meaningless. It is vanity. (Solomon uses this word “vanity” thirty-seven times in this book.) Since life is so short and man so insignificant, why bother to live at all?
2. **Man cannot understand it all (1:12–18).** Solomon was the wisest of men, yet when he tried to understand the meaning of life, he was baffled. How many wise philosophers have tried to explain life, only to admit their utter ignorance.
3. **Man’s pleasures do not satisfy (2:1–11).** Solomon had plenty of money, pleasure, culture, and fame; yet he admitted that these things did not satisfy. Nor did they last. See what Jesus said about this in Luke 12:13–21.
4. **Death ends all (2:12–23).** “One event” (death) happens both to the fool and to the wise, to the rich and to the poor. A person labors all his life, then dies and leaves the wealth for another person to enjoy. Is this fair?

These four arguments seem to lead to one grand conclusion: it is not worthwhile for a human being to live. But Solomon does not draw that conclusion. In 2:24–26 he tells us that we should accept the blessings of God now, enjoy them, and benefit from them. This agrees with Paul’s counsel in 1 Tim. 6:17.

**The Problem Discussed (3–10)**

1. **God has a purpose in our lives (chap. 3).** God balances life: birth-death, sorrow-joy, meeting-parting, so that we can learn to accept and enjoy what we have (vv. 12–13). God has set “eternity” in our hearts (v. 11). This means that the things of the world can never really satisfy us. Therefore, we must find God’s will for our lives and let Him “mix the ingredients” according to His purpose.
2. **God gives riches according to His will (chaps. 4–6).** These chapters discuss; Why is one person rich and another poor? Why is there injustice and inequality in the world? These are questions that can’t be clearly answered but we know, God has a plan for us, that we should not trust in uncertain riches but in the Lord. Do not live for riches, but use them according to God’s will.
3. **God’s wisdom can guide us through life (chaps. 7–10).** The word wisdom (or wise) is used over thirty times in chapters 7–12. It is true that man’s wisdom cannot fathom God’s plan, but God can give us wisdom to know and do His will. Simply because we cannot understand everything does not mean we should give up in despair. Trust God and do what He tells you to do.Did you notice that in each of these sections, Solomon emphasizes the enjoyment of God’s blessings and the reality of death? Read 3:12–21, 5:18–6:7, and 8:15–9:4.

**The Problem Decided (11–12)**

Solomon has already decided that man is not a “cog in the wheel,” that there is nothing wrong with enjoying riches and pleasures to God’s glory, and that our inability to understand all that God is doing is no hindrance to a happy life. In 11–12, Solomon sums up the whole matter with three practical points:

1. **Live by faith (11:1–6).** Circumstances are never going to be ideal in this life, but we must go ahead and obey God and trust Him for the results. If you wait for the right wind or the right day, you may miss your opportunity.
2. **Remember that life will end (11:7–12:7).** Is this a morbid suggestion? No, one day you will die, so make the most of the life you now have. This is not the worldly attitude, “Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.” Rather, it is the attitude of Paul in Phil. 1:20–21—to live is Christ, to die is gain. Note the three key words here directed especially to young people: rejoice (11:9), remove (11:10), and remember (12:1). Rejoice in God’s blessings while you are young; remove from your life the sins that cause sorrow; and remember to serve God and fear Him in the days of your youth. In 12:1–7 we have a poetic description of old age and death. See if you can discover what these poetic terms refer to in the human body.
3. **Fear God and obey Him (12:8–14).**  Live as those who will one day face judgment. When the fire of God tests your works, will they all burn up? (1 Cor. 3:9–17) You will want to interpret Solomon’s conclusions in the light of 1 Cor. 15, the great resurrection chapter of the Bible. If death really ends all, then life is not worth living, and everything truly is “vanity” and emptiness. But 1 Cor. 15 makes it clear that death is not the end. Because Christ arose from the dead, we shall also be raised. Therefore, our labor is not “in vain in the Lord” (v. 58). From the human point of view “under the sun,” it seems as if life is futile and empty; all is vanity. But when life is lived in the power of God for the glory of God, then life becomes meaningful. A person may live and labor for fifty years, and then die. Does this mean his life was wasted? Of course not. His labor is not in vain in the Lord. He will receive the rewards of his labors when Christ returns. “He who does the will of God abides forever” (1 John 2:17). The unsaved person loses all at death; but the Christian who rejoices in God’s blessings today and uses his life to glorify Christ, will receive abundant rewards in the life to come.

**Song of Solomon**

The title “Song of Songs” means “the finest of all songs.” Since Solomon composed over 1,000 songs (1 Kings 4:32), this must be classified as the best of them all. It is a book full of symbols and images, a book that requires maturity and spiritual discernment to appreciate and enjoy. Any student who would abuse the language and message of this priceless book is certainly revealing the carnality of his own life.

**The Historical Meaning**

1. From the earliest days, the Jews saw in this story a picture of the relationship between Jehovah God and Israel. Israel was “wedded” to the Lord at Mt. Sinai, when the nation accepted the Law. Isaiah 54 spells out this marriage relationship; see also Jer. 3 and the entire Book of Hosea. Alas, Israel was not faithful to her Divine Husband and “played the harlot” with the idolatrous nations of the world. She turned her back on her Beloved. However, there will come a day when, like the maiden in Song of Solomon, Israel will return home and be restored to her Beloved.

**The Typical Meaning**

1. The marriage relationship is also used to describe the relationship between Christ and the church. See Eph. 5:23–33. This applies not only to the church collectively (all believers of this church age), but also the church locally (2 Cor. 11:2). Paul saw each local church “wedded to Christ” and in danger of being seduced into sin by Satan and the world.
2. Just as husband and wife are “one” and belong to each other, so Christ and His church are one. We are “bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh.” He is in us, we are in Him. He loved us (past tense) and showed this love by dying for us on the cross. He loves us (present tense) and shows this love by caring for us, nourishing us through the Word, and seeking to make us as beautiful spiritually as possible. In the future He will continue to love us and we will share His glory in eternity. The “marriage of the Lamb” is coming (Rev. 19:7–9). Christ shall return in glory and take His bride to heaven.

**The Practical Meaning**

This book presents a vivid picture of faithful love and deepening communion. The intimate terms used only illustrate the wonderful love between Christ and the Christian. Let us note how love and marriage illustrate the Christian life:

**Salvation**.

1. We are “married to Christ” (Rom. 7:4). Marriage involves the whole person—mind, heart, will, body. A boy meets a girl and comes to know her with his mind. Perhaps this friendship deepens and his heart is captured. But he is not yet married to her. It is not until he says “I will” that he is married. Many people know about Christ, and even have emotional feelings that are exciting, but they have never said “I will” and trusted the Lord.

**Dedication**.

1. When a man and woman are married, all that they are and all that they have belong to each other. Their bodies are not their own (1 Cor. 7:1–5); they live to please the other. So it is with the Christian life: our bodies belong to Christ (see Rom. 12:1–2), and we live to please Him, not the world.
2. Satan and the world may try to tempt us from our devotion to Christ (James 4:4), but we must remain true to Him. When a man and woman love each other, no sacrifice is too great, no burden is too heavy. See 2 Cor. 11:2 for Paul’s warning about “spiritual adultery.”

**Communion**.

1. This is perhaps the greatest lesson in Song of Solomon—the deepening communion that ought to exist between those who love each other. The maid spoke of her love, she dreamed of him, and when she was free, she rushed home to him. Do we have this kind of love for Christ? Do we see His beauty? (Ps. 45) Do we realize how much He loves us and longs to fellowship with us?
2. In Song of Solomon 5 we have an interesting picture of the believer’s communion with the Lord. The maiden is asleep, but the voice of her beloved comes from outside the door. He wants her to share her love with him, but she is too lazy to get up. “I have put off my coat; I have washed my feet.” It is as though she says, “Please, don’t bother me. I’m too comfortable.” Then she sees his hand (v. 4) and realizes her sin. Remember—his hands are pierced. She then rises, but, alas, her beloved has gone. He left some perfume at the door, but what good is the blessing without the Blesser? In trying to find her beloved, the maiden runs into trouble and discipline.
3. How often the Lord wants to fellowship with us during the day, but we are too busy. Like Martha (Luke 10:38–42), we are “troubled about many things.” How much happier our lives would be if we would only keep our hearts open to the stirrings of His love. Just as a loving husband and wife think of each other when apart during the day, so a faithful Christian ought to think of his Savior and fellowship with Him.
4. In 1:1–7, the maiden sees no beauty in herself, but in 1:14–17, her beloved describes her beauty in tender words. We look at our life and don’t see what Christ sees in us.

**Glory**

The marriage has not yet taken place. We are engaged to our Lord (Eph. 1:13–14). We have not yet seen Him, though we love Him (1 Peter 1:8). But one day the voice of the Bridegroom will be heard, and Jesus will return for His church. Then the wonderful marriage supper will take place (Rev. 19:1–9) and we shall forever be with the Lord. No wonder the maiden closes Song of Solomon by saying, “Make haste, my beloved.” We can only add, “Even so come quickly, Lord Jesus.”