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Ecclesiastes Lesson 1

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Wisdom Literature in the Bible:

Job

Proverbs

Ecclesiastes

Song of
Solomon
(or Song of
Songs)

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“The four books balance each other theologically, and any one of them read out of the context of the others can be easily misunderstood.... Proverbs presents the rational, ordered norms of life, while the other three books present the exceptions and limitations to the rational, ordered approach to life.”

4

“...the other three books present the exceptions...”

Exception #1: Job:

“Sometimes tragedy strikes those who are wise, righteous, and hardworking, and God does not disclose the reasons behind such tragedy.... [We] are forced to rely on faith in the Creator....”

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“...the other three books present the exceptions...”

Exception #2: Ecclesiastes

“The book of Ecclesiastes is an intellectual search for meaning in life.... being wise is better than being stupid, he concludes that wisdom by itself does not provide meaning to life.... [The] only way to find meaning in life is to be in a relationship with God.”

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“...the other three books present the exceptions...”

Exception #3: Song of Solomon

“Proverbs gives good, practical, wise advice about marriage.... However, it is difficult to build a great love relationship in marriage with only logic and rational thought. The Song of Songs celebrates the wild, irrational, mushy, and corny aspects of true love.”

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Ecclesiastes must be interpreted as a whole.

Eccl 12:13 “The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person.”

8

Deut 17:14-20 God's standards for kings:

- v.15 should be God's choice
- v.16 should NOT multiply horses (and NOT import horses from Egypt)
- v.17 should NOT multiply wives; would turn his heart away from God
- v.17 should NOT greatly multiply gold for himself
- v.18-19 should copy the Torah for himself and read it
- v.20 should NOT lift his heart above his countrymen

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Solomon's failure:

- I Kings 10:14-23 he multiplied gold for himself
- I Kings 10:26-29 he had 1400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen; imported from Egypt
- I Kings 11:1-4 he multiplied wives to himself
- I Kings 11:5-8 Solomon's wives turned his heart away from God
- I Kings 12:4-11 he oppressed his people

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Solomon's failure:

I Kings 11:9 "the LORD was angry with Solomon because his heart was turned away from the LORD, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice."

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"the Preacher" Heb. KOHELET = one who calls an assembly; one who gathers, assembles, collects.

"the Searcher" = searching over all of life and observing what is behind the actions of people.

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3 Levels of Discourse in Ecclesiastes:

1. The teacher is referred to in 3rd person; retains a distance between the reader and the teacher. (ex. v.1-2)
2. The "wisdom level" = speaks of the nature of reality in universal terms. (ex. v.3-11)
3. The first person recollections and meditations of the teacher; the reader joins in confronting life lessons. (v.12-18)

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Heb. HEBEL = vanity, emptiness, futility, meaninglessness

- HEBEL can mean meaningless, absurd, contrary to how the world should operate, accomplishing nothing, a waste of time, failing to satisfy, without real significance.
- “Everything is transitory and therefore of no lasting value. People are caught in the trap of the absurd and pursue empty pleasures.”

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Lessons from Ecclesiastes 1:

1. When we take our eyes off Christ and His purposes for our lives, we will come to the wrong conclusions about the circumstances in our lives.
2. Growing in wisdom and knowledge will become grievous if we don’t pursue it from God’s point of view in the scriptures. Christ is our Wisdom!
I Cor 1:18-31; Col 3:2-3
3. The world can’t provide any new thing that could satisfy, but the Lord can.

15

“I will give you a NEW heart and put a NEW spirit within you.” Ezek 36:26

“...If anyone is **IN CHRIST**, he is a NEW creature; the old things have passed away; behold, NEW things have come.” II Cor 5:17

16

“The LORD’s lovingkindnesses indeed never cease....they are NEW every morning.”

Lam 3:23

“Behold I am making all things NEW.”

Rev 21:5

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