

ECCLESIASTES



SONG OF SOLOMON

The Bible Study Textbook Series

NEW TESTAMENT			
New Testament & History By W. Wartick & W. Fields Vol. I - The Intertestament Period and The Gospels	The Gospel of Matthew In Four Volumes By Harold Fowler	The Gospel of Mark By B. W. Johnson and Don DeWalt	
The Gospel of Luke By T. R. Applebury	The Gospel of John By Paul T. Butler	Acts Made Actual By Don DeWalt	
Romans Realized By Don DeWalt	Studies in Corinthians By T. R. Applebury	Guidance From Galatians By Don Earl Boatman	
The Glorious Church (Ephesians) By Wilbur Fields	Philippians - Colossians Philemon By Wilbur Fields	Thinking Through Thessalonians By Wilbur Fields	
Paul's Letters To Timothy & Titus By Don DeWalt	Helps From Hebrews By Don Earl Boatman	James & Jude By Don Fream	
Letters From Peter By Bruce Oberst	Hereby We Know (I-II-III John) By Clinton Gill	The Seer, The Saviour and The Saved (Revelation) By James Strauss	
OLD TESTAMENT			
O.T. & History By William Smith and Wilbur Fields	Genesis In Four Volumes By C. C. Crawford	Exploring Exodus By Wilbur Fields	Leviticus By Don DeWalt
Numbers By Brant Lee Doty	Deuteronomy By Bruce Oberst	Joshua - Judges Ruth By W. W. Winter	I & II Samuel By W. W. Winter
I & II Kings By James E. Smith	I & II Chronicles By Robert E. Black	Ezra - Nehemiah Esther By Ruben Ratzlaff	
The Shattering of Silence (Job) By James Strauss	Psalms In Two Volumes By J. B. Rotherham	Proverbs By Donald Hunt	
Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon—By R. J. Kidwell and Don DeWalt	Isaiah In Three Volumes By Paul T. Butler	Jeremiah and Lamentations By James E. Smith	
Ezekiel By James E. Smith	Daniel By Paul T. Butler	Hosea - Joel - Amos Obadiah - Jonah By Paul T. Butler	
Micah - Nahum - Habakkuk - Zephaniah Haggai - Zechariah - Malachi By Clinton Gill			
DOCTRINE			
Survey Course In Christian Doctrine Two Books of Four Volumes By C. C. Crawford	The Church In The Bible By Don DeWalt		The Eternal Spirit Two Volumes By C. C. Crawford

BIBLE STUDY TEXTBOOK SERIES

ECCLESIASTES

by

R. J. Kidwell

SONG OF SOLOMON

by

Don DeWelt

PARAPHRASE AND ANALYTICAL OUTLINE

by Arthur G. Clarke

College Press, Joplin, Missouri

Copyright 1977
College Press

TABLE OF CONTENTS

ECCLESIASTES

Dedication	xiii
Foreword	xv
Introduction	1

OUTLINE

<i>Introduction: 1:1-11</i>	5
A. Author: Solomon (1)	5
B. Thesis: The vanity of all earthly things (2)	8
C. Explanation: (3-11)	12
1. Man cannot show a profit of all his labor under the sun (3)	12
2. Compared with the world, man is transitory and all of his efforts are futile (4-8)	19
3. History repeats itself and man forgets what has gone before (9-11)	23
I. A MAN OF WISDOM WORKS IN HARMONY WITH GOD'S PROVIDENTIAL BLESSINGS, OTHERWISE HE DISCOVERS ALL HIS WORK IS VANITY (1:12—6:12)	27
A. Experiments and Conclusions (1:12—2:26)	27
1. Experiments (1:12—2:11)	27
a. Unlimited resources for research (12)	27
b. Wisdom is used in exploring all that is done under heaven (13-18)	29
c. Wisdom is used in the exploration of sensuous pleasure (2:1-11)	41
2. Conclusions (2:12-26)	55
a. Value of this wisdom and pleasure stop at the grave (12-17)	55
b. The legacy of one's labor is often lost to fools when one dies (18-23)	61
c. Labor is good only when it is acknowledged as from the hand of God (24-26)	65
B. Acknowledgments that we must work under	

ECCLESIASTES — SONG OF SOLOMON

the rule of God's providence (3:1-22)	69
1. Man should adjust to live his life within the framework of God's providence (1-8)	69
2. Working outside the framework of God's providence results in frustration and defeat (9-22)	78
a. Man should work with an awareness of God (9-11)	
b. The ability to enjoy the fruit of one's labor is a precious gift from God (12-15)	
c. God's purpose is thwarted but not defeated by perversion of justice (16-22)	
C. Guidelines for working with God under all circumstances (4:1-16)	89
1. How to work under oppression (1-3)	89
2. Keep your motive for work pure (4-6)	94
3. Attain your riches for practical good (7-12)	96
4. Keep in mind that prestigious positions will soon be forgotten (13-16)	103
D. Guidelines for the work of worship (5:1-9)	107
1. Watch your step in God's house (1a)	107
2. Refrain from making a sacrifice of fools through hasty words (1b-7)	110
3. Recognize God as the Ruler over all (8-9)	119
E. Admonitions concerning the futility of riches (5:10—6:12)	123
1. Riches by themselves are vain (5:10-20)	123
a. They do not satisfy (10-12)	123
b. They may be harmful (13-17)	127
c. Exhortation to enjoy the riches God permits (18-20)	131
2. It is possible to possess riches which cannot be enjoyed (6:1-6)	135
3. Reasons why riches cannot satisfy (7-9)	143
4. Reasons why it is useless to strive for riches (10-12)	147

TABLE OF CONTENTS

II. A MAN OF WISDOM WHO WORKS IN HARMONY WITH GOD REAPS EARTHLY BENEFITS REGARDLESS OF ENVIRONMENTAL CIRCUMSTANCES (7:1—12:8)	152
A. Adverse circumstances teach worthwhile lessons but if improperly interpreted could lead to despair (7:1-22)	152
1. This lesson is taught by comparisons (1-14)	152
a. A good name is better than precious ointment (1)	152
b. Attendance at a funeral is better than attendance at a birthday party (2)	154
c. Sorrow is better than laughter (3)	156
d. Wisdom is better than folly (4)	158
e. A rebuke from the wise is better than the song of fools (5-7)	159
f. Patience is better than anxiety (8-9)	162
g. The now is better than the former days (10)	164
h. Wisdom is better than hasty judgment (11)	166
i. Wisdom is better than money (12)	167
j. Trusting God for tomorrow is better than knowing about tomorrow (13-14)	169
2. This lesson is taught even when the opposite appears to be true (15-18)	172
a. The wicked are rewarded and the righteous suffer (15)	172
b. Warnings against the wrong interpretations of life (16-17)	174
c. Choose the best in life (18)	177
3. Wisdom leads to proper attitudes and conduct (19-22)	179
a. Wisdom strengthens the wise (19)	179
b. Wisdom leads one to see his own sin (20)	181
c. Wisdom protects against false accusations and self righteousness (21-22)	183
B. Important lessons drawn from these observations (7:23-29)	185

ECCLESIASTES — SONG OF SOLOMON

1. Practical lessons can be learned, but the deeper things are unattainable (23-24)	185
2. Through intensive study, one comes to see the potential within men and women to do evil (25-28)	189
3. A final observation: Men seek evil devices (29)	195
C. Admonitions to use wisdom in the work of solving the problems of life (8:1—9:18)	197
1. Work in submission to the king (8:1-8)	197
2. Work even when one discovers the oppression of the righteous (9-13)	209
3. Work even when one cannot understand the working of God (14-17)	217
4. Work regardless of the similar fate of the godly and the ungodly (9:1-10)	221
5. Work with the awareness that God will control the final outcome (11-12)	232
6. Wisdom is declared to be the greatest guide in our work (13-18)	236
D. Illustrations of those who lack wisdom (10:1-11)	242
1. The foolish worker is in trouble (1-4)	242
2. Foolishness leads to humiliation (5-7)	246
3. Failures in life result from lack of wisdom (8-11)	248
E. Those who work contrary to wisdom are reprehensible (12-20)	251
1. Talkers and workers (12-15)	251
2. Rulers (16-17)	254
3. Warnings (18-20)	256
F. Exhortations to work in harmony with wisdom (11:1—12:8)	260
1. Trust God and be cheerful in all of your activities (11:1-8)	260
2. Enjoy the days of your youth (9-10)	269
3. Remember God in your youth (12:1)	272
G. Death comes to every man (2-8)	274

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Conclusion: 12:9-14

A. Man is admonished to work in harmony with God through the words of one Shepherd (9-12)	284
B. Man is admonished to fear God and keep His commandments (13)	289
C. Man is admonished to work in harmony with God because God will bring every work into judgment (14)	292
Epilogue	293
Bibliography	295

SONG OF SOLOMON

Preface	301
Introduction	305

THE SONG OF SONGS

OUTLINE OF THE BOOK

by Arthur G. Clarke

Title — 1:1	315
I. <i>FIRST SCENE — The King's Palace — 1:2 to 3:5</i>	316
A. <i>Shulammite:</i>	
1. Sililoquy, 1:2-4	316
2. Appeal, 1:5-6	322
3. Sililoquy, 1:7	326
B. <i>Court Ladies:</i>	
1. Response, 1:8 (ironical)	328
C. <i>Solomon:</i>	
1. First Advance to Shulammite, 1:9-11	331
D. <i>Shulammite:</i>	
1. Narration to Court Ladies, 1:12 to 2:7	334
a. Explanation of her situation, 1:12	334
b. Estimation of her beloved, 1:13, 14	336

c.	Description of a conversation, 1:15 to 2:6	339
1.	Dialogue: Shepherd, 1:15	339
	Shulammitte, 1:16 to 2:1	339
2.	Dialogue: Shepherd, 2:2	344
	Shulammitte, 2:3a	344
3.	Aside to Court Ladies, 2:3b	344
4.	Appeal, 2:5, 6	344
d.	Adjuration to Court Ladies, 2:7 (first)	344
E.	<i>Shulammitte</i> :	
1.	Narration to Court Ladies (perhaps later), 2:8 to 3:5	351
a.	Invitation from the beloved, 2:8-14	351
b.	Intervention of the brothers, 2:15-17	358
1.	Their behest, 15	358
2.	Her avowal, 16	358
3.	Her request to the shepherd, 17	358
c.	Relation of a dream, 3:1-4	361
d.	Adjuration to Court Ladies, 3:5 (second)	361
II.	<i>SECOND SCENE — The Royal Procession — 3:6-11</i>	
A.	Remarks of the Spectators	367
1.	<i>First Speaker</i> : v. 6	367
2.	<i>Second Speaker</i> : vv. 7, 8	367
3.	<i>Third Speaker</i> : vv. 9, 10	367
4.	<i>Fourth Speaker</i> : v. 11	367
III.	<i>THIRD SCENE: The Lovers' Interviews — 4:1 to 5:1</i> .	375
A.	<i>First Meeting</i> (Jerusalem?)	
1.	Shepherd's monologue, 4:1-7	375
B.	<i>Second Meeting</i> (Jerusalem)	
1.	Prolepsis, 4:8 to 5:1	382
	(Chronologically coming between 8:4 and 8:5?)	
2.	Dialogue: Shepherd, 4:8-16a	382
	Shulammitte, 4:16b	391
	Shepherd, 5:1a	391
3.	Comment: Remarks of Wedding Guests or Shepherd's Companions, 5:1b	391

TABLE OF CONTENTS

IV. *FOURTH SCENE — The King's Palace —*
 5:2 to 8:4 Retrospect

A. *Shulammitte:*

1. Narration to Court Ladies of another dream
 5:2-7 394
2. Adjunction to Court Ladies, 5:8 (third) 400

B. *Court Ladies:*

1. Challenge, 5:9 (ironical) 400

C. *Shulammitte:*

1. Description of her beloved, 5:10-16 400

D. *Court Ladies:*

1. Inquiry, 6:1 407

E. *Shulammitte:*

1. Answer, 6:2 407
2. Avowal, 6:3 407

F. *Solomon:*

1. Interview with the Shulammitte, 6:4 to 7:10 407
 - a. Dialogue: Solomon, 6:4-10 407
 - Shulammitte, 6:11-13 416
 - Solomon, 7:1-9 419
 - (vv. 1-5 may be remarks of women attendants)
 - Shulammitte (interrupting the king) 7:9b, 10 419
 - (Her final avowal of fidelity to her beloved.)

G. *Shulammitte:*

1. Invitation to the Shepherd, 7:11 to 8:2 425
2. Aside to Court Ladies, 8:3 425
3. Adjunction to Court Ladies, 8:4 425

V. *FIFTH SCENE — The Homeward Journey — 8:5-14*

A. Villagers (or the Shepherd's Companions):

1. Inquiry, 8:5a 432

B. *The Lovers:*

1. Dialogue, 8:5b-14 432
2. Shepherd, 8:5b 432
3. Shulammitte, 8:6-12 432

ECCLESIASTES — SONG OF SOLOMON

a. Aspiration, 6, 7	432
b. Recollection, 8, 9	432
c. Declaration, 10	432
d. Information, 11	432
e. Repudiation, 12	432
4. Shepherd, 8:13	432
5. Shulammitte, 8:14	432
Bibliography	445

To
my wife Patsy
and our dear children
Vicky Lynn and Stephen Kehrer
Pamela Kay and Jay Link
and Jay
who together
have risen above the vanity
of this world
and have
“tasted of the heavenly gift.”

FOREWORD

Ecclesiastes is a negative, when once developed, produces an unbelievably sharp picture of modern man. Once the message of the book is sufficiently grasped and perceived, one is astounded at how crisp, up to date, and relevant the pictures are. Little would we suspect that such graphic word photographs were taken nearly three thousand years ago! It is possible, as Robert L. Short¹ has demonstrated, to capture today's various moods of work and play through the lens of his camera, and set the picture along side the corresponding truths of this marvelous book. There is nothing new under the sun!

The untiring and resourceful experiments of "the Preacher" are proposed and carried out with a single objective: to discover if man is capable of finding joy, fulfillment, and lasting satisfaction in things which are purely of a sublunary nature. His conclusion is that not only is such a pursuit futile, it is like "feasting on the wind."

His photographs reveal the true picture of life. He does not attempt to hide selfishness, hypocrisy, greed, oppression, tyranny, ambition, or social inequities. He tells it like it is. He has at least this much in common with the present generation.

He recognizes that God has control of His world. He senses a providential influence in all of life. It is just that his photography never brings God into sharp focus. He is always in the distance. He is there, but one can never quite make out His form. His influence and power are felt but no word is forthcoming to give one direction to life or an interpretation of the pictures of life. It isn't that the Preacher is disinterested in the answers, he simply cannot find them on his own. He writes, "Even though man should seek laboriously, he will not discover" (8:17).

From the beginning, man has had to earn his living by the

¹ Robert L. Short, *A Time to be Born and a Time to Die* (New York: Harper and Row Publishers, 1973). This concept of Ecclesiastes as the "Bible's Negative Image of Christ the Truth" is demonstrated in his book.

ECCLESIASTES

sweat of his brow. This labor takes on many forms. It is evident from the Preacher's observations that even when one does not have to resort to physical labor for his daily needs that he still must labor with his mind. The advantage appears to be with the man who labors with his hands. He discovers his sleep to be sweet and peaceful as compared to the man who increases his wisdom and knowledge and at the same time increases his sorrow.

The basic question of the book is: Is there any profit in all of man's work which he does upon this earth?

Hard work! That is the key. Every man who has ever lived can identify with that. Labor and reward, labor and reward. This is the age-old principle, but does it really work? The paradox of life is that the richest men are often the loneliest men and those with the greatest wealth are the ones who possess the greatest need. This is the puzzle that must be sorted out and put together.

When the book is completed, the reader has discovered that no new road can be traveled. Man has traveled the road before. Each new generation appears to discover something new, but they are merely inventing new names to define and describe ancient pursuits.

The Preacher has succeeded in putting his finger on the emptiness of man. He has actually photographed the vacuum. His greatest contribution, however, is to lead the reader to see that the "want" of man is in the form of Jesus. The vacuum is Christ-shaped.²

² *Ibid.*, p. 100.

INTRODUCTION

It is important that we see in Ecclesiastes more than the woe of a disappointed preacher.

The book has been variously interpreted through the years offering vastly different "keys" to unlock its hidden meanings. Keys are important in interpreting much of the Bible, but they must always be in harmony with the immediate and greater context of the writer. They must never contradict the overriding purpose of God's revelation. Keys, therefore, must fit the lock before they are of value. Many approaches to the book have been discarded simply on the basis that the key did not work. It may be impossible to discover the exact key that satisfactorily reveals every nuance, or meaning, or hidden lesson contained in Ecclesiastes. It would be presumptuous to offer one's interpretation as the "only" workable key. However, there is a certain amount of confidence that must be demonstrated in writing a commentary on a book of the Bible. At the same time one comes to such a responsibility with humility and gravity of mind. It is this author's prayer that nothing offered will be contrary to the greater purposes of God or hinder His blessings on those who study.

The following limited examples of some of the themes pursued in the interpretation of the book run the gamut of human imagination and experience. These include such alleged "keys" as epicurean philosophy, fatalism, hedonism, pessimism, cynical materialism, sensuality and license, and existentialism. "To some it has presented itself as merely the sad outpouring of the deep melancholy of a world-weary monarch, sated with all that life can offer."¹ Others see in it the expressions of a repentant Solomon reconciled at last to the God whom he had forgotten. So divergent have been the interpretations that even skeptics and infidels have rejoiced over the fact that such a book is in the Bible. They see only the superficial meaning of some phrases, when taken out of context, which appear to contradict the rest of the Bible. In addition they hope to see

¹ George Granville Bradley, *Lectures on Ecclesiastes* (Oxford, England: Clarendon Press, 1898), p. 6.

ECCLESIASTES

in the book a humanistic and secular approach to life that excludes the necessity of God, and places emphasis on pleasure as the object of man's greatest good.

The purpose of the book is clearly stated in 12:13: "Fear God and keep His commandments."

Secondary purposes or themes are numerous. One prominent idea is that everything of this world is cursed to a transitory nature and thus one cannot find true enjoyments in either the collection of the earth's goods or the pleasure derived from them. To divorce one from a love of earthly things is a worthy endeavor. Another minor theme calls attention to the inequities of life and teaches that the godly ones should not be discouraged when they are caught by them. Numerous lessons may be derived from a study of the book but each should be kept subservient to the major purpose.

There is little dispute over the destiny of the book. It was primarily written to the godly in Israel. Like all other books of the Bible with the qualities of practical application, it must be accepted in the Christian age for its contribution to our understanding of and participation in the redemption process. It has been stated that Ecclesiastes asks the questions that the rest of the Bible answers.

If the book did nothing more than demonstrate the futility of living apart from God's grace and revelation, it would have a pertinent place in every age. If the average non-Christian individual would but read it today, it could bring him much more quickly to Christ. It would save him the difficult, arduous journey of a wasted life. He could see immediately that God is the only alternative to this world and its offerings, and that Jesus is God's first and last argument to man's claim to genuine fulfillment and peace.

The immediate recipients of the book were those godly people of Israel whose needs were to be met by the ministry of the Preacher's words. More than this, there is a message for the Christian and the non-Christian today.

Although there is general acceptance that the book was written to the godly in Israel, there are more important questions

INTRODUCTION

on this subject: to the godly of what age and by whom?

Opinions on these two questions generally center in two camps. The one holds the more traditional view that Solomon is the author and that he wrote to those of his own day. The other view, more widely accepted since the middle of the seventeenth century, subscribes to the theory that the book was written by one who impersonates Solomon, choosing to refer to himself as "the Preacher," or by the Hebrew term "Kohleth." They would say that the godly of Israel were those who lived under Persian or Greek rule from 400-200 B.C. For an example, let us give the words of Robert L. Short who maintains this view. He writes, "So, then, who was Ecclesiastes really? Ecclesiastes was an upper-class teacher of wisdom who lived in Jerusalem about three centuries before Christ. Beyond this there is little more about the man that we need to know—or indeed can know—in order to appreciate his book."² Although during the last three centuries the concensus of writers has been against the Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes, a new trend is developing in favor of ascribing the book to him. It is a well accepted fact that the universal consent of antiquity attributed the authorship of Ecclesiastes to Solomon. The traditional Jewish view subscribed to Solomonic authorship.

Our discussion shall assume Solomonic authorship. The date, therefore, would be approximately 985 B.C., or toward the end of his life. The original readers of his words would be those of his own day. Throughout the book Solomon may be variously referred to as the Preacher, Kohleth, Ecclesiastes or Solomon. Ecclesiastes is a transliteration in the English of the Greek equivalent for the Hebrew title. The Hebrew name for the book is Kohleth. It means to assemble as a congregation, and many believe for the purpose of receiving a message. Martin Luther rendered the title, *Der Prediger*, which simply means *The Preacher*. This title is consistent with the fact that in 1:1 the Preacher has certain words to

² Short, *op. cit.*, p. 92.

ECCLESIASTES

communicate to his audience and in 12:10 the Preacher "sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly."

Ecclesiastes falls into two equal parts. The first six chapters establish the premise that all earthly things are futile and that the only way man can have personal satisfaction is to live within God's providential blessings. The last six chapters, or second half of the book, assume this premise and therefore proceeds to demonstrate that man can still reap earthly benefits regardless of environmental circumstances. Once man is led to see that earthly values cannot satisfy, he is ready for the conclusion of the book. The conclusion is really a three-fold admonition: (1) to work in harmony with God through the words of one Shepherd; (2) to fear God and keep His commandments; and (3) to realize that God will bring every work into judgment.

ECCLESIASTES

INTRODUCTION: 1:1-11

A. AUTHOR: SOLOMON, 1:1

TEXT 1:1

1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:1

1. Name three distinctions claimed by the author.
2. What Bible character fits the description given in this verse?
3. From the evidence of this verse, would Solomon qualify as the Preacher?
4. Read 12:9-10 and list the goals the Preacher sets for himself.

PARAPHRASE 1:1

These are the words of the one who assembled the people in order to preach to them. In addition to being identified as a preacher, he is David's son and king in Jerusalem.

COMMENT 1:1

v. 1 This verse identifies the author of Ecclesiastes as "the Preacher," and "son of David, king in Jerusalem." Views vary sharply concerning the actual author of Ecclesiastes, but there is little doubt that Solomon fits this description. The name "Solomon" never appears in the book. This does not mean, however, that he is thus discounted as the author. The Jewish tradition held to the Solomonic authorship as did most non-Jewish writers until Hugo Grotius argued against this

possibility in 1644 A.D. Since that time modern critics have woven fanciful theories concerning possible authors. Even among conservative writers, there is an uncertainty as to whom the book should be ascribed. Recent tendencies, however, on the part of conservative scholars fashion a return to the more traditional view that Solomon wrote the book.

An overwhelming amount of evidence within Ecclesiastes sustains the contention for Solomonic authorship. The following list of internal evidence, consistent with Solomon and his day, is offered as worthy of serious consideration: (1) Verse one identified Solomon precisely; (2) The statement in 1:12 requires that the author be identified as a king in Jerusalem over Israel; (3) The extensive and elaborate experiments recorded in chapters one and two required wealth and opportunity available only to one of Solomon's greatness; (4) References such as 1:16 necessitate an authoritative position and identifies Jerusalem as the base of activity; (5) Collaborating evidence from I Kings, Song of Solomon, Nehemiah, and I Chronicles complements the information of 2:1-9 and thus confirms our contention; (6) The inequities identified with the close of Solomon's reign along with the social conditions created by his desire for self enjoyment are in harmony with the descriptions of 4:1-6 and 5:8; (7) The allusion in 4:13 to an old and foolish king (Solomon) and one who has come out of prison (Jeroboam's return from his exile in Egypt) to replace the king, fits the closing days of Solomon's reign explicitly; (8) A final reference noted is found in 12:9 where the author of Ecclesiastes has searched out and arranged many proverbs. This is in harmony with I Kings 4:32 where it is recorded that Solomon spoke three thousand proverbs.

Solomon is undoubtedly the one to whom we are indebted for this marvelous book. Read also II Samuel 12:24 and I Kings 1:39 to identify "the Preacher" of 1:1.

"The" words of the Preacher implies that a definite message is in the mind of the author and he intends to proclaim it to all who will hear. We are aware immediately that the Preacher is a proclaimer of truth. From the very first line in the book

we note the purpose of his writing. The definite article "the" suggests a specific message. The content and direction of thought are not revealed at this time. It is the discovery of that message and its practical application to life that shall be the reward for the diligent student of Ecclesiastes.

The goal of the Preacher's words is clearly stated in 12:10: "The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly." It is like a breath of fresh air to discover his intention so refreshingly isolated for all to see. There can be little doubt about his purpose. He wants to "find delightful words," and "write words of truth correctly." He clarified his purpose further by stating that a Preacher uses his words as "goads" to prod and drive toward a goal (12:11). He wants the truth of his message to be secured in the minds of his readers as surely as well-driven nails hold fast the carpenter's masterpiece. Although the lessons he teaches us may arise from his own experience, or out of the cultural situation of historic Israel as she struggled under her oft-times foolish king, the Preacher does not want us to miss the fact that it is God who gives us the book! He declares that the words "are given by one Shepherd" (12:11). Once we see that, regardless of the myriad approaches to the interpretation of the book, we must admit that there is a single well-defined purpose for its writing. Solomon eliminates the possibility of debate over this issue when he writes: "The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person" (12:13).

Any pathway taken to unlock the mystery of the book of Ecclesiastes has at least one inescapable criterion: it must lead to Solomon's stated conclusion.

Solomon arrives at an exciting, positive conclusion. His thorough examination of all things, and his extensive experimentations with greatness, work, and pleasure, led him to the frustration of dead-end streets and blind alleys. His conclusion in reality is a fresh, new beginning. The entanglements of the world of vanity are behind him and a clear new horizon looms before him. He draws his reader to the inescapable doorway

to the new life. A burst of heavenly sunlight drives all the meaningless experiments and observations of the past deeper into the ever darkening shadows of the outer periphery of little concern. His grip now is on his new found truth. He clings to it and to it alone. He has finally managed his priority list in such a way that life becomes worth living and filled with purpose and enjoyment. He has managed to bring into focus, in the center of his existence, the central truth alone worth knowing, and most importantly worth believing. He declares this single truth with a note of triumph: "Fear God and keep His commandments" (12:13).

It is a long, difficult journey from Solomon's opening statement that "all is vanity," and his final conclusion to "fear God," but at least the reader knows from the beginning the road Solomon intends to travel.

FACT QUESTIONS 1:1

1. What Bible character best fits the description of 1:1?
2. Until what year did both Jews and Protestants generally ascribe to Solomonic authorship?
3. List evidence within Ecclesiastes that supports Solomon as the author.
4. What is implied by the definite article "the" in reference to the words of the Preacher?
5. What is the Preacher's goal as clearly stated in 12:10-11?
6. The words of the book are given by whom? (12:11)
7. Could this reference be speaking of Divine inspiration? Cf. II Timothy 3:16.
8. What single truth does Solomon arrive at in the final analysis? (12:13).

B. THESIS: THE VANITY OF ALL EARTHLY THINGS 1:2

TEXT 1:2

- 2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:2

5. How many times is there a reference to "vanity" in this verse?
6. What does the Preacher include in his category of vain things?
7. List some popular meanings and some dictionary meanings given to the term vanity.

PARAPHRASE 1:2

"Empty and transitory," sighs the Preacher, "Everything is fleeting as a vapor and unfulfilling!"

COMMENT 1:2

v. 2 The Preacher's first declaration, "All is vanity," is not one of despair but one which simply states the truth concerning the nature of his world and everything in it. The Lord has cursed the earth (Genesis 5:29) as a result of Adam's sin. Therefore, Paul writes, "For the creation was subjected to futility, not of its own will, but because of Him who subjected it, in hope." The fact that the earth and all that it contains has felt the curse of death, is in harmony with the message of the Bible. Study Genesis 3:17-19; Psalms 39:5-6; Genesis 5:29; Hebrews 1:10-12 and James 1:10-11 and 4:13-17.

We often ascribe the idea of vainness of false pride to the term vanity, but this is not the meaning to be given the term as it is interwoven throughout the Preacher's message. It is evident that it conveys the idea of a short life, as the proper noun "Abel" comes from the same Hebrew word that is here translated "vanity." The Hebrew term "hebel" is used thirty-seven times in Ecclesiastes.¹ Such extensive application of one

¹ Ernest W. Hengstenberg, *A Commentary on Ecclesiastes* (Rochester, Wn.: Sovereign Grace Publishers, 1960), p. 46.

idea, discussed in each chapter except the tenth, demands a thorough understanding of its use.

The term is rich in meaning and usage as it appears over and over again in the book. No one term could possibly convey the meaning of each situation. *The New English Bible* has replaced the word "vanity" with "emptiness," while the *Anchor Bible* replaces "vanity" with "vapor." Listed here are terms which serve as synonyms or corresponding ideas. They are: vanity, futile, empty, meaningless, fleeting, pointless, incomprehensible, breath, vapor, unfulfilling, striving after wind, short-lived, Abel, transitory, temporary, sublunary, under the sun, under heaven and upon the earth.

Many lessons in the book are based on the conclusion that "All is vanity." It is vital, therefore, that one see the numerous possibilities contained in the word "vanity." When all of life and its hopes are qualified by sublunary restrictions and limitations, when everything a man has to remember, enjoy today, and look forward to, is limited to and qualified by experience in this life only, then one begins to sense the impact of the term. The term vanity, therefore, is applicable to everything that falls beneath the curse of sin. When man sinned, he began the process of death. As noted in Genesis 3:17-19, the process was passed on to man's world. Therefore, the "All" of Solomon's declaration is comprehensive enough to include both man and his world. There is a genuine pity associated with this truth. As the Apostle Paul has said, "If we have only hoped in Christ in this life, we are of all men most to be pitied" (I Corinthians 15:19). Or again, "If the dead are not raised, let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die" (I Corinthians 15:32).

At the beginning of the book, we are confronted with the most basic question man can possibly ask: Is this life, in its toil, pleasures, possessions, challenges, and ambitions all there is to living, or is there a Word from God to give hope to man in the midst of his activities? It is in the face of this question that the Preacher embarks on his quest.

It is with deep gratitude to God that we study Ecclesiastes

with the wisdom of His final revelation. On numerous occasions Jesus pointed to the transitory nature of man and his world and always directed his hearers to a higher calling. It was indeed Solomon that Jesus had in mind, clothed in all his glory, when he drove home the lesson that “. . . not even when one has an abundance does his life consist of his possessions” (Luke 12:15). It is in the light of this truth that he challenges us, “But seek for His kingdom, and these things shall be added to you. Do not be afraid, little flock, for your Father has chosen gladly to give you the kingdom. Sell your possessions and give to charity; make yourselves purses which do not wear out, and unfailing treasure in heaven, where no thief comes near, nor moth destroys. For where your treasure is, there will your hearts be also” (Luke 12:31-34).

Solomon’s use of “vanity” does not convey the idea of “fatalism” because God is always present in the sense that He is the acknowledged Creator of this world (12:1), and in His providence He controls the ultimate outcome of all events.

FACT QUESTIONS 1:2

9. What should be included in the term “All” in the statement “All is vanity”?
10. Since the proper noun “Abel” is derived from the Hebrew term for vanity, what meaning should be ascribed to “Abel”?
11. How often does the term “vanity” appear in Ecclesiastes?
12. List some of the possible ways the Hebrew term “hebel” could be translated.
13. According to Paul’s reasoning in I Corinthians 15:19, what would cause man most to be pitied?
14. What did Jesus say concerning earthly possessions? Cf. Luke 12:15
15. “Fatalism” is the teaching that the world is controlled by fate. Why can we rule “fatalism” out as a possible interpretation to the book of Ecclesiastes?

C. EXPLANATION: 3-11

1. Man cannot show a profit of all his labor under the sun.

1:3

TEXT 1:3

- 3 What advantage does man have in all his work which he does under the sun?

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:3

8. Explain the meaning of "advantage" in the light of 3:9 and 1:22-23.
9. Man labors, but his work is restricted to what place?

PARAPHRASE 1:3

If all of man's efforts are for personal gain and satisfaction, when life is over, what does he possess that he can claim as his reward?

COMMENT 1:3

v. 3 This first question in the book gets to the heart of the Preacher's pursuit. It is not a question directed toward a lazy person. He is a worker! He has dreams and ambitions. He envisions great wealth and power. It is the advantage or profit that he is concerned with. This same proposition is close to Jesus' heart as he, too, raises the question, but is quick to offer an incentive to make our work worthwhile. He says, "For what will a man be profited, if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for

his soul? For the Son of Man is going to come in the glory of His Father with His angels; and will then recompense every man according to his deeds" (Matthew 16:26-27).

The term "advantage" or "profit" is only used in Ecclesiastes. It does not appear in any other Old Testament book. It is used several times by Solomon (1:3; 2:11; 3:9; 5:9, 16; 7:11). It means preeminence or gain. It may also mean "to remain or be left." The meaning here is that of a collected materialistic gain. The Preacher's contention is that man does not have an advantage or profit. He cannot hold on to anything. He toils, labors, plans, but it is like grasping the wind (4:16; 5:15).

This first question of the book offers a key to the reader. It is obvious that man will be engaged in making his living by the sweat of his brow (Genesis 3:19). Man and labor are not equal but they are inseparable. But what will be man's profit? This question must be held against the interpretation of the entire book. Even when there is a temporary profit (5:9; 7:11) it is short lived and unfulfilling.

Modern man, too, grows weary of facing the labor of each day, realizing nothing more than the financial compensation at the end of the week. The monotonous grind of daily routine of the Preacher's day resulted in the declaration, "I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor" (2:20).

What a vastly different question is "What advantage does the *Christian* man have in all his labor?" Cf. Colossians 1:29; Hebrews 13:21; Revelation 14:13.

Solomon's question and answer are qualified by the phrase "under the sun." This restricts both his question and his answer. Just what restrictions the phrase places upon the inquiry and the place and meaning of the phrase in the book of Ecclesiastes now draws our attention.

The phrase "under the sun" implies a necessary restriction. What is to be included, and what is to be excluded? Since Solomon does not define the meaning for us, we are left to discover the meaning from the use of the idea in the context of the book. One cannot go outside Ecclesiastes for his answer as the phrase is no where else employed in the Bible.

Two other phrases used in the book apparently carry the same meaning. They are "under heaven," and "upon the earth." It is Solomon's purpose, through the use of these restricting phrases, to make his observations and conclusions believable. On occasion he expresses the futility of life "under the sun" with such words as, "who knows what is good for a man during his lifetime, during the few years of his futile life" (6:12)? Yet, he never qualifies his toil "upon the earth" by contrasting it to any after life or hope of eternal blessing. It is as if he is saying, if on this earth we find our complete experience and reason for existing—if this life is all there is, then "a live dog is better than a dead lion . . . for whoever is joined with the living, there is hope" (9:4. Life "under the sun" may not afford man the opportunity for enjoyment, but one must be alive in order to take advantage of such opportunity if it does come.

The restriction "under the sun" appears to be a self-imposed framework of interpreting the meaning of life as it is lived apart from the "verbal revelation" from God. Without the benefit of "words" from God, man is caught in a futile struggle to unravel and interpret the complexities of our transitory world. Thus, the phrase "under the sun" includes that which has to do with purely earthly things. The Preacher purposely closes off the influence of Heaven for the sake of his higher purpose: i.e. the vanity of all earthly things.

In a very real sense the "sun" can move about heaven mocking man, disappearing only to return again tomorrow, smiling upon the futile efforts of those who are so identified with sublunary affairs. Yet, for some, a new day dawns and as Malachi predicted, "For you who fear My name the sun of righteousness will rise with healing in its wings" (Malachi 4:2). The Preacher is not ready to take us to the "new day" but intends to fully demonstrate that upon the earth, under heaven, and beneath the earthly sun, man toils and dreams but for little profit!

“UNDER THE SUN,” “UNDER HEAVEN,” AND “UPON EARTH”

A STUDY OF
 “UNDER THE SUN,” “UNDER HEAVEN,”
 AND “UPON EARTH”

IN ECCLESIASTES

Scripture Reference	That which is viewed by Solomon under the sun	Observations and Conclusions
1:3	All the work one does	What advantage?
1:9	Nothing that is new	Already has been done
1:13	All that has been done	A grievous task to discover
1:14	All the works that have been done	Vanity, Striving after wind
2:3	What good the sons of men might do	Vanity, Striving after wind, No profit
2:11	All of man's labor, activities and exertion	Vanity, Striving after wind, No profit
2:17	Work	Hated life, Grievous, Futile, Striving after wind
2:18	All the fruit of my labor	Hated it Must leave it to another
2:19	All the fruit of my labor	Vanity, Another will have control over it
2:20	All the fruit of my labor	I completely despaired
2:22	All labor and striving	Painful, Grievous, No rest, Vanity
3:1-9	An appointed time for everything	What profit?

ECCLESIASTES

A STUDY OF "UNDER THE SUN" . . . *continued*

Scripture Reference	That which is viewed by Solomon under the sun	Observations and Conclusions
3:16-19	Wickedness in the place of righteousness and justice	Vanity
4:1-2 4:3	Acts of oppression Evil activities	Congratulated the dead Greater congratulations to the one who never lived
4:7-8	Labor depriving me of pleasure	No one to whom to leave the wealth
4:15-16	Prominence and success are soon forgotten	Vanity, Striving after wind
5:13-16	Riches hoarded by their owner	Grievous evil, No advantage, Toiling for the wind
6:1-6	A man who has been given everything from the hand of God, but he cannot enjoy them and a foreigner enjoys them	Prevalent evil, Vanity, Sore affliction, Miscarriage is better, Ends in the grave, Never satisfied, No advantage over the poor, Futility, Striving after wind, Cannot argue with God, Increases futility, No advantage
6:12	Spends life like a shadow, Few years	No knowledge of tomorrow
7:20-24	No righteous man	Remote, Exceedingly mysterious

“UNDER THE SUN,” “UNDER HEAVEN,” AND “UPON EARTH”

A STUDY OF “UNDER THE SUN” . . . *continued*

Scripture Reference	That which is viewed by Solomon under the sun	Observations and Conclusions
8:9-13	Every deed done, Exercised authority to another's hurt, Dead are soon forgotten, Wicked receive burial, Men do evil continually, Sinner lengthens his life,	Futility
8:14	Righteous suffer as though they were the wicked ones, Wicked are blessed as though they were the righteous ones	Futility
8:16-17	Sleepless effort to discover wisdom and the task done, Saw every work of God	Cannot discover the work, Cannot really know
9:3	All that is done	An evil, One fate for all, Insanity in all men's hearts, All men go to the dead
9:6	All that is done: love, hate, and zeal	Have perished, Man no longer has a share
9:11	Race is not to the swift, Battle is not to the warriors, Bread is not to the wise,	Time and chance determine these things

A STUDY OF "UNDER THE SUN" . . . *continued*

Scripture Reference	That which is viewed by Solomon under the sun	Observations and Conclusions
	Wealth is not to the discerning, Favor is not to men of ability	
10:5	Folly is in the hand of the ruler, Princes sit in humble places	An evil
10:7	Slaves riding on horses, Princes walking like slaves on the land	An evil

The following three references employ the phrase differently. In each instance, the results are positive rather than negative. The Preacher's message to the man who lives "under the sun" is that he should resign himself to the Providence of God, enjoy one day at a time, and make the most of the "now." Salvation or eternal redemption are not the subjects under discussion for the man "under the sun." He is searching for the best way to live out the difficult days of his life.

5:18-20	God gives you a few years to eat, drink, and enjoy your labor	Good, Fitting, Your reward, Rejoice, Keeps you from remembering the past
8:15	Eat, drink, be merry, Enjoy pleasure and labor	God gives him these days of his life
9:9	Toil and labor with the woman you love	This is your reward Enjoy life

FACT QUESTIONS 1:3

16. What advantage does man have in all his work done under the sun?
17. What is meant by the word "advantage"?
18. What does Revelation 14:13 teach will happen to the Christian's works?
19. What two phrases, also used in the book, are equivalent to the phrase "under the sun"?
20. What limitations are considered by the phrase "under the sun"?
21. Why does Solomon say that a "live dog is better than a dead lion"? Cf. 9:4

2. Compared with the world,
man is transitory and all his efforts are futile. 1:4-8

TEXT 1:4-8

- 4 A generation goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever.
- 5 Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; and hastening to its place, it rises there again.
- 6 Blowing toward the south, then turning toward the north, the wind continues swirling along; and on its circular courses the wind returns.
- 7 All the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, there they flow again.
- 8 All things are wearisome; man is not able to tell it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:4-8

10. When did man become a transitory creature? Cf. Genesis 2:17.

11. How is the term "forever" to be understood in verse 4? Cf. Hebrews 1:10-12 and II Peter 3:10-11.
12. In addition to the generations of men, what three things that God created are used to illustrate the routinism of our world?
13. Everything that man does see and hear, he describes how?

PARAPHRASE 1:4-8

Generations are indeed transitory in their coming and going as compared to the earth, which appears to remain forever. The sun rises and sets, staying within its orbit or tent,² and panting along mocks the futility of man. Likewise, the wind stays within its appointed circular courses and going toward the south and turning back toward the north it continues swirling along. The little wet-weather streams run to the sea, but the sea is never full. In due season they fill their banks and flow to the sea again, but the sea is never full! Man, in his trek about the earth, is never able to see everything or hear everything. All things continue in wearisome toiling; man cannot tell how much.

COMMENT 1:4-8

v. 4 Both man and earth share in the gloomy, monotonous routine of activities. Both man and earth are transitory. The tragedy manifests itself when men, the highest of all God's creatures and made from the earth, continually pass away while the earth remains. Solomon pictures the world as the stage upon which the tragic drama occurs. One generation

² This concept is not foreign to the Bible. In the *New American Standard Bible*, Psalm 19:4 is translated, "He (God) has placed a tent for the sun." Cf. Psalm 104:2. This is a picturesque description of what one should envision when considering man "under the sun." The "tent" closes out the higher values and confines man to knowledge and wisdom discovered only within the tent.

enters as the former generation exits. The events that take place within each generation are described in 3:1-8. They encompass one's life from the time of birth to the time of death. The Preacher does not see beyond the tent which God pitched for the sun and earth. From his observations he concludes that the earth remains forever. When he has reviewed how man spends his short span of life, with its numerous activities involving the "appointed time for everything," he raises the same question with which he opens his book: "What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?" (3:9). Man doesn't seem to have any advantage, and the only advantage the earth has over man is in its duration. But even here, the word "forever" does not mean eternal. In Exodus 21:6, instruction is given whereby a servant is to serve his master "forever." It simply means "a good long time." Old Testament evidence of the transitory nature of the earth is found in Psalms 102:24-28.

Metaphorically, James implies that it is indeed the sun which destroys us. He says, speaking of man, "because as the flower of the grass he shall pass away. For the sun is no sooner risen with the burning heat, but it withereth the grass, and its flower falleth, and the grace of the fashion of it perisheth; so also shall the rich man fade away in his ways" (James 1:10-11). It is in this same context that James reminds us that our life is but a vapor, and like the vapor will quickly vanish away.

vs. 5-7 The lesson of man's transitory nature and the futility of earthly endeavor is the purpose of this section. To look for more than this is to cloud the issue and perhaps miss the impact of the book.

The sun, the wind, and the rivers disappear, but unlike man, they are there again tomorrow! In our modern day we see and hear man's protest that the earth outlasts him. Such plaintive cries as "That lazy old sun ain't got nothin' to do, but roll around heaven all day," or, "Old man river, he don't say nothin', he just keeps rolling, he just keeps rolling along," demonstrates man's frustration and resentment in the light

of his own transitory existence. The sun stays within its own appointed limits but as it pants along it appears to actually mock as man works in endless endeavor to discover the profit of his labor. Likewise, the wind is confined to circular courses, and although it appears to pass on never to return, it inevitably finds its way back in its trek about the earth.

The streams, which once flowed freely and often furiously to the sea, may at times beg for water and appear to have lost their intended purpose, but in time they fill their banks and rush toward the sea again. Thus, they demonstrate, that unlike man they continue on forever!

Even though the sun, wind and streams continue on beyond the duration of any generation, they demonstrate the unwearied sameness of the procedure of the repetition of all things. Everything the sun shines upon is transitory by nature, even the sun itself. Man comes and goes, the sun comes and goes, the wind comes and goes, and the streams come and go.

Just as there is a sameness in the backdrop of nature, and a sameness in the "props" which appear upon the stage of life, so there is an identifying characteristic of sameness to be found in man. Since the fall, man and his world have at least one thing in common: "they have been made subject to vanity" (Romans 8:20). Solomon is sharing with us the conclusion of his initial observation. He remarks that man, like his world, is in ceaseless, monotonous, regular motion. Both are on a treadmill, it is just sad that man exits first.

v. 8 Two ideas are possible in translating verse eight. One suggests that all things are more wearisome than words can tell. The other suggests that it is wearisome to try and discover all things. The final thought in the verse is saying that man is unable to discover everything that should be seen or heard and thus the latter idea would be the most tenable. He does not intend to say that man cannot discover some truth or draw reasonable conclusions. Ecclesiastes is filled with numerous discoveries made under the sun. He is stating that when one pursues earthly knowledge, the eye cannot see it all nor the ear hear it all. But, even if he did, he would not discover

the meaning of it all. He knows enough to at least reach this conclusion.

FACT QUESTIONS 1:4-8

22. What is the "tragic drama" taking place?
23. What is the only advantage the earth has over man?
24. Explain the meaning of "forever" as it is used in verse 4.
25. What is the main purpose of this section?
26. What two ideas could come from the translation of verse 8?
27. Is man capable of attaining knowledge apart from the revelation of God's word? Explain your answer.
28. If man could discover everything going on in his world, he would still not have the answer to what important question?

3. History repeats itself and man forgets what has gone before.
1:9-11

TEXT 1:9-11

- 9 That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So there is nothing new under the sun.
- 10 Is there anything of which one might say, "See this, it is new?" Already it has existed for ages which were before us.
- 11 There is no remembrance of earlier things; and also of the later things which will occur, there will be for them no remembrance among those who will come later still.

THOUGHT QUESTIONS 1:9-11

14. Is Solomon contending that there is a sameness which marks all parts of man and his world?

15. What is Solomon's answer if man were to say, "See this, it is new?"
16. Does the "for them" of verse eleven refer to things or generations?
17. Since the "them" of verse eleven refers to the "earlier things" and the "later things," and these happen in every generation, why would someone call them new?
18. How is this truth illustrated in 2:16? Cf. 9:5.

PARAPHRASE 1:9-11

The sun shines on all the earth and exposes the routine sameness of all the events which continue on since creation. They shall continue on the same. There is nothing new under the sun! Is something new because you in your generation have not discovered it? Is something new simply because it was forgotten by one generation? No! Sometime in the past it existed as we now discover it. All generations are similar in that they fail to remember the former things and fail to acknowledge that the same events will happen in the future. However, the routine activities of all things continue on regardless of the attitudes men have toward them.

COMMENT 1:9-11

vs. 9-11 These three verses constitute his final arguments in this section. He has declared that everything has fallen beneath the curse of impermanent futility. Rhetorically he has questioned if man has any profit at all in all his work. He has illustrated that not only man, but man's world are caught in a routine sameness that is characteristic of every generation's experience. Man cannot tell everything, he cannot bear everything, and he cannot see everything. What he does perceive he concludes isn't new, but if man thinks it is, it is only because he does not remember what has gone before. History

repeats itself. His further observation is that since human nature and nature itself never change, not only are his peers guilty of forgetting what has gone before, but those who are to come will not remember the things of today.

Solomon is really saying, "He that has seen the present, has seen all things." Things are considered novel or new only because they have been forgotten. So intent is the Preacher on this point that he repeats himself in verses nine and ten.

Much of what Solomon writes throughout the book is based on this premise. For example, he speaks of how easily men are forgotten (9:6-7; 9:15). He instructs us to enjoy today and not to fret over a tomorrow which none is able to see (7:14; 9:7). He suggests that he sought to know wisdom, madness, and folly, and that each of these will be sought by the one who succeeds the king (2:12). There is no lasting memory of either a wise man or a fool (2:16). God knows that human nature is always the same and seeks to deal with man on that basis (3:15; 6:10).

There is dispute as to whether the term "things" in verse eleven refers to "former generations" and "later generations" or "former things" and "later things." The original terms could have either meaning. If one looks at the Preacher's writings in 9:6-7 and 9:15, he will discover that "generations" do fail to remember that which happened long ago. However, the context seems to be weakened by this interpretation. His "all" of verse two and his "earlier things" and "later things" of this verse encompass all the activities of each generation. This appears to be more in harmony with the question he seeks to answer: "What advantage does man have in all his *work* which he does under the sun?" (v. 3).

His message is simple. If one keeps his eyes upon this world alone, then his labor is worth very little. He discovers that all his labor becomes entangled in the gray maze of monotonous, endless activities of not only his own life and generation, but of every generation that "goes" and "comes." It all fades into a similar backdrop of routine acts of nature which he so vividly describes through the activities of the sun, wind and rivers.

His toil and effort on earth profit little. He discovers that he is caught in a purposeless web, a staircase to nowhere, the proverbial treadmill. His observations grow out of a life of one who has lived through the optimum of the excitement of youth as well as the experience of fulfilled dreams which he entertained in young manhood. Now, on the edge of departure from this world, with his eyes focused on earthly values alone, he wants to know what advantage, or profit, he can claim as his own in all his labor.

When man elects to face life and interpret its mystery apart from God's help, he inevitably will come to the same conclusion. Solomon has established an inescapable principle that a wise man works in harmony with the will of God, and God alone. The first half of his book illustrates the premise set forth in chapter one verses one through eleven. Many have asked, "What does the writer know of life?" Almost as if Solomon anticipated the question, he takes up the challenge and turns to the task before him. He is now determined to demonstrate the wisdom of his conclusion.

FACT QUESTIONS 1:9-11

29. What has fallen beneath the curse of futility?
30. In what sense is Solomon teaching that history repeats itself?
31. What is there in verse 11 that corresponds to the "all" in verse 2?
32. What conclusion will man reach in reference to the question of the purpose of life, if he lives all of it purely "under the sun"?
33. The first half of Ecclesiastes illustrates what premise?