

OLD TESTAMENT SURVEY

Lesson 19 w/Answers

Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon

This week, we will take a very quick look at the books of Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon. In light of the limits that sin and God place on human existence, Ecclesiastes looks at wisdom and the search for it. Furthermore, it warns us of the hopelessness that comes with trusting in one's own wisdom, successes, and possessions while living on this earth. The Song of Solomon is a love story, a collection of romantic poetry that expresses God's love for His creation.

These two "wisdom" books are included in the five "wisdom" books in the Old Testament: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon; and they provide us a look at the life God has given us, its purpose, its shortcomings, and how to live it. This week our study will take a less academic look at God's Holy Word and a more philosophical look as we study these two books.

Both of these books are short but full of insight. I encourage you to read them both and then consider the following for our study this week:

1. Having emphasized that all is "vanity", or meaningless, in life; there are two main points in the book of Ecclesiastes that do indicate what is good, or not vanity. List them below beside the following two references.
 - a. Eccl. 12:13
 - i. ANSWER: "Fear God and keep his commandments; for this is the whole duty of man."
 - b. Eccl. 5:18-20
 - i. ANSWER: Because of our human limitations, the effect of sin, and God's sovereignty over our lives, we should accept these limitations and enjoy what God provides us, rather than seeking after the things and wisdom of this world. We have no control on the outcome of our lives; we all die in the end, but we can enjoy the good that God provides us while we serve him on earth.
2. Now, reflect on the book of Ecclesiastes and write out a theme for the book, and for its major divisions. What is it addressing, and how is it organized to do so?
 - a. ANSWER 1: The theme of the book of Ecclesiastes reflects on the philosophy of a man who has everything, but yet is thwarted by the vanity of human endeavor.
 - b. ANSWER 2: In chapters 1 and 2, we see the first discourse of a man who lacked for nothing and tried everything humanly possible to gain happiness. However, it turns out to all be vanity and futile, since he cannot find pleasure in work, materialism, or even in pleasure itself. We see that Solomon tried hedonism, and that he purchased hard assets, agriculture, and even cattle in pursuit of his materialistic goals. However, in Eccl. 2:17, he writes "I hated life", and we see that he has discovered that you really cannot "take it with you".
 - c. ANSWER 3: In Ecclesiastes Chapters 3-5, his second discourse, he addresses the laws that govern life. He comes to realize that there is an appointed time for everything.
 - d. ANSWER 4: In Chapters 6-8, his third discourse begins, and it is here that we learn that there is no satisfaction in earthly goods or possessions.
 - e. ANSWER 5: In Chapters 9-11, his fourth discourse begins, for which he realizes that God will ultimately deal with the injustices of this life.
 - f. ANSWER 6: In Chapter 12:1, the book is summed up, and we see a man who has literally tried everything, as a self-centered, ego-centric person. He finds that, in the end, all is vanity, nothingness, and empty because it was done outside of a relationship with God. He exhorts us to remember God and focus our life on God. Solomon's life was like that of the apostle in the New Testament who had spent the entire night fishing and caught nothing; this was how Solomon viewed his entire life.

3. How is Ecclesiastes applicable today?

- a. ANSWER: Clearly it shows us the void that is left in one's life by following a lifestyle focused on materialism and hedonism. It also shows us the folly and emptiness of living a life outside of a relationship with God, and how foolish we are when we act like (and believe that) we have no need of God. We think that we can fill that void in our life with possessions, parties, and wild times. In the end, we see that a life lived without God is a lost life, amounting to nothing, full of despair and meaningless. If we learn anything from Solomon, it is that we should depend on God for everything, and not desire the ways or material possessions of the world around us.

4. Now, using what you've learned from Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes, create a description of a biblically-based worldview and lifestyle. If you've never developed a "worldview", the questions below will assist you.

- a. Who, or what, do you believe about God and the creation of the world?
 - i. ANSWER: A review of the books of Proverbs, Job and Ecclesiastes will quickly identify the framework for a biblically-based worldview. In Job, for example, we can see that an infinitely complete and perfect being exists in God, and that he created this physical universe and exists outside of his creation. Furthermore, he is the source of all knowledge, power, and goodness.
- b. Is there more than one god?
 - i. ANSWER: We can see from the books of Job and Proverbs that God is the one and only living God, which contrasts with the theology or worldview of the Pantheists, who see many ruling spirits in the world.
- c. What is your view regarding nature, man, and the presence of good and/or evil?
 - i. ANSWER: The book of Ecclesiastes points out the foolishness of putting faith in material possessions and momentary pleasure, which is diametrically opposed to the beliefs of those who adopt a "nature theology". All three of these books (Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes) contain great wisdom regarding the creation of man and the universe, God and his righteousness, good and evil and their existence in the world, and the results of man choosing to go his own way apart from God, which is called sin.
- d. Does heaven and hell exist? If so, who gets to go there? Alternatively, what happens when you die if there isn't a heaven or hell? Is there something called "salvation", and how does it happen?
 - i. ANSWER: In these three books, we see that God so loved his creation that he has made provision for the salvation of mankind. He shows us not only his plan for this salvation, but also assures us that all things will eventually be restored to their natural order, and that in the end, He will restore man's relationship with his creator, God.
- e. What is your view regarding evil in the world? Does God have anything to do with it?
 - i. ANSWER: It is clear from reading these books that God is manifested as a triune God, that He allows evil and suffering as a part of his plan for the redemption of man, and that he provides for us an opportunity to "see" God -- and to also see that Satan is as much alive and real as ever and that he is very much a part of God's creation.

In summary then, the currently held Biblical worldview of the Christian community is encapsulated within these three books of the Old Testament. Furthermore, it is fair to say that reading and studying these three books will reveal much to us about God, Satan, the material world that surrounds us, as well as God's loving intervention on our behalf -- which will in time provide for the salvation of all who believe in His son Jesus.

5. Now summarize the Song of Solomon, or "Song of Songs", and explain what you believe to be its purpose and application today.

- a. ANSWER 1: The Song of Solomon is an allegory, a symbolic representation which combines literal and typical poetry in order to typify, or show a typology of, the love relationship between Christ and His Bride the Church. Rabbinical law required a man to be thirty before he could read the Song of Solomon because of its intimate nature. The book is designed for a husband and wife to share together and shows the love of Christ for His Church and how the Church should respond to the love of the master. It also cites twenty-one varieties of plants or flora, and fifteen species of animals or fauna, and many examples of royal luxury with the use of gold and silver.
- b. ANSWER 2: Today, the book illustrates to us how great, close, and intimate that Christ's love for the Church is, and how He will cherish and nourish it. The book is full of descriptions of how much Christ loves the Church and how high and lifted up the Church is in the eyes of Christ. It reassures us that he will always be the head of the Church and will provide everything the Church needs. He will always protect the Church; everything that Christ does, he does for the Church because of his love. This should provide us hope and faith that, similarly, Christ will always take care of us and protect us. We are filled with a sense of joy as we realize how blessed Christ has been, and will be to us, the body of His Church. In turn, we should respect the Church, as His bride, and do nothing that would bring shame or embarrassment to His bride, nor anything which would not honor Christ through His bride.

In our study of the wisdom literature, we have learned much about this life that God has given us, and we have learned much about God. How marvelous it is that God has chosen to reveal himself and his plans for us, his creation, to us. Although this life may sometimes seem overwhelming, sometimes it seems that only the unrighteous prosper, how great it is that we can still see that God is sovereign and in control. No matter how chaotic or catastrophic our lives may seem, we have the blessed eternal hope that God is with us, will never leave us, and has an eternal plan for us to be present with Him.

Christ our Savior came to earth once to die for us, is now risen from that Grave, and will return again so that we may be with Him eternally. Praise God for our salvation and praises to Jesus for his willing sacrifice on our behalf! Tell someone about Christ today, and celebrate Him next Sunday in worship.

Have a great weekend everyone.

In Christ,

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