

THE MEANING OF LIFE

From the book of Ecclesiastes (Part 1)

(Leader's Notes)



What is the meaning and purpose of our lives? This was a question that King Solomon asked! In the book of Ecclesiastes he describes his search for the meaning of life. He begins his book by saying that everything in the world is meaningless, however by the end, he comes to a conclusion. And this is his conclusion: everything in the world is meaningless unless God is in the centre of our lives.

? Why do you think it is worth listening to what King Solomon has to say on this topic? Discuss.

(Answers may vary. Some may say it was because he had everything the world could offer, and yet he still found life meaningless without God, and others may say he was a very wise man. Both are true.)

? What are some of the things that Solomon concluded are meaningless? Ecclesiastes 1:13-14, 16-17, 2:1, 17-18, 5:10, 8:9-10

(Everything that man does is meaningless, including attaining wisdom and knowledge, pleasure, gaining possessions and wealth, having positions of power and receiving praise from man.)

Let's look at two of those things that King Solomon said were meaningless. The first one is wisdom.

1. Wisdom

It seems strange that King Solomon should say wisdom is meaningless as he wrote so much about it! However we need to understand that wisdom can come from different sources.

? What are the different sources of wisdom, and what do you think Solomon is referring to in this book? See James 3:15-17, Ecclesiastes 1:13, 16-18, 7:25, 12:9-12

(James tells us there are two types of wisdom. There is wisdom that is earthly and unspiritual, and ultimately the source of this wisdom is the devil. However the other kind of wisdom is from above, or from God. King Solomon is saying that wisdom from this world which can be achieved by study is meaningless, however true wisdom comes from the 'Shepherd', from God himself.)

? Although King Solomon concluded it is meaningless to pursue humanistic wisdom, he says there is value in it. What are the values and limitations of such wisdom? Ecclesiastes 1:18, 2:13, 14-16

(Although we may gain more human wisdom and knowledge it doesn't bring meaning to life, only more grief and sorrow. King Solomon acknowledges it is better to be wise than foolish, but we all face the same fate, which is death.)

? How can we acquire Godly wisdom, which is described by Solomon as 'more precious than rubies'? Proverbs 1:7, 2:6, 1 Corinthians 1:30, Ephesians 1:17, James 1:5

(Godly wisdom comes from God alone. He wants to give us his wisdom, but we need to come with an attitude of reverence, and ask for it. This is why King Solomon concludes his book by saying "Fear

God – this is the beginning of wisdom.” As believers we can receive God’s wisdom through Christ, by the Holy Spirit.)

2. Pleasure & Riches

King Solomon then considered the pleasures he enjoyed and the wealth he had acquired.

- ✍️ Make a list of the pleasures King Solomon enjoyed. Ecclesiastes 2:3, 8, 10
- Make a list of the projects he undertook. Ecclesiastes 2:4-7
- Make a list of the wealth he accumulated. Ecclesiastes 2:8

(Pleasures – drinking wine, he had entertainment and many women.

Projects – he built houses, planted vineyards, made gardens and parks, bought slaves, herds and flocks.)

Wealth – he amassed silver and gold and the treasure of kings.)

- ? Although King Solomon had worked hard to achieve all this, he came to the conclusion it had no meaning. Why did he feel this way? Ecclesiastes 2:11, 18, 19, 21, 4:4

(Despite all he had done he had gained nothing from it, and he would have to eventually leave it to others, who did not work for it, and may not use it well. Not only that, he realised that much of what we do is to compete with others.)

Most people today work all their lives to accumulate money and possessions. This represents security, power and prestige. However King Solomon would have been one of the wealthiest men, if not the wealthiest man, who has ever lived, and yet his conclusions are very different to what we would expect. Ecclesiastes 5:8-17.

- ? What are some of King Solomon’s conclusions, and what should our attitude to work be? Why? Ecclesiastes 3:12-13, 5:18-20, 9:9-10. Also look at Genesis 2:15.

(We first of all need to understand that it is God’s purpose for us to work. When he created man he gave him a garden to care for. We are to use our strength and abilities to work, and to be happy and find satisfaction in what we do.)

- ? Discuss how we can bring our children up to have God’s values in regard to their future careers, rather than the world’s values.

Conclusion

King Solomon had everything the world could offer. He had knowledge and earthly wisdom, undertook great building projects, amassed enormous riches, and had power and prestige. However he knew that true wisdom only came from God and because he asked God for that wisdom, he became known as the wisest man who ever lived, apart from Jesus.

Despite being the wisest man, he still grappled with the question of the meaning to life. We will discover his conclusions in our next study, but he realised that part of God’s purpose for man is to work. If anyone can find happiness and satisfaction in the work they do, then this is a gift from God. What is your attitude to your work? Perhaps you need to listen to what King Solomon had to say!