

'SMOKE & MIRRORS'
(Seeing Through the World's Deceptive Tricks and Illusions)
 Studies in Ecclesiastes

Solomon's Search for Sagacity
(Perceptive insights for living 'under heaven' during your life here 'under the sun')

Ecclesiastes Chapter One – **Living in Two Worlds**
 “*Life under the sun*” “*Life under heaven*”
(natural man in a fallen world) *(spiritual man under God's holiness)*

Everything one does 'under the sun' is 'vain' (*pointless & disappointing*) and **'grabbing wind'** (*can't hang on to it and of no lasting value*) **when done in one's own energy for his or her own personal pleasure.**

Solomon's purpose for writing Ecclesiastes (1:12-18) - to use his God-given wisdom investigating all the things *'under the sun'* people pursue to find personal fulfillment, and to prove that nothing ever fulfills unless it is pursued with God's purposes for man *'under heaven'*. This assignment from God is necessary but also hard, perplexing and heart-breaking, but it had to be done to get the book of **Ecclesiastes**.

Ecclesiastes Chapter Two

('life under the sun')

– all for me & all for fun

'myself' – *fun, stuff, wealth, activities, relationships, entertainment, recreation/ indulge my senses/ me*

Solomon's experiment of 'self-indulging' the flesh with different sensuous pleasures (*mirth, people, possessions, entertainment, projects, hobbies, etc.*) resulted in instant fun, but inner dissatisfaction, long-term disappointment, and depression (*hatred of his life and the work he previously enjoyed*).

Solomon's conclusion and advice: In both cases Solomon's wise summary is to live a simple life, have a good job you like and are good at and plenty of time for personal time with God (**2:24-26 & 3:22**). **'Life under the sun'** (*self-centered human passions*) can only have fulfillment and meaning if it also acted out *'under heaven'* (*God-centered attitudes, activities and relationships*). To omit life lived under God's heavenly ways is to choose a life of **'vanity'** (*just physical sensuous activity that turns empty & disappointing in time*) = **'grasping wind'** (*pursuit of elusive quickly passing physical experiences*).

Ecclesiastes Chapter Three

('life under heaven')

– all for Him & His glory

'His way' – *accept & yield to His seasons for things and patiently await His perfect timing in everything*

Solomon's calm acceptance and patient endurance of God's changing seasons of life and timing to make things work out for the best, helped him to see life as *'all things beautiful in its time'* and *'eternally satisfying to his heart'*. This also eliminated fear of 'judgment day'.

Ecclesiastes Chapter Four

(Solomon's general population test – 'under the sun' realms besides his own)

- (vs 1-3) Those oppressed without a comforter
- (vs 4-6) Those persecuted unfairly
- (vs 7-8) Those all alone
- (vs 9-12) Solution for 'living under heaven' in these situations = a good, godly friend or two
- (vs 13-16) Solomon's personal testimony of becoming unteachable, unwise and foolish in 'the home stretch'

Ecclesiastes Chapter Five

(How 'life under heaven' gets clouded by 'life under the sun')

Solomon's admission of how he became 'an old, unteachable foolish king' / 4:13-16

'Keep Your Promises'

(context: 1 Kings 11:9-11 Solomon breaks his vow to the Lord)
5:1-7

- What is a good biblical policy about making promises?
- What biblical things should a believer make and keep?
(Romans 12:1-2, 1 Thessalonians 4:3-8,
1 Corinthians 7:8-9, 2 Timothy 4:7-8)
- In Ecclesiastes 5, what are consequences of breaking promises?
- Talk about reckless things people say that are needless oaths:
(*"I swear _____!"*)

'Keep Your Integrity'

(context: 1 Kings 11:14-40 Solomon's foes & corrupted officials)
5:8-10

- Discuss how weak principles lower one's guard to compromise.
- What's the lesson here about people you entrust with authority?
- How can you tell if people have integrity and are to be trusted?

'Keep Your Simplicity'

(context: 1 Kings 10:14-29 Solomon's extravagant opulence)
5:11-17

- Talk about why 'love of riches' is a 'severe evil' (vs 13, 16)
- How does 'love of riches' affect one's vows and integrity?
- How can you tell if you're keeping or craving more than you should?

'Keep Your Life 'Blessable''

('live life under God' – 'in your labor' (18), 'in your lifestyle' (19), & 'your ministry' (20))
5:18-20

Notice 'God' is part of each of the above sections

Solomon's departure from 'blessability' started with breaking his spiritual and moral promises to God, which led to unwise decisions about friends and who worked for him, which led to avarice and greed and extravagance. He ended up as the richest but saddest man in the cemetery.

- How can we avoid ending up like he did?