

that act like goads, they poke us to get us to think. **A man dies just as a beast dies, so what's the point?** **The wealthy collect their riches and leave them all to the next generation that may foolishly waste them, so what's the point?** He pokes us with these and many other goads so that we will get the point and think. There must be something more to life!

- b) **"Goads are the disturbing reflections of men."** (Berg)
The reason Solomon pokes us with his goads in this book is to get us to THINK!
 - c) Richard DeHaan: "In summary, the goads Solomon includes in Ecclesiastes are the recollections, the concerns, the serious thoughts, and the guilt feelings which arise in the consciousness of one who is willing to face things as they are. Their stings are painful, and do not in themselves provide the answer to man's need. But they bring to light a person's sinfulness and helplessness, and thereby may get him started in the right direction. When he is finally driven to faith in Christ, they have served their purpose."
- 2) The **nails** of which Solomon speaks were large tent stakes driven firmly in the ground to which the tent ropes were attached.
- a) In Ecclesiastes, nails are the revelations of God. They are stabilizing truths about the nature of God and His word. (Berg)
 - b) DeHaan adds, "The nails, ... are the truths that come from God through special revelation."
- 3) There are many goads in this book but only a few nails. Most of the nails are at the end of the book.

Conclusion: Life is full of goads to get us to think. Neither money, partying, riches, pleasures, earthly wisdom nor hard work will give true joy, satisfaction, and fulfilment so what's the point of living? There is no point in living life without God. Only God fulfils. Only God can paint a meaningful picture on your empty canvas. Live for God's glory!

Song: Trusting Jesus **262**

The Book of Goads and Nails

23 February 2020 AM – Ecclesiastes 1:1-2 – Ecc20 – Scott Childs

Introduction: Years ago, when we were missionaries in PNG, a co-worker and I visited a remote village called Simbai. We first flew an hour to a bush airstrip and then hiked over many mountains for nearly 8 hours. We hiked up winding mountain trails, crossed streams, descended into valleys and back up steep mountainsides. It was a trip I will never forget!

Studying through Ecclesiastes is like making a gruelling hike over rugged mountains. It is a difficult task to try to grasp what God is telling us in this book. Two commentators from whom I have greatly benefited are Jim Berg and Warren Wiersbe. There is no way I will ever preach the book as well as they did, nor will I be preaching their sermons, but I will be gleaned much from what they had to say. I want to give them credit right from the start.

Transition: As I introduce the book of Ecclesiastes, I want to prepare you to gain as much as possible for our study in this important book.

1. The Author and Audience

a. Solomon was the author

- 1) Though unnamed in the book, the author calls himself the *son of David*, king in Jerusalem (v.1).
- 2) He calls himself the *king of Israel* (v.12).
- 3) He identifies himself as the *Preacher*. This word is the Hebrew word *Qoheleth*. It refers to a collector of sentences, a gatherer of wisdom, or a public speaker.
- 4) These statements point us to the conclusion that Solomon was the author of this book.

b. A young philosopher was probably his audience

- 1) Jim Berg points out that Ecclesiastes is a **"cultural apologetic"**. In other words, it was a defence of his world view. Because God gave Solomon more wisdom than anyone else, this makes good sense (1Kings 4:29-30).
- 2) Wise people came from far to hear Solomon's wisdom. (1 Kings 4:34) *"And there came of all people to hear the wisdom of Solomon, from all kings of the earth, which had heard of his wisdom."*

- 3) The queen of Sheba also came to test him. (1 Kings 10:1)
- 4) Solomon seems to be addressing a young man (11:9; 12:1; 12:12). This young man may have been a worldly wise man. Perhaps a Gentile since the book contains no mention of Jehovah, Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob.

2. The Frustration and Fact

a. Frustration: This does not make sense.

- 1) Many who read this book think it teaches ...
 - a) Atheism – death ends all (1:11)
 - b) Hedonism – pursuit of pleasure (2:24).
 - c) Pessimism – all will end bad (4:2)
- 2) I admit, it is confusing that Solomon makes so many statements that do not sound Christian. For example:
 - a) (Ecclesiastes 2:15) *"Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity."*
 - b) (Ecclesiastes 3:19) *"For that which befalleth the sons of men befalleth beasts; even one thing befalleth them: as the one dieth, so dieth the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man hath no preeminence above a beast: for all is vanity."*
 - c) (Ecclesiastes 6:11-12) *"Seeing there be many things that increase vanity, what is man the better? For who knoweth what is good for man in this life, all the days of his vain life which he spendeth as a shadow? for who can tell a man what shall be after him under the sun?"*
- 3) Solomon's statements that seem frustrating are intentional to get his readers to think about life.

b. Fact: Life without God never makes sense.

- 1) The book contrasts two opposing philosophies: life **without** God, and life **with** God.
- 2) When we leave God out of our lives or ignore God, life does not make sense. Life apart from God is futile. It is supposed to be that way, if we leave God out of our lives.
- 3) That is not the way God created life to be. (Genesis 1:31) *"And God saw every thing that he had made, and, behold, it was very good. And the evening and the morning were*

the sixth day."

- 4) Your life will be empty and unfulfilling if you leave God out of it. Do Christians ever do that? YES! FREQUENTLY!

3. The Features and Focus

a. Unique features in the book

- 1) Common words in the book
 - a) *"Under the sun"* 29x, refers to life on this earth, under the sun in the sky distinct from eternal life after death.
 - b) *"Labour"* 30x, life is full of labour, toil, trouble, grief, misery, frustration, and weariness.
 - c) *"Vanity"* 33x (*vanities* 4x). This describes that which is empty. Being empty is not necessarily bad. It is just a state of being empty of contents. **ILLUS**: Here is an empty canvas. I have not painted anything on it yet. It is neither good nor bad. It is just empty. Only God can "paint" something meaningful on your canvas.
 - d) *"Wise"* and *"wisdom"* 45+x. Solomon is not always speaking about God's wisdom. He often is speaking of man's human wisdom or logic.
- 2) Solomon presents many troublesome aspects of life without giving clear explanation. How can man make any sense of life and find fulfilment and joy? It is not until the end of the book that he answers that question for us, (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14) *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."* Only God can fulfil!

b. Key focus of the book (12:11)

(Ecclesiastes 12:11) *"The words of the wise are as goads, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd."* This verse is the key that unlocks the difficulties of this mysterious book.

- 1) A **goad** is a stick with a point on the end used by a farmer to poke the backside of his stubborn ox to get him to move.
 - a) Solomon points out many frustrating events in life