

01-01-07b Ecclesiastes

Let's resume our study now in the introduction to the book of Ecclesiastes. We're tracing what we know of the early days of Solomon. We don't know much more than his birth during the reign of David.

Very little is mentioned about him until he comes to the throne. And these are the events that took place as he comes to the throne that we find in 1 Kings chapter 2 and chapter 3. We've reviewed 1 Kings chapter 2 and we've seen that Solomon inherited some unfinished business from his father David, Shimei, Adonijah, the unpunished murders that Joab had committed and so forth. And Solomon has to pretty well hit the ground running.

He has to exercise his wisdom two or three different times when David is exhorting him from his deathbed. He says, you are wise. You'll be able to do this.

You will know what you need to do. And you can tell that David is trying to give encouragement to Solomon that he is going to be able to handle these very delicate situations. We sort of take it for granted because we know everything turned out fine.

But you can imagine the instability that attends any transition of power. We've recently experienced it here in our own country. But in a monarchy where there are others who may be rivals for the throne and so forth, to do something rash could result in disaster.

But Solomon has one saving factor in his favor and it's the one that we saw in our scripture reading this morning in Psalm 144. And that is that he loves the Lord and he trusts the Lord. He makes mistakes.

He does some wrong things. Patty mentioned a good point during the break that we saw here in the beginning of Chapter 3. Solomon made a treaty with Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and married Pharaoh's daughter. Well, the law of Moses talks about not intermarrying with the people of the land.

It says don't intermarry with the Hittites and the Hivites and the Horites and the Jebusites and the Amorites and all these other ites. It doesn't specifically prohibit intermarriage with Egyptians. We know that there was, in fact, a lot of intermarriage that is evident in the mixed multitude that leaves from Egypt.

We know Moses himself was married to a Midianite and later to apparently an Ethiopian woman. We know that there were occasionally a Rahab the harlot, was a foreigner as we say in Oklahoma. But these were acceptable.

Ruth is another example. These were acceptable when they became proselytes, if they believed in God, and sort of added themselves to the number. David himself, several of his wives were

from the daughters of kings or were a part of military alliances and he had five or six different little families going there.

But it is an interesting question. Well, did Pharaoh's daughter, born and raised in Egypt, did she come to faith in the God of Israel and was that sort of a precondition of Solomon marrying her? Scripture doesn't say. My rule of thumb is if Scripture doesn't seem to point to something or make a great emphasis on it, then it's probably not a place to spend a whole lot of time speculating.

But it is recorded for us here and of course this is probably the first of quite a multitude of wives and concubines that Solomon is going to accumulate. We know that later on he was not very scrupulous in determining what their faith was because he accommodated them in the worship of their own pagan and in some cases even accompanied them in the worship of their idols and so forth. But here we are in 1 Kings chapter 3 and Solomon, these are the first few years of his reign.

I know this for a fact because we have a chronological note that tells us that Solomon had been reigning for about three years when he began the construction of the temple. So these are the events that fill those three years. He made this treaty, married Pharaoh's daughter, brought her to the city, started working on the walls in the palace and the temple, went to Gibeon.

And at Gibeon in verse 5 of 1 Kings 3, the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night and God said, Ask, what shall I give you? How would you like to have this dream? How would you like to have God come to you in a dream by night and say, wide open request line here, whatever you want, I will grant. What would your answer be? What would you ask for? And we like to think, oh, well, I would do just like Solomon. I would ask for wisdom.

But a lot of us have pressing concerns. We have issues that we wish were resolved. If we could ask for someone to be exempted from the volitional test and say, God, just save them no matter what, I want them to spend eternity with me or to resolve a problem or to take care of our children or some other loved one, to grant healing.

There's lots of things that we might ask for. A lot of people play the lottery. A lot of people hope for riches and financial security.

Someone might ask for that. Might ask for a guaranteed exemption from any form of violence or theft or other wrong on the part of people. Lord, if you'll just put a wall of fire around me so that me and my loved ones will never be touched by evil.

Lots of things you might ask for. But God knows about the heart of someone before he presents them with an option. I'm reminded of the conversation we recently reviewed that Moses and the Lord God had after the children of Israel did the golden calf thing.

And God said, stand aside, Moses, I'll wipe out this people and I'll start over with you. You'll be

the new Noah, and it'll be you and your descendants that I make a great nation from. Here God says, ask, what shall I give you? Solomon doesn't say, well, Lord, you know, it's a new regime here, a new reign.

Our coffers are not nearly full enough. If we had more tribute, if these pesky foreign neighbors weren't nibbling away at our borders and if we could get a better trade arrangement and if my wife would settle down and quit being an Egyptian all the time and, you know, I have many children, if I could make sure I had an heir to the throne. You can imagine the things that might press in on his soul, but what he says is what's on his heart, and what's on his heart is God.

And he talks about God as the first part of his answer. He says, you have shown great mercy to your servant David, my father. Why did God show that mercy? Because he walked before you in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with you.

Solomon knows the cause and effect. He knows why the reign of David was great for 40 years, why God was able to establish the nation of Israel under David and give them peace from their enemies on every side. It's because David walked before God in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart.

You have continued this great kindness for him, and you have given him a son to sit on his throne as it is this day. Now O Lord my God, you have made your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child. I do not know how to go out or to come in.

Again, I'm so reminded of what we studied Friday night at the King of Tyre. We saw that campaign on the part of the Assyrians, the Assyrians who were the rod of God's anger, the rod of God's fury, accomplishing what Israel never did in the land of promise by expunging and conquering and punishing all of the pagan peoples in the region. Israel didn't ever ultimately complete that task, and so God brings in the pagans, and he says, I will make you jealous by a people who don't even speak your language.

And he uses the Assyrians, and they come in, and they purge out all of the ites and all of the isms and the cults out of the land. And the last bastion of the pagan culture are the Phoenicians up in the northwestern region where Tyre and Sidon are, and they are the sea peoples. They're the sea captains and the merchants and the traders, and their characteristic is pride.

They are self-sufficient. They have mastered the seas. They have made their treaties and established their trading alliances.

They know where the markets are. They know how to work the supply and demand and take their cut. And it's that self-sufficiency that makes them immune to any interest in God or the things of God.

They don't need God. And we saw that pattern as it goes all the way back and reaches into the

throne room of God itself and comes down through the Garden of Eden and down through history. Here you see the opposite.

Solomon has just been made king of Israel. He has the treasury. He has the army.

He has all of these things. But he says, Oh, Lord, my God, you've made me the king, but I am a little child. I do not know how to go out or to come in.

Going out and coming in is often a term used of military operations. To go out and to come in means to march out into battle and to come in again successful. If you're not successful, you typically don't come back.

Your servant is in the midst of your people whom you have chosen. You'll notice what a great prayer this is. And it reminds me of what we've talked about before in terms of prayer.

Because do we pray in terms of what we want or do we pray in terms of what God wants? What is in God's interest? What is in Jesus' name and for His sake? This is how Solomon views his situation. He says, It's not me and the fact that I'm the big king here. It's your people and your nation.

It's been your faithfulness to David that has brought this situation about. I am only here because of your promise to him. I don't know how to come out and go in.

I need your help. I am sitting in authority over your people whom you have chosen. It's a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted.

Therefore, my request, Oh, Lord, is to give to your servant an understanding heart to judge your people. That I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of yours? Solomon says.

He doesn't say, How am I going to judge this great people of mine? There's nothing that grates on my ear worse. And I have nothing against people who do this. But when people talk about it and they say, Oh, well, my ministry, I've got my ministry.

My ministry is going well. Solomon doesn't do that. He doesn't say, Oh, Lord, how am I going to rule my kingdom? He says, Lord, how am I going to rule your kingdom? How am I going to judge your people? This tells us a lot about the heart and the attitude and the perspective, the viewpoint of Solomon.

He looks at it as a charge to keep. You know, there's that hymn, A Charge to Keep I Have. It's a stewardship of the things of God.

And Solomon phrases his answer to God in terms of God's interest. That's what someone who loves the Lord does. That's what someone who is tuned, attuned to the plans and purposes of

God will do.

Is see where they are in the forward progress of God's plan. And because of that, in verse 10, the speech pleased the Lord. Boy, if I could ever have that said just once in my whole life, when the judgment comes along, that something I said or something I did pleased the Lord.

That is the ultimate accolade. The speech pleased the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. So God said to him, because you have asked this thing and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies.

Notice all of the second person pronouns there. You didn't ask for your life, for your riches, for your security. I could go back to Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs and show you that these things are all right down at the very foundation.

These are the root desires that everyone has for security, for safety, for life, for health, for the basic necessities to be met, you know, to have enough to cover your necessities. The very root motivations of the human heart, Solomon has set aside in favor of wanting to do a good job with the stewardship that God has given him. Because you have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, behold, I have done according to your words.

Look, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. This tells us something amazing about Solomon. Solomon is literally the wisest man who ever lived.

Nobody had, now what kind of wisdom is it? I don't think it's marital wisdom. He's not the smartest man in the world when it comes to marriage. He's not the smartest man in the world when it comes to raising his sons.

He has some of the same failings that his father had in terms of his sons. You can see this come out at his death and the way his son behaves. Of course, some of that the parents are not responsible for.

You can't hold parents accountable for everything that their children do because they have a mind and a volition of their own. But there are indications that there were some fundamental facts about ruling that Solomon did not inculcate into his son. Although he probably tried.

But this is a specific kind of wisdom. What is the wisdom that God imparts to Solomon? You have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice. To discern what is right and what is wrong.

What is best. To discern, Paul talks about this in the New Testament. He says, my prayer for you is that you will learn to discern the better things.

Things accompanying righteousness. That you can not only tell good from evil and tell the difference between sin and what is not sin. But also looking at good things to discern among

good things which is better, which is best.

What is most profitable in order to rule the people. The purpose of this wisdom is not for Solomon to make a fortune. It's not for Solomon to be healthy and wealthy.

It is to carry out the stewardship that Solomon has talked about with God. I have given you a wise and understanding heart. And I have also given you what you have not asked.

Both riches and honors so that there will not be anyone like you among the kings all your days. Then look at verse 14. So, if you walk in my ways to keep my statutes and my commandments.

The very same condition that David heard and met back in 2 Samuel chapter 7. You will not lack a man on the throne of Israel if you heed my statutes and walk in my ways. As your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days. Then Solomon awoke and indeed it had been a dream.

He came to Jerusalem and stood before the Ark of the Covenant. Isn't this a great thing? Just by seeing God at Gibeon, Solomon figures out that he is in the wrong place. God didn't have to say a word.

Just spending time with God and hearing the words of God on a completely different subject and receiving wisdom. By the time Solomon awakes from that dream, it's like he wakes up and says, What am I doing in Gibeon? I need to be where the Ark is. I need to be where the presence of God is.

And so the first thing he does, he came to Jerusalem and stood before the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord. And now he's going to do his offering all over again. He offered a thousand burnt offerings in Gibeon and he realizes that was a waste of time.

He comes and does it right now. He comes to Jerusalem, offers burnt offerings, peace offerings and made a feast for all his servants. He celebrates.

Now you have the examples of his wisdom. We know about the two harlots and the two babies, one of them dying in the night. And he says, Well, cut the baby in half.

The real mother says no. And he knows who it is. Very famous story.

That's what fills out the rest of Chapter 3. Then in Chapter 4, King Solomon was king over all Israel, gives a list of his officers. And the way that he organized the government, in verse 7, Solomon had 12 governors over all Israel. You figure this is probably one per tribe, providing food for the king and his household.

Each one made provision for one month of the year. These are their names, Ben-Hur in the mountains of Ephraim. If you wonder where the movie name came from.

Then he gives the other 11 listed there. In verse 20, Judah and Israel were as numerous as the

sand by the sea in multitude, eating and drinking and rejoicing. So Solomon reigned over all kingdoms from the river to the land of the Philistines, as far as to the border of Egypt.

This river is the river up north and ostensibly the Euphrates. And they brought tribute and served Solomon all the days of his life. Then it goes on to talk about how great his reign was, how much it took to sustain them.

His 40,000 stalls of horses and the barley and straw in verse 28, to their proper place, the horses and steeds, each man according to his charge. And one of the things you see in an administration characterized by wisdom from God is it's organized. Verse 29, God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore.

Thus Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men. He was wiser than Ethan the Ezraite, wiser than Heman, Chalcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol.

These were apparently big time wise guys back in the days of David. And Solomon's wisdom just put them in the shade. His fame was in all the surrounding nations.

He spoke 3,000 proverbs and his songs were 1,005. Also, he was a botanist. He talked about trees from the Cedar Tree of Lebanon and even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall.

He was also a naturalist. He knew about animals, birds, creeping things and fish. So he was a scientist.

Men of all nations from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom came to hear the wisdom of Solomon. That's very interesting. Again, you know, we were talking about Tyrum Friday night.

The very next chapter starts out. Hyrum, king of Tyrum. You think, you know, there were some good people in Tyrum at one time.

Then it all kind of went downhill because Hyrum was a great man. Hyrum loved David and Hyrum pledged his loyalty to Solomon. And he was instrumental.

He was key in getting both the temple and the palace of Solomon constructed. And you can find down in chapter 5, verse 10, the cedar and cypress logs and all of the other things that Solomon gave Hyrum in payment year by year. And again, in verse 12 of chapter 5, the Lord gave Solomon wisdom as he had promised him.

There was peace between Hyrum and Solomon and the two of them made a treaty together. And not only did he have wisdom for the administration of the land, but also specifically for carrying out the task of building the temple. We've talked in previous studies about the analogy or the

illustration of David clearing out the enemies in the land as the man of war that God had called him to be.

So that once the enemies were expunged from the immediate environs of the twelve tribes of Israel, the temple could be built. And once those enemies were conquered and driven out along with their pagan practices and their cults and their idols, then Solomon builds the temple, the dwelling place of God. And the analogy to our own heart is that which is reflected in the words of Jesus Christ to his disciples when he said, the one who has my words and keeps them, he it is that loves me.

And I and my father will come to him and make our home with him. Over in John, all the way to chapter 14 through 17, that great rich section of teaching from Jesus about the vine and the branches and abiding in him and what the rewards and the fruits of that will be. God will prune so that we bear much fruit.

God the Father and God the Son will come and make their home in our hearts as a result of possessing the word and keeping it. The very same conditions that are given here for fulfillment of God's covenant. And to drive out the enemies, to succeed in warfare, to have our hands trained for battle and our fingers for fighting so that we can have victory over the enemies in our spiritual conflict.

Winning those victories provides a place of peace. And that is where the dwelling place of God is built. And the example of David and Solomon is an example for us.

And it is a conflict. There is bloodshed. There is pain.

There is a lot of stress in any sort of warfare. Just having an argument can produce a lot of stress. Everybody's had an argument at some time or another and it's stressful.

Well, warfare is doubly stressful. It's as stressful as this life gets. And the Bible constantly tells us that we are in a warfare.

And it produces stress. But there is a place of refuge. There is a place of peace.

We have strength from God. The verses we memorized out of Psalm 91, I had the opportunity to review those and actually read them as a part of the funeral that I did this past week for my grandmother. Because it's a reminder that if we make God our refuge, he will shelter us under his wings and dwell with us.

We will abide with him. He will abide with us. Solomon understood this and God gave him wisdom to construct this dwelling place.

Our dwelling place is also constructed in wisdom. James tells us if we lack wisdom, we can go to God who gives to all men freely in James chapter 1. We can make the same request of God that

Solomon does. We can ask for wisdom.

God will grant it. If we ask for bread, he will not give us a stone, a snake or a scorpion. And with that wisdom, we can also construct the dwelling place of God in our own souls.

So this was a very active and action-packed three-year period. You can see in chapter 6, it says it came to pass in the 480th year after the children of Israel had come out of the land of Egypt. In the fourth year of Solomon's reign over Israel in the month of Ziv, which is the second month that he began to build the house of the Lord.

So that gives us that three-year bracket. You get the idea that that span of time was roughly the same as the span of the Lord's earthly ministry from the time he was 30 until he was 33. And as a result of receiving this wisdom, Solomon sat down in writing a lot of songs and a lot of proverbs.

If you turn to 1 Kings chapter 11, at the end of Solomon's reign, when things had started to slide downhill, this is when he had... Chapter 11 is the story. In fact, it's subtitled in the New King James, when Solomon's heart turns from the Lord. And it's turned largely because of these women that he closely associated with in various capacities.

And you have the Jeroboam-Rehoboam division on the horizon. But look at verse 41 of chapter 11. Now, all the rest of the acts of Solomon, all that he did and his wisdom, are they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon? And the period that Solomon reigned in Jerusalem over all Israel was 40 years.

Then Solomon rested with his fathers and was buried in the city of David his father. Rehoboam, his son, reigned in his place. David reigned 40 years.

Solomon reigned 40 years. But it tells us the rest of the acts of Solomon. The word for acts here is an interesting word.

And you might just make a little mark there because it occurs in verse 41. And again, in the title of the book in which those acts are written, are they not written in the book of the acts of Solomon? Because as we turn now to actually examine the book of Ecclesiastes, we're going to find that same word, the word for acts, or the word that's translated acts, in the first verse of Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes chapter 1, verse 1, the title of the book, it says, The words of the preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

The language sounds very similar to what we just read over in 1 Kings, doesn't it? And in fact, the Hebrew term that is translated words here in Ecclesiastes 1.1 is the very same one that's translated acts over in 1 King. It's from the Hebrew verb *dabar*, D-A-B-A-R. The verb means to speak.

And *dibre* is the plural of the noun form, *diber*. *Diber* is translated word or thing. And *dibre* is the plural.

And so here we literally have the rest of the *dibre* of Solomon. And it's an ambiguous word. Sometimes it's translated words because it comes from this speaking verb.

Other times it's translated things. Sometimes it's translated acts as we have it here in 1 Kings chapter 11. And it has the idea of matters.

We talk about different matters. Well, there is a matter. It's even in legal vocabulary, it takes on a more concrete substance.

We say, well, there is a matter pending before the court. And there's a legal definition for what a matter is. Well, in 1 Kings 11, it tells us that the rest of the... It's not so much the acts, the things that he did.

It's the things pertaining to Solomon. It includes his words. It might include his actions.

The matters pertaining to Solomon are written in the book of the *dibre* of Solomon. Well, when you come to Ecclesiastes chapter 1 verse 1, the *dibre* of Kohelet, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. The word translated preacher is Kohelet.

And that is, in fact, the title of the book. So as we turn our attention directly now to the book of Ecclesiastes, as it is named in our scripture, we know from this very first verse the words of Kohelet, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. How many sons of David were king in Jerusalem? Well, if you think of sons in terms of descendants, there are a number of descendants of David who sat on the throne of Judah, but there's only one that was king over Israel.

And we have the notice in verse 12 of Ecclesiastes 1 that says, I, the preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. It doesn't say I was king over Judah. It says I was king over Israel.

Well, if he's a son of David and king over Israel, that pretty well limits it to one individual, and that's Solomon. So the authorship of this book has traditionally been ascribed to Solomon for that reason. His name does not appear in the book anywhere.

We never see Shlomo anywhere in the Hebrew text, but his authorship is based on these statements that we've seen in verse 1 and in verse 12, and also on the obvious fact that this is a man who is wise and who is communicating wisdom. Toward the end of Ecclesiastes, we have a statement in chapter 12 in verse 9. It says, Moreover, because Kohelet was wise, he taught the people knowledge. He pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs.

And we've just seen that this is something that Solomon did. So this is another indication of his authorship. However, this book called Ecclesiastes, by the way, the reason it's called Ecclesiastes, this English title was originally adopted from the Vulgate, which is the Latin translation, and the Latin came from the Greek.

And the Greek title of this was Ecclesiastes. You could just spell that in Greek letters and get the very same term. And ecclesia is the word for church or assembly.

It originally meant assembly in the general sense. It came to be a technical term in the later New Testament for the church. Ecclesia.

Well, ecclesia is at the root of Ecclesiastes, but it is a term for one who speaks in the assembly in Greek. Someone who stands up and addresses a group or an assemblage of people was an Ecclesiastes. And this is how it came to be translated into English as the preacher.

But the preacher is really a poor and wide of the mark translation for this term. The Hebrew word here that underlies the Greek and Latin and English is Kohelet, Q-O-H-E-L-E-T. And the Hebrew title of this book is The Words of Kohelet, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

This is how you find it titled in the Hebrew manuscripts. Or the short title is just Kohelet. Kohelet is an odd word, and the enigma of this book begins with its title because Kohelet is a feminine, singular, cal-active participle.

Cal, by the way, is Q-A-L. It's the common sort of the declarative form in Hebrew. It would be kind of more or less like a present tense.

It's actually a past tense in Hebrew. But the cal is the normal way to tell what happened. It's just a declarative.

You could call it a tense. It's actually a stem in Hebrew. But this is a feminine, singular participle.

It's an active participle. From the Hebrew verb kahal, Q-A-H-A-L. Kahal has at its root the idea of assembling, gathering, or uniting, collecting things together.

And we think, well, this kind of makes sense. We've seen in both Kings and at the end of Ecclesiastes the idea that Solomon gathered Proverbs. He assembled them and set them in order.

So maybe he is the assembler of wisdom. He's gone out and gathered or compiled wisdom together. And so we might say, well, he's the compiler.

The problem with this is kahal never occurs in the cal stem anywhere in the Hebrew text. It always occurs in the nifal, which is the passive, meaning to be gathered or to be assembled. Or it's in the hyphial, which is the causative.

Moses caused the people to be assembled. Joshua assembled the people or assembled the army. God told Moses, assemble the people before me and I will deliver my words.

And it's always in a hyphial or nifal. So we don't have any examples from the kal where it just

says, I'm going to unite. It's always in a causative stem.

So the fact that this is a kal participle makes it odd to begin with. The second thing is it's feminine. The T ending on it makes it a feminine word, not masculine.

But this word occurs, kohelet, occurs seven times in this book. And it always takes a masculine verb. So it's a feminine participle in the kal, but it takes a masculine verb.

And to make a long story short, there's been dead seas of ink spilled on trying to figure out exactly what it means. It is possible that this was a title for an office in Israel. We have some examples over in Ezra chapter 2, verse 55 and 57.

And also in Nehemiah 7.59. These are places where they were talking about families that returned from exile back to Israel. And one of these is ha-so-fer-eth, ha-so-fer-eth. It's going to be the ha-so-fer-eth family.

And it's just transliterated over into English. Well, so-fer means scribe, or if you point it differently, it means a tanner, a tanner of leather. Well, ha-so-fer puts an article in the front of it.

And the T on the end is a feminine ending and makes it a feminine participle. And what scholars have concluded is that possibly this is not so much a feminine ending as it is a way to take a word and make it the title of an office. You know, they've got these weird titles for people who attend the King of England or the Queen of England.

They've got the Knight of the Bath and the, you know, the Man of the Shoestring and all these other weird nonsensical looking things. But they have evolved into a title for an office. So the idea here is that this might have been someone who was a speaker to an assembly.

And this is what the Greeks concluded when they translated it Ecclesiastes, that he is one who speaks to an assembly. The other thing about kahal is every place you find it in the Hebrew Bible, in the Nephal and in the Hithiel, it is always used of people. It's never used of things.

It's always assembling or uniting or gathering people or people gathering and uniting themselves. It's sometimes used in contexts where it says the people rose up against a king or rose up against a foreign adversary. They assembled themselves together.

It's used in Leviticus and Deuteronomy for assembling for worship. You find places in the Law of Moses where it says someone will be cut off from the assembly and the word there is kahal. It's the noun from the verb kahal.

And the congregation as it conducts business, as it meets for worship, as it meets for civil action. You remember when Jacob said I will not unite my honor with the assembly of Simeon and Levi? Kahal was in that. When he says when they gather together, I will not unite my honor with them.

Kahal is in that verse. So it has the idea of a gathering of people. So it doesn't really work well.

It doesn't seem to be the best choice to think that he's in the assembler of wisdom. Well, here is the crux. This book has been called perhaps the most enigmatic of all the sacred writings.

J.S. Wright calls it the black sheep of the Bible. It's been called the Bible's strangest book. It's like a chest full of puzzles, another commentator said.

It is no exaggeration to say, this is a quote from one of the commentators, it's no exaggeration to say that there may be less agreement about the interpretation of Kohelet than there is about any other biblical book, even the revelation of John. Scholars differ widely on its authorship, its date of composition, its structure, its original language, its purpose, and its message. That's pretty much everything.

Nobody can agree on any of those items. It was not accepted easily into the Hebrew canon. Even the ancient scribes who were assembling the sacred writings of the Hebrews wrestled with whether or not to include this book.

And this controversy came all the way down into the time of Christ. And you remember you had two schools of thoughts. You had the Shammai school and the Hillel school.

Paul was from the Hillel school. The Shammaiites were the conservatives. They were the dyed-in-the-wool old school guys.

The Hillel people were more flexible, more willing to accept new ideas. And the Hillel people finally argued strongly enough to get Ecclesiastes included in the canon. And this is all recorded in the Mishnah.

What is the problem with the book that causes it to be such an enigma and such a puzzle? Well, we'll go into this in detail next time. But first of all, looking at the book, it seems almost impossible that it is actually of Solomonic authorship. And I'll give you the reasons for that next time.

But there have been strong arguments made that Solomon could not have written this book. It also has a very pessimistic point of view that's not reflected in any of the other wisdom literature of Israel. The only reason it ever got accepted into the canon is because of some of the orthodox statements that are scattered through it.

And in the final chapter, there seems to be some orthodoxy there. And that's how the Hillelites finally got it included in the canon. But it makes very pessimistic statements.

It seems to have a dark view of life. It seems to have nihilism and fatalism woven through it. It doesn't seem to be of Solomonic authorship.

There are problems with vocabulary. There are problems with language structure. Martin Luther,

who was the first of the Protestant biblical scholars, did not think Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes.

And if Solomon didn't write it, we have a big problem in inspiration because the book basically claims that Solomon wrote it. So this is the beginning of our investigation in answering these puzzles. But more importantly, when we do establish that Solomon wrote this book, and we will, we're going to find that the repository of this great wisdom that God gave to Solomon is found here.

And we're going to learn some amazing things and gain a viewpoint that is not found anywhere else in the scripture about our lives and our responsibilities before God. So I hope you look forward to it as much as I do. We'll resume our study of Kohelet, Ecclesiastes next time.

Let's close here in a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for the privilege of studying your word. We ask you to give us wisdom and understanding as we tackle the interpretation of this enigmatic book.

We pray that you will be with us and help us not only to solve the puzzles, but to gain the wisdom that you would have for us so that we can live our lives in a way that's pleasing to you. We pray these things in Jesus' name. Amen.