

01-01-14a Ecclesiastes

Let's continue our worship this morning by turning in our Bibles to Psalm 147. Psalm 147. This, although it is not apparent to you, is apparent to me, because I know what we're going to talk about this morning in the book of Ecclesiastes, bears directly on one of the fundamental conclusions we are going to draw about the purpose of that book.

We know, and this reflects a more general principle that we know, which is that God gives Scripture to us for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness. We have a variety of Scriptures with a variety of formats. Various types of literature are employed by the Holy Spirit as He carries along the authors of Scripture.

You have poetry, you have narrative, you have all different genres reflected. But there is a purpose for the record that we have before us, the inspired Word that is set down and is kept for later generations. We know that prophets and apostles and the Lord Jesus and Moses and many others spoke things that reflected divine viewpoint.

Wouldn't it be great to have a cassette series of the sermons of the Apostle Paul faithfully rendered into English by somebody who could do so? But he preached hundreds of sermons, perhaps thousands of sermons, during his career as an apostle that we don't have recorded. But certain things have been set down and preserved. And the book of Ecclesiastes is one of those 66 books.

And there's a purpose for it. And that purpose is reflected in this psalm, Psalm 147. It's subtitled in the New King James, Praise to God for His Word and for His Providence.

The psalmist exhorts believers to praise God for the care of His people. And this is, of course, the underlying reason for everything that we have from God. But in particular, we're going to find the application of that principle to Ecclesiastes as we continue our introduction and move into the first chapter this morning.

But Psalm 147 begins this way. Praise the Lord, for it is good to sing praises to our God, for it is pleasant and praise is beautiful. The Lord builds up Jerusalem.

He gathers together the outcasts of Israel. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds. He counts the number of the stars.

He calls them all by name. Great is our Lord and mighty in power. His understanding is infinite.

The Lord lifts up the humble. He casts the wicked down to the ground. Sing to the Lord with thanksgiving.

Sing praises on the harp to our God, who covers the heavens with clouds, who prepares rain for the earth, who makes grass to grow on the mountains. He gives to the beast its food and to the

young ravens that cry. He does not delight in the strength of the horse.

He takes no pleasure in the legs of a man. The Lord takes pleasure in those who fear Him, in those who hope in His mercy. Praise the Lord, O Jerusalem.

Praise your God, O Zion, for He has strengthened the bars of your gates. He has blessed your children within you. He makes peace in your borders and fills you with the finest wheat.

He sends out His command to the earth. His word runs very swiftly. He gives snow like wool.

He scatters the frost like ashes. He casts out His hail like morsels. Who can stand before His cold? He sends out His word and melts them.

He causes His wind to blow and the waters flow. He declares His word to Jacob, His statutes and His judgments to Israel. He has not dealt thus with any nation.

And as for His judgments, they, these other nations, have not known them. Praise the Lord. There are many observations that can be made about a psalm such as this, but we are aware in this psalm of the fact that it is addressed specifically to Israel, to the nation of Israel.

And most of the passages of Scripture that are so addressed, this would include the law of Moses and the vast bulk of the Old Testament, if not the entire Old Testament, was directed specifically to the nation of Israel. So when we come to passages like this, we have to recognize, first of all, what the purpose and the immediate application was to that nation. And I remember one of the first things I ever learned in seminary is this interpretive pyramid, if you will.

It's a three-point process. You start out with observation. You observe what is in the passage and try to make an accurate perception of what has been set down.

And that's in its context, with the recipients and author and historical subtext all in mind. Then, once you've gotten a grip on exactly what is being said, why it's being said, to whom it is being said, then you move to interpretation. What does it mean? Why was it said? What was its purpose? What is the point? Are there timeless truths that can be identified and extracted from your observations? So observation, then interpretation.

And once we detect and identify and come to understand the timeless truths that rise above the immediate context, we move into the third phase, which is application. What do those principles, those doctrines, those timeless truths mean in my case? And one of the things that Dallas Seminary has been famous for and deservedly so is hammering into every student who passes in and out of its gates observation, interpretation, application. I understand recently they added in a fourth step in there someplace, but we don't need it.

We only need the three. I like it. It's triune, because you can't do one without another.

And most of the pitfalls of biblical interpretation arise through faults in one or another of those steps. The most common one is that we get to the application phase and apply it to everybody except ourselves. The second most common is to fail to do a good job of observation.

That's the foundation that the interpretation and application rests upon. And if you have faulty observation, you're going to extract wrong truths. This is why someone can turn into their Bible and say, bring your tithes into the storehouse and God will open the windows, heaven and rain blessing on you.

They've observed something in the scripture. They say, oh, well, if I give to God, he'll give back to me. That's the timeless truth.

And they apply it by going down and sending a check off to some ministry and surprise, surprise, nothing happens. And it's all because that entire process was perverted by somebody on TV. But back to Psalm 147.

This is obviously directed to Jerusalem and to Zion, to the nation of Israel. And you can see here there's no hint that it's a divided nation or that it's a scattered nation. The Lord builds up Jerusalem.

This is the capital of the United Nation. Before it is the capital of Judah. It says, he gathers together the outcasts of Israel.

And there is a, because God the Holy Spirit inspires scripture, God is able to look ahead. You remember over in Isaiah when he identifies himself as the God who can see ahead. What other God is like me who tells you what's going to happen before it happens? And this is something we'll return to a little later when we talk about Ecclesiastes.

That the Lord builds up Jerusalem. He gathers together the outcasts. He heals the brokenhearted and binds up their wounds.

So on the one hand, when you hear about praise and worship of God, it sounds like this is a bountiful time where there are many blessings to be thankful for. And yet there is also scattering. There is casting out.

There are broken hearts. There are wounds. And God is praised because he heals and binds up all of these things.

In verse 4 it says, he counts the number of the stars and calls them all by name. We have names for the stars. I learned most of them when I was studying celestial navigation back in school.

And later on in the artillery, we use certain stars for directional orientation. There's a standard direction finding technique called Polaris-Kolchab where you use those two stars and their orientation to determine your latitude and several other things so that you can fire artillery rounds

and have them impact where they're supposed to. So we have given names to the stars.

But what is being talked about here is not that God's got a big celestial map where he's named every heavenly body, although he may well have done that. But the stars in the Old Testament are often veiled references, not so veiled references, to the angelic creation. And there is a reason for using that.

It's not just, well, I don't want to say angels so I'm going to say stars. Whenever there's a symbolic correspondence, that symbol tells you something about the substantial thing behind it. We've remarked many, many times about the use of the sea as representing the forces of evil.

This is the dwelling place of Leviathan. The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest. Well, why would God use the sea for that? Well, it has characteristics.

That verse from Isaiah, the wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There are characteristics of the sea. It's chaotic.

It's uncontrollable. Man has never yet been able to still a storm on the sea. We often fall victim to the vagaries of weather and conditions, the perfect storm movie we saw a few weeks back.

Once you're out there bobbing along like a cork on the water, there's nothing you can do about the sea. In the same way, the stars tell us something about the angelic creation. They are innumerable.

We have this referenced many other places in Scripture. There are 10,000 times 10,000. And yet God knows every single one by name.

When you look up at a night sky, especially in these days before lit up cities and smog and everything else obscured the heavens, these men as they watched their flocks by night could look up and see literally hundreds of thousands of stars in the night sky. And to reflect on the fact that God could take a quantity that large and have intimate knowledge of each and every object, in this case each and every star or by extension each and every angel, tells us something about His knowledge of us because we are very finite compared to that. Great is our Lord and mighty in power.

His understanding is infinite. Now this is important because if you will notice, this is bracketed by verse 2 and 3 and verse 6 talking about the broken hearted and the wounded. And then down in verse 6, the humble are lifted up by the Lord and the wicked are cast down to the ground.

Well, why is that true? How is that possible? It is because God has intimate knowledge of each and every human being. If He can number the stars, if He is mighty in power and infinite in understanding, then He knows our situation. He knows the thoughts and intents of every heart.

This is the thing that boggles my mind. And I've come closer to completely losing track of my

reasoning ability looking out at a large city from the window of an airplane and thinking about the hundreds of thousands of people, just the ones that I can see out the window, watching the cars go up and down the freeways and realizing that of all of those people, God not only knows each one by name, but He knows their hearts. He knows the complex stew of thoughts and intents and motivations in every heart.

He knows every act of faith. He knows every sin. He knows every pressure.

He knows every thought in every heart of every person on the face of the planet. And beyond that, He knows the same about all of the angelic creation. And the staggering infiniteness of God is just beyond human comprehension.

You can't even begin to wrap a human mind around that. But why are we told this? Why is this suggested to us in the psalm? God knows at any given moment in time all of these things. Not only that, He has perfect recollection of every thought, of every heart, of every person that has ever lived all through the past, and He already knows every thought, of every heart, of every person for all the rest of human history and all the rest of time and eternity.

His knowledge is staggering, but what does it mean to us? God isn't just a big computer in the sky with infinite storage. He does something with this knowledge in the same way that when we gain knowledge from the Scriptures, it's supposed to fuel something in us. It's supposed to accomplish a purpose.

This knowledge is not idle. One of the things you find out when you work with computers for very long is that people save a lot of stuff that has no useful purpose. You can go back on a hard drive or a network storage device and find memos and things that were done four, five, six, seven, eight years ago that are completely worthless and meaningless.

The information is useless, but it's just stored there and it gets backed up to tape every night and it increases the length of lists of files. If you have a word processor and you go and try to pull something up and you had a delay, it's because your computer is alphabetizing that list. God has an infinitely greater amount of information at His disposal, but it is for a purpose.

What is the purpose of God's knowledge of your heart and my heart? It is for healing, for binding up, for lifting up those who are humble. And this is a qualification. God doesn't lift up everybody that has a problem.

Some people have problems for a reason, for a variety of reasons. You can do an entire study, and it has been done, on why Christians suffer. Only one reason is discipline.

There are many other reasons, and most of them have to do with growth, with taking knowledge of God's Word out of the theoretical and putting it into the practical. But God lifts up the humble. James reiterates this.

God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble. It's another way of saying what is said here. The Lord lifts up the humble and casts the wicked down to the ground.

His intimate knowledge of our thoughts and our motivations and our priorities and our decisions is in action. There is a result from that knowledge. Because of that, if we are the humble, we can sing to the Lord with thanksgiving and sing praises on the harp.

And he goes back to refer again to God's power. He covers the heavens with cloud. He prepares rain for the earth.

He makes the grass grow. He gives the beasts its food and the young ravens their cry. What is the implication here? The same thing Jesus drew out in more concrete terms when He talked about the fact that if your Father in heaven knows every sparrow that falls, if He can clothe the lilies of the field, then we are worth more than many sparrows.

So God is infinite. God is all-powerful and all-knowing. But God is also intimate.

And anytime we think of the infiniteness of God, we should also think of the intimateness of God because He is a personal God. He loves us with the love of a father for a child. He is aware of every factor in our lives.

And He has great power. And what's the conclusion we draw from this? If He knows my problem and has all this power, then why doesn't He just fix it? Why did He allow it in the first place? Well, this goes back to the whole reason that we exist at all, and that is to exercise faith, to trust that God has a purpose, that there is a reason, and that it is for our good. Romans 8.28 and related passages tell us that the things that happen to us happen for a purpose and a reason.

And if we have confidence in God, if we have humility, we are teachable, we are approachable from the standpoint of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God, correctable, instructable, then these things are going to be beneficial not only to us, but they're going to produce positive results in the plan of God. Now, all of this, we know most of these things, this is sort of review on a lot of these principles, but this is specifically going to help us approach the book of Ecclesiastes, because too often, when people come to a book, we don't place it in the context of God's plan and God's purpose, and that is essential to getting anywhere in that book. And this psalm reminds us of those truths.

God has power, He sends out His Word, He sends out His command, look at verse 15, He sends out His command to the earth, His Word runs very swiftly. It's God's Word that makes the snow fall, it's God's Word that scatters the frost, so this drives the seasons. I think of this, it's too hard for me to comprehend God actively managing every atom and molecule in the universe and consciously directing every wind that blows and every storm system that covers the planet and every leaf that pops out of every tree.

And so for me, for convenience, or to keep from just melting down my mental apparatus, I think of God as setting the universe in motion like a very perfectly written computer program. You can write a program and say, this is like, you see people with video games, the girls have got little games, I was helping them play Star Trek 25th anniversary last night, which is actually a very good game, there's a lot of problem solving logic that you have to use, you get to use Spock to figure things out and so on. But you can write a program and create an environment, and once you write the routine that paints the background and shows you which part of the ship you're in or all of these other games, there's a background, there's an environment, well you paint that environment and then you move the characters around in front of it.

Once you've painted the environment, you don't have to keep running a new program to keep the environment painted, it's there and it's fixed. And I think God has programmed the laws of the universe, gravity and magnetism and electricity and all these other things, and they function according to the rules that God has laid down. So it is a rule-based universe, not an actively commanded, God doesn't have to say to every apple that disconnects from the tree, fall to the ground.

He set up a rule. He's programmed DNA, He has programmed all of the different things in the universe. Is He aware of every aspect of how that is running? Can He intervene and change the program and suspend gravity or stop a storm or raise someone from the dead? Sure, in the same way that on a very limited basis, a programmer could go into a program and disable one routine or another.

There are cheats for these video games, they're designed to run a certain way and you have to solve a certain puzzle or you're an armed person and you only have so many guns and so many bullets. Well, there are little hidden things that a lot of programmers put in their games and if you know them, you can go in and hit a certain key combination and now you're immortal. You can't be killed by the enemy.

You can take as many bullets as you want, you never die. Your weapon will never run out of bullets. You can suspend the normal operation, the normal rules of the game by knowing certain things and changing the program.

The miracles that God does in the Bible are nothing more than suspending the usual rules. But the point here is God has the ability to place His full attention on each and every one of us at all times and He has infinite power. If He allows something in our lives and the nation of Israel is going to face a lot and some of it is going to be divine discipline, some of it is going to be for growth.

There is a remnant in Israel and yet they suffer right along with the rest of the nation. Why doesn't God isolate them? Why isn't there sort of a rapture for the remnant in every generation of Israel to make them immune to capture and exile, to make them immune to death and disease and a lot of

the other things that were a part of the discipline on the nation? Well, there is a purpose and there are eternal fruit issues. There is eternal weight of glory attached to the faith and the endurance and the obedience and the unwavering belief that God is doing what is best that is a part of that life.

Can you do without in the short term to gain in the long term? Can you give up something that you cannot keep to gain something that you cannot lose? This is an obvious application of that principle are teenagers who have the opportunity to date and engage in physical relationships and so forth before marriage. Can you forego indulging your desires and your passions and save yourself until you get married? If you do, there are tremendous benefits to be gained but you have to believe and that belief has to be strong enough to overcome your impulses and your urges and the impulses and urges of other people with whom you associate who are going to try to convince you that, oh, baby, I love you, need you, want you and let's go do it. And there has to be a faith that is active.

Well, where does that faith come from? What is its object? It is the all-powerful, all-knowing, all-loving, intimate, infinite God and that's what this Psalm talks about. And believe it or not, that is the God that is behind the viewpoint expressed in the book of Ecclesiastes and it is essential to any advanced study of wisdom in the Old Testament to recognize that there are these presuppositions. If you just come to a book like Ecclesiastes or a book like Proverbs or a book like Job and try to process the statements and the axioms, the aphorisms that are communicated there without the background of the infinite God and His purpose and His plan, it doesn't make sense.

It seems to contradict itself. It seems to only have limited applicability. I never got so frustrated, or never more frustrated, I've been frustrated many times, but I've never been more frustrated than I was in seminary when we came to the book of Proverbs and they said, well, you have to take a different approach when you come to a book like Proverbs or these other wisdom books because you can't say that these are absolute truths, that the righteous will prosper and the wicked will be condemned because we have to think, why do the wicked prosper? Sometimes the wicked prosper and Proverbs seems to say that the wise man will prosper in all his ways and the wicked man, the fool, will be parted from his money and suffer all kinds of bad things and that just doesn't play out in real life.

So we have to take the Proverbs with a grain of salt. We have to say, well, this is the ideal or this is the usual or most of the time this is true and that just is like fingernails on a chalkboard to me because that's trying to process divine truth at a human level and what is the missing ingredient? It is God. God in his heaven and the third dimension, that's like a two-dimensional approach instead of the third dimension of the heavenly and the eternal.

If you are wise, your prosperity is not measured by how much you have, it's measured by what God decides you have and are going to have and that proverb is always true that the wise man is

going to prosper in all his ways and you may look at him and say, look, he's living in a hovel, he's got no money, he's got no friends, he's got no standing, he's afflicted, he's got a disease, he's crippled, he's this, that and he's the other and from a human point of view, you say, well, now see, that proverb is just not true. That wise man did not prosper. But you see, it's a two-dimensional, it's a flattened down, it ignores the third dimension, the eternal, the divine and the fraction of eternity that time occupies and that this life occupies.

Well, this is all background and it's understanding we have to have in place and have to keep current in our minds when we come to Ecclesiastes and that's reflected here in this psalm. When you come down to verse 19, he declares his word to Jacob, his statutes and his judgments, to Israel. This is a standard two-line, sort of a proverb and you see the parallel there between Jacob and Israel.

We talked about this in our study of Genesis. Why does God alternate these? Is it just stylistic variation? Is it just for poetic effect? But we saw in our study of Genesis that Jacob speaks of that man and by extension, his offspring, the nation of Israel in terms of their actual human experience. Israel implies the ideal, the place to which God wants to bring Jacob and his offspring, the nation of Israel.

So what happens? He declares his word to Jacob and that's the starting place. When you're Jacob, when you're embroiled in the world and you need to grow and you need to learn and become mature, the word of God comes to you. When you start moving into the Israel category where you are beginning to fulfill and beginning to grow into all that God wants you to have and all that God wants you to be, you find out that His word is statutes and judgments.

You can differentiate. You can tell the difference. It's not just the word of the Lord.

This is a statute. And this other thing over here is a judgment. And so there is a growth and expansion of understanding and perception as we move into the growth and the progress that God wants us to make.

He has not dealt thus with any nation. As for His judgments, they have not known them. Nations can hear the word of the Lord but they're not going to understand the judgments of God and by extension the statutes and the ordinances and all of the other... We know the difference between promises, principles, and doctrines in the word of God.

And you don't get that if you're just a member of a run-of-the-mill nation. You get that when you're Israel here in the Old Testament day. The interpretation of that, God withholds certain things and certain understandings and gives them to those who belong to Him.

What is the application? God will do that for us. We will gain insight. We will gain wisdom.

We will gain understanding. We will have more and more things to make the object of our faith

and to substantiate the reality of that third dimension, the eternal, the divine. And because of that, we praise the Lord.

And as the psalmist thinks about that, he just doesn't even write any more song. He just says, praise the Lord. What a great thing that we have the privilege.

And in this age, this is what Paul talked about when he said, I am a steward of the mysteries, things that were not even revealed in the previous age. Because when you step back and look at human history, the nation of Israel in the Old Testament is sort of the Jacob and the church is the Israel in terms of the people of God in general. And there's been all kinds of weird theological conclusions drawn about the church being the new Israel and I do not subscribe to that.

But there is a sense in which Israel represents us before progress, before transformation and renewing of the mind. Without the ministry of the Holy Spirit, without perception and substance and content of the Word of God in our souls. And the church is supposed to be Israel in the sense of fulfilling that potential that God has for His people.

How do we get there? It's by heeding the Word and beginning to perceive the statutes and the judgments. The Word of God is what is alive and powerful. That is the transforming power that takes us by the renewing of our minds from the Jacob stage to the Israel stage.

It's going to do it for the nation of God's people that began with Abraham. It's going to do it for us individually. Okay, well that is sort of a sideways introduction.

If we turn now to Ecclesiastes, I want to resume our... and conclude our introductory look at this unique book in the Bible. I mentioned to you last time that the title Ecclesiastes is from the Greek, the Septuagint and the Vulgate which followed it. Ecclesia, the church.

Ecclesiastes, one who speaks in the assembly. Hebrew title, the words of Kohelet, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. So the Hebrew title of it was Kohelet or the words of Kohelet.

That term doesn't occur anywhere else in the Bible. It is a participle. It's a feminine participle.

And several different meanings have been suggested for it. Maybe an assembly leader or a preacher. It has more the idea of someone who assembles or who gathers.

The word Kahal has at its root meaning to assemble, to gather, or to unite. It's always found in the Hithiel stem which is causative. You cause something to come together.

Or the Nifal which is passive. You are the thing that has been gathered. So someone is causing things to be gathered in most passages in the Bible or in other places.

You are the thing, you are the Israelite that has been gathered for worship or gathered for battle. But this participle is in the straight Kahal stem which is just the declarative stem. It's not in the

causative and it's not in the passive.

So it's unique. And because it's a participle it sort of turns into a noun. He is the assembler.

He's not causing things to assemble and he's not being assembled. He is the assembler. And this sort of moves him up a step and we'll see why as we go forward this morning.

It is never used of inanimate objects in the Old Testament. Always of an assembly of people. So we get the idea that whatever it is Kohelet is assembling or uniting it's going to have to do with people and not just with collecting proverbs.

He's not the editor, if you will. Some people edit a book and a collection of poems or essays. That's not what's in view.

I also mentioned to you last time and this is where we pick up this morning that there are reasons why this has been called the most enigmatic of all the sacred writings. The Bible's strangest book. A chest full of puzzles.

The black sheep of the Bible. I mentioned last time one of the foremost scholars has said it's not an exaggeration to say there's less agreement about the interpretation of this book than any other book in the Bible including Revelation. And this is because of problems that have been identified with authorship, date of composition, with the structure of it, the original language of it, the purpose of it, and the message of it.

There's such little agreement on any of those things. And this goes all the way back to before the time of Christ. And the scholars of that day, the rabbis, argued about whether it even ought to be in the canon of inspired scripture.

Why is this? Well, first of all, and I have numbered these and I'll give you my numbers. You can number them if you want to. What are the problems with this book? Some of these you may already be aware of, but we need to know this as we go in so that we're not just saying, oh, well, it's all simple and fine.

If you talk to anybody else about Ecclesiastes, some of these things will probably come up. Well, first of all, it's not generally believed that Solomon wrote it. Now, your standard Christian who just has a very straightforward view of the Bible, everything in my Bible is true, actually has it right.

But people that get in and delve and start looking at the details, this reminds me of archaeology. You grow up and you hear in church about the seven days of creation. You say, hey, that's fine.

And as long as you don't study archaeology and listen to the voice of science, you can sustain that view with little problem. But you get into school, you start taking courses, go to college, and they start talking about sedimentary layers and bones and all the rest of it, dinosaurs, La Brea Tar Pits, age of the earth, carbon dating and all the rest of it. And pretty soon you start thinking, wow,

there's really no way that Genesis 1 account can be true because the evidence in the fossil record just doesn't support it.

Look at the Grand Canyon. How many years did it take the Colorado River to cut that thing? On and on and on. So it seems like knowledge tends to erode faith in the Scripture.

And that's exactly what has happened with Ecclesiastes. And so they say, boy, there's really a lot of problems. When you look at this book closely, it doesn't seem like there's any way Solomon could have written it.

And this is a big problem because I will tell you this, if Solomon did not write this book, we don't have any business studying it because the book claims to be written by Solomon. They say, well, this was a royal fiction. And this did happen in the ancient world where you have pseudepigraphical works, which is a fancy way of saying you write the book and you claim to be Peter or Paul or somebody, but you're really not.

So you have these spurious Gospels being written, the Gospel of Thomas, the Gospel of Peter, and a lot of these other books that obviously didn't make it, so to speak, into the New Testament because they're bogus. They say, well, this is the Gospel of Peter and it purports to be written by Peter and it was not. Well, this book purports to be written by Solomon.

It doesn't come out and directly say, I, Solomon, was king in Israel. But what it does say is, I was king in Jerusalem over Israel. He claims great wisdom and the ability to investigate everything that happens under the sun.

He claims to be a son of David. There's only one person that these things fit and that is Solomon. Nobody else was king over all Israel in Jerusalem except David.

And David can't be his own son, so that lets out David. It has to be Solomon. Jeroboam, Rehoboam, and the rest of them, you look at their career in Chronicles and Kings, there's no way this description fits them.

So it claims to be written by Solomon. And if it's not, then we ought to just close it and go on to another book study. But 98% of all biblical scholars don't think Solomon wrote it.

And here's why. They say, well, this royal fiction is dropped after chapter 2. He sort of puts himself in the position of being the king in the beginning, but after chapter 2, he doesn't resume and say, while I sat on my throne I did this, or as the king I did that. That kingly viewpoint seems to disappear after chapter 2 and doesn't ever come back.

And that this royal fiction is put on to try to give authenticity and weight to the book. And then after it's accomplished that, well, the author kind of drops it and really speaks with his own voice. This is their perception.

Not only that, but they claim this. They say, well, he doesn't ever come out and just put his own name on it. Why doesn't he do like he does in Proverbs? Proverbs says in Proverbs 1.1, in Proverbs 10.1, in Proverbs 25.1, the Proverbs of Solomon, son of David, king in Israel.

Well, why doesn't he just come out and say, I'm Solomon? Well, you could make the same argument. Why doesn't the Apostle Paul come out and say, I'm Paul in Hebrews? Well, there's a reason for it. I think Paul wrote Hebrews.

I wouldn't die for it, but if somebody held a gun to my head and said, guess who the author is, I wouldn't hesitate a second. I think the Apostle Paul wrote it. And I've mentioned to you before why I think he didn't use his name.

People say, use the argument, every other book of Paul, he says, I'm Paul, an apostle of Jesus Christ, Paul, a bond slave of Jesus Christ. Why doesn't he do it in Hebrews? Well, look at the audience. To whom is he writing? Every other book was written to mixed congregations or Gentile churches.

This is written to the Hebrews. Well, what kind of standing does Paul have with the Hebrews? What does his name connote to them? Traitor, goofball, nutcase, says he was struck down by God while trying to go to Damascus, and now he's completely changed. He's abandoned his pharisaic roots.

He's a nutball. So if he says, hi, I'm Paul, well, nobody's going to listen. So there is no introduction to the book in terms of author or purpose.

It just launches right out, talking about God. The name that starts out at the beginning of the book is God. And the author of Hebrews is appealing to people who care about God.

So there's a really good reason if the author is Paul, why he's not going to distract everybody by saying, oh, hi there, I'm Saul, remember me? Well, in the same way, there's a reason why Solomon is not going to put his name directly in the front of this book. We'll see that as we go into the content. But if there's a plausible alternative, then it's not an argument that he could not have written it because he didn't put his name on it.

But they also say this. They say, well, his attitude toward kingship is distant and even critical. Look at the observations about injustice in 3.16 and in chapter 4, verses 1 and 2, and in chapter 5, verse 7. If you go to these passages, he seems to be critical of kings.

So if he's a king, why would he be critical of his own self? He says in 3.16, I saw under the sun that in the place of judgment wickedness is there, and in the place of righteousness iniquity is there. Well, this is not to me a compelling argument. You can be the king and look down at all the judges and the lower administrative courts and places of decision making and right and wrong judging and say there's corruption in our judicial system.

This is not necessarily a commentary on the king. Chapter 4, verse 1 and 2, I returned and considered all the oppression done under the sun. I looked and here's the tears of the oppressed.

They have no comforter. Their oppressors have power. They have no comforter.

And I decide that the dead are better off and so forth. Chapter 5, verse 7 is cited as an argument. In the multitude of dreams and in many words, there's vanity.

So just fear God. Well, I don't see anything in here that says, well, this author could not have been the king. But these are the things that are put forward.

Comments about royalty in chapter 8, verses 2 and through 4. The author of Ecclesiastes says here, I say, keep the king's commandment for the sake of your oath to God. Do not be hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand for an evil thing.

For he does, the king, does whatever pleases him. Where the word of a king is, there is power. Who can say to him, what are you doing? Well, again, you can draw your own conclusion.

That doesn't look to me like it militates against Solomon having written it. But these scholars say that it does. You go to chapter 10, verse 4 through 7. If the spirit of the ruler rises against you, do not leave your post.

For conciliation pacifies great offenses. There's an evil I've seen under the sun as an error proceeding from the ruler. Folly is set in great dignity while the rich sit in a lowly place.

I've seen servants on horses while princes walk on the ground like servants. So the idea, the argument here is this viewpoint that the author expresses seems to be of a subject looking up at kings rather than a king looking at fellow kings or a king looking down. So this is sort of an implication type of argument.

So people say, this is really a problem. He doesn't sound like a king. He doesn't say, this is what I've seen as I sit in the seat of judgment, so to speak.

So these comments seem to stem from someone who appears to know more about how to deal with a king than how to rule himself. And they say, well, these passages indeed lend credibility to the claim that he's talking about situations in a foreign court and hence about the post-exilic period after the exile when Israel comes back and they're being dominated by foreign rulers and that they're looking up at these foreigners, the Persians or the Greeks or whoever, the Ptolemies that ruled this part of the world. So here's a quote.

In short, both the tenor of the book and the language in which it is written renders impossible the identification with Solomon or any Hebrew. The author of the epilogue, the last few verses of the book, is right. Kohelet is a sage.

So he's a wise man posing as Solomon for his own purposes. So, this is the problem of authorship that is put forward. We don't think Solomon could have written.

It doesn't sound like Solomon. It doesn't sound like a king. We're going to go on to note several other reasons why this book is said to be late, is said to not be written by Solomon.

But as we pause here to take our break, if this was our only substance, our only spiritual nourishment for the day, what conclusion would we draw? What principle would we bring out and interpret and apply for ourselves? Well, there are many places in life where the evidence seems to suggest that our faith is invalid, that what the Word of God says is not necessarily true. And if you sit there and listen to the arguments and listen to the evidence in the absence of faith, you'll be convinced. And you'll say, well, you know, I've really got to go.

I've got to find the world's solution. I've got to use the commonly applied human answer to this problem because look at the evidence. Well, this is precisely why God has immersed us in a fallen world.

Why are we not at salvation transported to the heavenly realms? And why don't we grow up and mature? Wouldn't it be great to be taught by the angels? But we're left here on earth. Why? It is an exercise in growth. We need to push against resistance for our faith to grow.

So when you look at the daily circumstances, you look at the problems, the issues, this is good. We need it. We're supposed to question.

We're supposed to have a conflict with our faith in the unseen realm. Let's pause here and take our break. When we come back, we'll see just how great a conflict there is when it comes to Kohelet or the Book of Ecclesiastes.