

# **Read the Bible in a Year**

Week 35 – January 30-February 5

## **Read on Your Own this Week:**

*Psalms 103-105*

*Matthew 17-20*

## **Readings in Class:**

1 Thessalonians

2 Thessalonians

Ecclesiastes

Song of Solomon

## **Introduction to Ecclesiastes**

Meaningless! Vanity! These are the words that usually come to mind with this book of the Bible. While often considered depressing, this is actually a very encouraging book. Ecclesiastes is a book about how life *without God* is meaningless. God gives life meaning.

Ecclesiastes is part of the wisdom literature, most likely (like Proverbs and Song of Solomon) written by Solomon, the wise king himself, perhaps as an older man reflecting on his life.

## **A Brief Summary of Ecclesiastes**

1. Prologue (1:1-11)
2. Only God gives meaning to human existence (1:12-6:12)
3. Divine wisdom enables wise living (7:1-12:8)
4. Epilogue (12:9-14)

## **Meaningless! Vanity!**

The refrain that most often comes to mind when thinking about Ecclesiastes is from the opening lines. Meaningless! Meaningless! Vanity of vanities! Futility of futilities! Everything is meaningless! The Teacher goes on to say that riches are meaningless, wisdom is meaningless, pleasures are meaningless. Everything goes on and on, repeating over and over, and then we die, and it still goes on. Sounds depressing, right?

We do the dishes and the next day we do the dishes again. The laundry never ends. The inbox is never empty for long. A loved one dies and life keeps going on. The sun rises and the sun sets and the sun rises again. What's the point? Secular society tries to come up with meaning, but in the end we get old and die and no one remembers us. Still depressing, right?

While this all sounds depressing, Ecclesiastes is actually rather encouraging. The final point sums it up (12:13): "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." Everything in life is meaningless because it isn't permanent. Sin and death take everything from us eventually. But not God. God is eternal. Everything good comes from God. So the meaning of life is to fear God and serve our neighbor.

Nothing more, nothing less. You don't have to do anything great or grand in your life for it to have meaning. As Martin Luther said: When a father goes ahead and washes diapers or performs some other menial task for his child, and someone ridicules him as an effeminate fool...God with all his angels and creatures is smiling.'

### **Introduction to Song of Solomon**

Song of Solomon is a book of love poetry between King Solomon and his bride, who is called the Shulammite, often thought of as the feminine name form for Solomon to express the oneness that is achieved in marriage that they share the same name. This happens in Genesis 2 between Adam and Eve. Adam who is called "the man" (*ish* in Hebrew) names the beautiful creature taken from his side *ishah*, or as we would say, woman.

The poetry in Song of Solomon follows a cat and mouse between the two lovers. Each of them is desperately searching for the other and longing for each other. Often, just as they discover each other or approach the physical fulfillment of their love in marriage, the scene suddenly ends and cuts back to them separated and back on the hunt for each other. Such is the nature of love. That is how the book ends too with the lovers back searching for each other and a warning from the author about the nature of love and how love should be used.

The Song of Songs has perhaps some of the most shocking verbiage in all of Scripture but its focus is on the delight that man and woman find in each other in the bond of marriage and has much to teach couples how they should see each other in marriage as they constantly seek to woo their beloved. Ultimately, this book is alluded to often in the New Testament with the themes of marriage and ultimately how Christ searches and weds himself to His bride, the Church.

### **A Brief Summary of Song of Solomon**

1. The First Cycle 1:1-17
  - a. Desire for Consummation 1:1-4
  - b. Courtship 1:5-8
  - c. Wedding 1:9-11
  - d. Consummation 1:12-17
2. The Second Cycle 2:1-17
  - a. Wedding/Consummation 2:1-7
  - b. Courtship 2:8-15
  - c. Wedding 2:16
  - d. Consummation 2:17
3. The Third Cycle 3:1-4:7
  - a. Courtship 3:1-5
  - b. Wedding 3:6-11
  - c. Consummation 4:1-7
4. The Fourth Cycle 4:8-5:1
  - a. Courtship 4:8-4:11
  - b. Wedding 4:12-15
  - c. Consummation 4:16-5:1
5. The Fifth Cycle 5:2-6:10
  - a. Search 5:2-8
  - b. Praise 5:9-16
  - c. 1<sup>st</sup> Garden Scene 6:1-3
  - d. 2<sup>nd</sup> Garden Scene 6:4-10
6. The Sixth Cycle 6:11-8:4
  - a. Search 6:11-13
  - b. Praise 7:1-9
  - c. Invitation 7:10-13
  - d. Longing 8:1-4
7. The Conclusion 8:5-14
  - a. Theology of Love 8:5-7
  - b. Applying Love 8:8-12
  - c. Final Appeal 8:13-14

## **This is in the Bible?!**

For a casual reader of the Bible, this book can be a bit shocking. The physical language and intimacy can be a little blushing at times as if we were outsiders who discovered a love letter between two other people. We might be tempted to ask why this book is included about the canon. But marriage and sexual intimacy are a major part of life, designed by God himself, and should rightly be discussed.

Too often we are flooded with the world's view of marriage and sex. From Hollywood, Social Media, and every day life, the world does not blush to flaunt about a sexuality and physical worldview that is foreign to God's view. Here in Song of Solomon we get an image of love that is God pleasing and the way that God has intended intimacy and love to play out in marriage. This letter gives us a beautiful example.

But more importantly, this book gives us the picture of Jesus and his bride, the Church. We see how the Lord desires us, that we are his chosen people. And we see how we should desire him as well. We too are caught up in the desire and cycle to find our beloved Lord who will come and unite Himself to us when he comes again. This is why Revelation ends with marriage metaphors as well.