

**Ridgecrest Baptist Church  
Tuscaloosa, AL**

Scripture texts English Standard Version,  
Copyright © 2001, Crossway Publishers

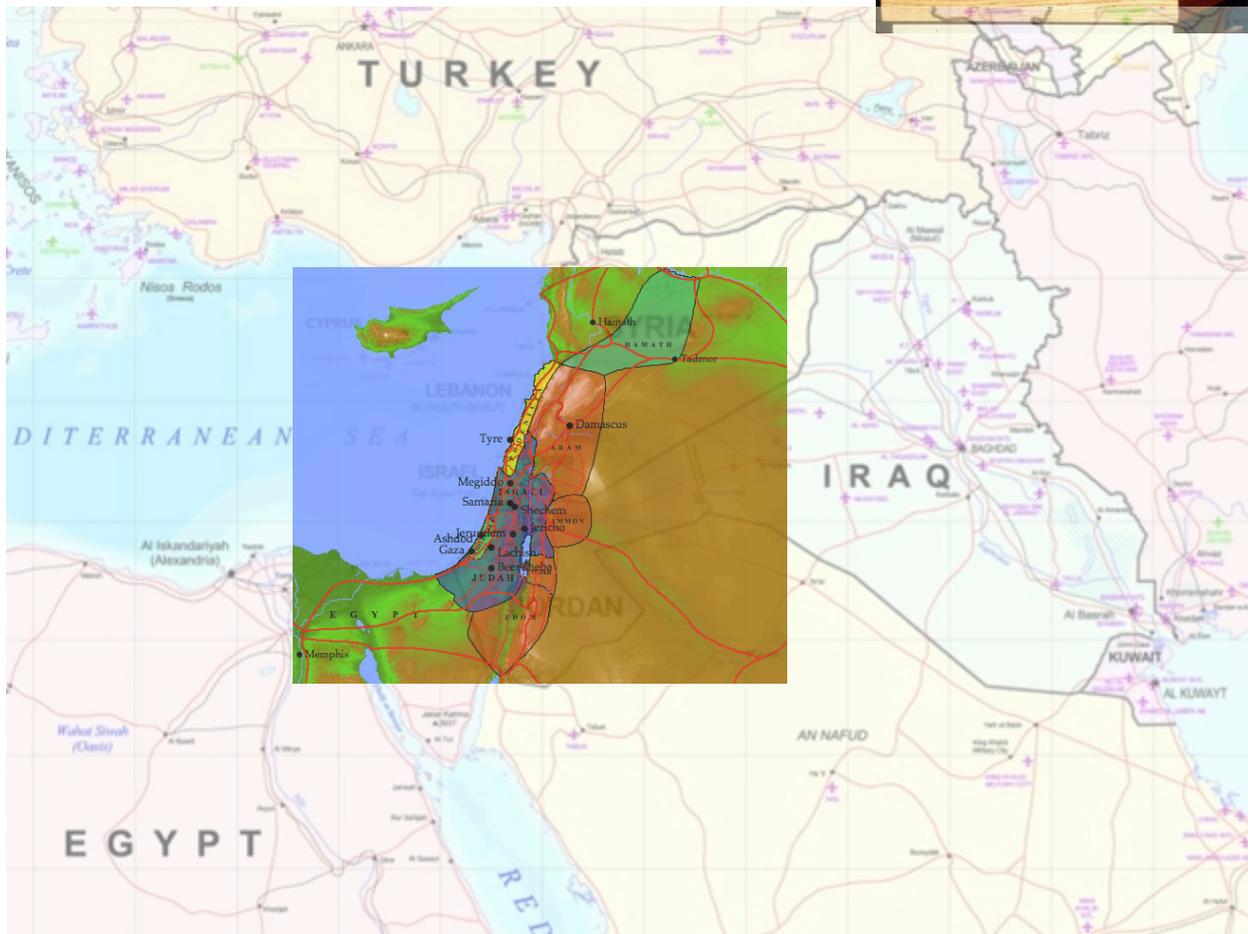
## Session 1: Introduction to the World of Solomon

### •Study Goals:

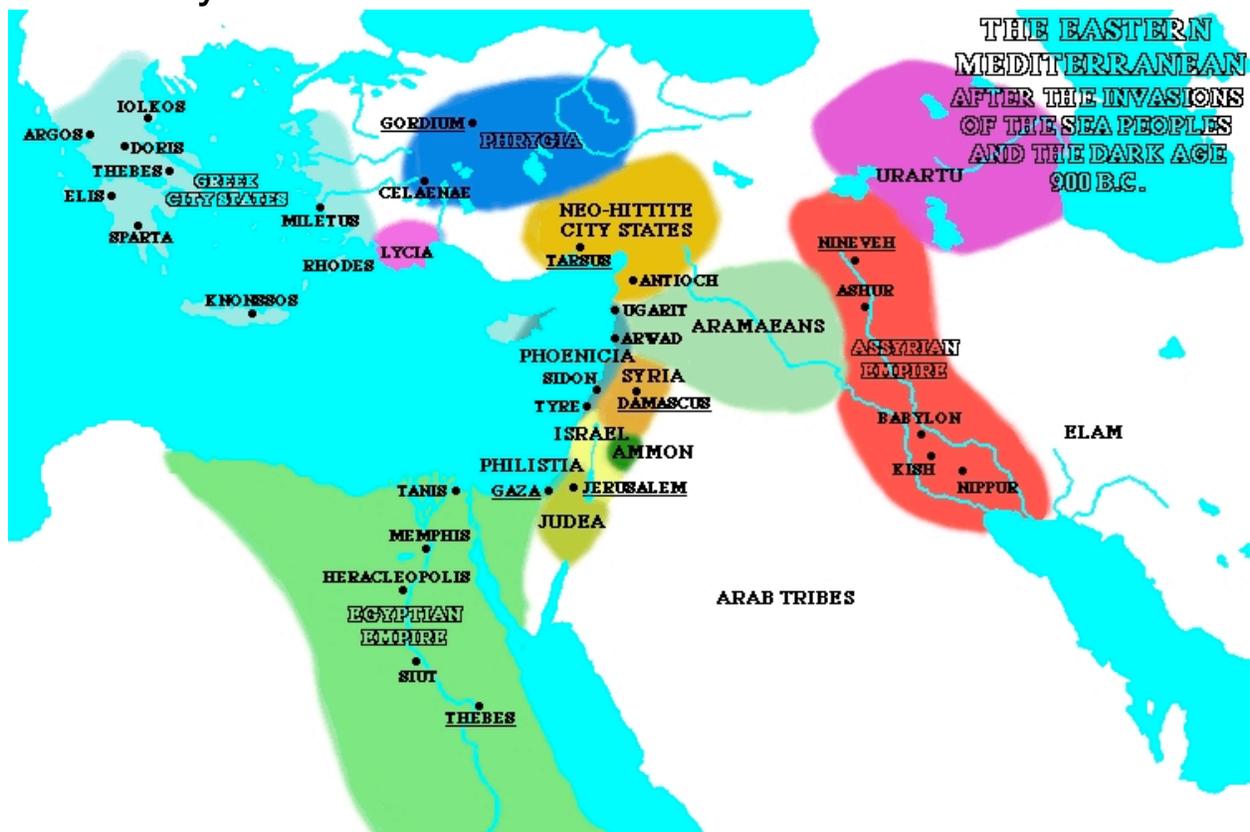
- The historical setting of Solomon
- Ecclesiastes' setting in Scripture
- Ecclesiastes' application to New Testament believers

### •Questions of life:

- Adm. James Stockdale, Vice-presidential candidate, 1992
  - “Who am I?”
  - “Why am I here?”
  - Everyone asks!



- Q. “What is the chief end of man?”
- A. “Man’s chief end is to glorify God, and to enjoy him forever.” — Westminster Shorter Catechism
- Our study: The book of Ecclesiastes
- All ancient cultures asked the questions; all ancient cultures wrote proverbs explaining the answers
- Solomon’s World
- Israel inherited the land promised to Abraham’s descendants
- Problem: It was inhabited by Canaanites and surrounded by hostile neighbors
- Two major superpowers for most of Israel’s history: Egypt and Assyria



Source: <http://www.aina.org/maps/historic/historic.htm>

- Assyria
  - Ancient empire; dated from c. 2600 B.C.
  - Eventually became the dominant empire of Mesopotamia
  - Strongest period came after Solomon; eventually conquered Northern Kingdom of Israel, 722 B.C.
  - Known for military strength and cruelty
- Egypt
  - Egypt of Solomon's time: New Kingdom era (22<sup>nd</sup> Dynasty)
  - Golden Age of Egypt had long passed; pyramids were ancient in Solomon's time (over 1,600 years old)
  - Wealthy civilization; based on agriculture
  - Egypt claimed Canaan as a province several times over its history
- Empire of Rameses II (1304-1236 B.C., or 250 years before Solomon)
- Implications:
  - Israel existed between 2 major competing powers in the most hotly contested real estate on the planet
  - Much of Israel's history involved warfare and diplomacy with hostile kingdoms
  - Diplomacy almost always included a wedding
  - Earliest examples include marriage of Zimri-Lim's daughters to king of Ilansura, c. 1770 B.C.
  - Hostile neighbors forced Israel to rely on God for protection
- God's Promises
  - God promised Israel:

- Wisdom: “See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, ‘Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people’” (Deut. 4:5-6)
- Security: “And when you draw near to the battle, the priest shall come forward and speak to the people and shall say to them, ‘Hear, O Israel, today you are drawing near for battle against your enemies: let not your heart faint. Do not fear or panic or be in dread of them, for the LORD your God is he who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies, to give you the victory’” (Deut. 20:2-4)
- Justice: “Beware lest you say in your heart, ‘My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth.’ ... if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish” (Deut. 8:17, 19)
- God and Kings
  - God gave Israel the requirements for a king:
  - No foreigners (Deut. 17:15)
  - Must not acquire horses or return to Egypt for horses (Deut. 17:16)
  - Must “not acquire many wives for himself” (Deut. 17:17)

- Must not hoard “excessive silver and gold” (Deut. 17:17)
- “And when he sits on the throne of his kingdom, he shall write for himself in a book a copy of this law, approved by the Levitical priests” (Deut. 17:18)

## Session 2: Solomon

- King of Israel, 971-931 B.C.
- Son of David, Israel's model king
- Came to the throne as the result of an attempted coup (1 Kings 1)
- Inherited a kingdom that stretched from the border of Egypt to the Euphrates River
- Prayer for wisdom: "Give your servant therefore an understanding mind to govern your people, that I may discern between good and evil" (1 Kings 3:3-9)
- Demonstration of wisdom: The 2 women and the child (1 Kings 3:16-28)
- Solomon the Wise
  - Considered the wisest person in Scripture (except, of course, Jesus)
  - "God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and breadth of mind like the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east and all the wisdom of Egypt" (1 Kings 4:29-30)

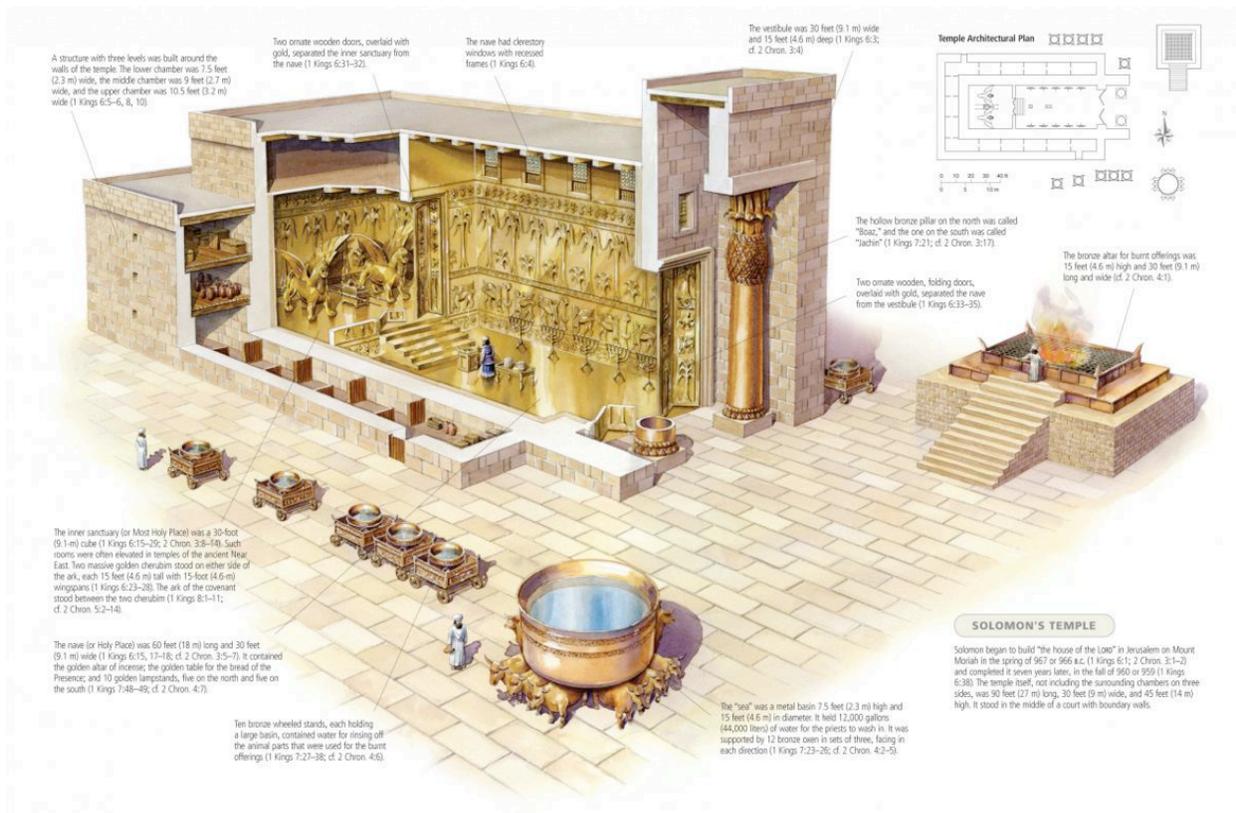


Giovanni Battista Tiepolo, *The Judgment of Solomon*

- [Solomon] also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005.... And people of all nations came to hear the wisdom of Solomon” (1 Kings 4:32, 34)

- Solomon’s Reign

- Ruled during Israel’s golden age: “And Judah and Israel lived in safety, from Dan even to Beersheba, every man under his vine and under his fig tree, all the days of Solomon” (1 Kings 4:25)
- Wealth:”the king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stone, and he made cedar as plentiful as the sycamore of the Shephelah” (2 Chron. 9:27)
- Military power: 1,400 chariots and 12,000 horsemen
- Spent 7 years building the Temple in Jerusalem (1 Kings 6:38)
  - Considered a wonder of the ancient world
  - All parts were fashioned away from Jerusalem and assembled on site with no iron tools (1 Kings 6:7)
  - Dedicated c. 959 B.C.
  - Dedicatory prayer ranks as one of the greatest prayers in history (1 Kings 8; 2 Chronicles 6)



Source: ESV Study Bible, <http://www.esvbible.org/media/esvsb/images/big/illustration-solomons-temple.jpg>

- Spent 13 years building his own house (1 Kings 7:1)
- Married daughter of Pharaoh of Egypt
  - Sign of Solomon's power; Pharaoh's daughter rarely married outside the royal family and almost never a foreigner
- Q. Did Solomon trust his father-in-law?
- A. Built a fortress city at Arad in the South
- 164' square



- Outer wall was 5.25' thick
- Inner wall was 4' thick
- Small replica of the Temple found here
- Queen of Sheba
  - Visited by the Queen of Sheba  
(1 Kings 10)
  - She gave Solomon 120 talents of gold and a treasure of spices; he gave her “all that she desired” (v. 13)
- Alliances
  - Political problems:
  - Egypt to the south
  - Ammon, Edom, Moab, and Syria were conquered by his father David and annexed to the kingdom
  - Solomon ruled over at least 4 other nations other than Israel; would have employed extensive diplomacy with the powers in the region
  - Solution to the diplomatic issues: Marry the kings' daughters
  - “Now King Solomon loved many foreign women, along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women” (1 Kings 11:1)
- Solomon's Women
  - Solomon's final tally:
  - 700 wives, all princesses (mostly the result of his extensive diplomacy)
  - 300 concubines
  - Result: “when Solomon was old his wives turned away his heart after other gods, and his heart was not wholly

true to the LORD his God, as was the heart of David his father” (1 Kings 11:4)

- Results of Solomon’s idolatry
  - God raised Solomon’s enemies (1 Kings 11)
  - Hadad the Edomite
  - Rezon of Damascus
  - Jeroboam, Solomon’s supervisor
  - Promised 10 tribes of Israel
  - Fled to Egypt for protection (remember Solomon’s wife from Egypt?)
  - Kingdom split under Solomon’s son, Rehoboam, 931 B.C.

## Session 3: Ecclesiastes 1-2

### Wisdom Literature

- Hebrew word “hokmah”: means “right or skillful living”
- Wisdom literature tells us 2 things:
  - How we should live life according to God’s commandments
  - How people really live

### Ecclesiastes

- Authored by Solomon, tenth century B.C.
- In Hebrew canon, located in “Writings” Word “Ecclesiastes” comes from the Greek; means “one who addresses an assembly”
- Refers to word “preacher” in 1:1
- 12 chapters
- Addresses “vanity” of life; fear of God; human life; and life as God intends for us

### Key Themes

- Reality of the fall
- Vanity of life
  - Word “vanity” occurs 38 times in this book
- Sin and death: “Human beings forfeited the righteousness they originally possess before God and thus all people are sinners” (*ESV Study Bible*, 1195)
- Joy and frustration of work
- Grateful enjoyment of God’s good gifts
- Fear of God

### Introduction

- Introduction: 1:1-3

- Key word: “vanity”
  - Hebrew word also refers to “vapor,” “breath”
  - Often refers to:
    - empty works
    - idolatry
    - vain attempts to defy God’s commandments
  - Word translated “vanity” in Greek translation of Ecclesiastes also used by St. Paul, Rom. 8: “For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God” (vv. 20-22)

#### Vanity of work

- Does a man “gain” anything with his work?
  - Answer: v. 4
- Does the natural world care about our work?
  - Answer: vv. 5-8
  - “You think man can destroy the planet? What intoxicating vanity. If we're gone tomorrow, the earth will not miss us” (Michael Crichton, *Jurassic Park*)

#### Vanity of the “New”

- Does anything “new” really ever happen?
  - Answer: vv. 9-11
    - “There is nothing new under the sun” (v. 9)
- Danger of forgetting what has passed: “There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after” (v. 11)

## The Quest for Wisdom

- Solomon's goal: "I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven" (v. 13)
- Solomon's results:
  - v. 14: "all is vanity and a striving after wind"
  - v. 17: "I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind"
  - v. 18: "For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow"

## "I Want It All!"

- Chapter 2: Solomon's tests for wisdom
  - Pleasure: "I said in my heart, 'Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.' But behold, this also was vanity"
  - Solomon withheld nothing from himself:
    - Wine
    - Women
    - Wealth
  - Result: "all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun" (v. 11)

## "I'll Live Rightly..."

- Chapter 2: Solomon's tests for wisdom
  - If indulgence doesn't work...
  - v. 12: "I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly"

- Better result: “I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness”
- Still, the same end: “How the wise dies just like the fool! “ (v. 16)
- Solomon “hated life... for all is vanity and a striving after wind” (v. 17)

#### “It’s Mine!”

- What did all his work earn for Solomon?
  - “I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me, and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun” (vv. 18-19)
- Reality: one generation will leave its accomplishments for succeeding generations

#### Final Result

- Did Solomon learn anything from his numerous experiments?
  - “There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil” (v. 24)
  - One should consider this “enjoyment” as a blessing of God (v. 24)

## Session 4: Ecclesiastes Chapter 3-4

- Chapter 3: “To Everything...”
  - One of the most familiar passages of Scripture in our culture (thanks to the Byrds, 1965)
  - Passage tells us one of the greatest truths in Scripture: God does everything in His time
  - v. 11: “He has made everything beautiful in its time”
    - Time and humanity: v. 11: “[God] has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end”
  - Solomon: Focus on the present (v. 12)



Source: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/File:TheByrdsTurnTurnTurn.jpg>

- Real Choices in Life: Chapter 3:16-21
  - A time for justice: vv. 16-17

- Injustice in this world will meet with perfect justice before God
- Humanity vs. creation: v.v. 18-20
  - “This, indeed, is probably one of [God’s] motives for creating a dangerous world — a world in which moral issues really come to the point...Courage is not simply *one* of the virtues, but the form of every virtue at the testing point, which means at the point of highest reality” (C.S. Lewis, *The Screwtape Letters*, p. 161)

#### Chapter 4: Can we do better alone?

- American hero: The solitary cowboy
- v. 1: “no one to comfort them”
- The dead are more fortunate than those with no comfort (v. 2)
- The danger of loneliness: v.v. 7-12
- Estrangement from family: vv. 7-8
- The benefit of a friend: vv. 9-12
- “Two are better than one”
- “A threefold cord is not quickly broken”



Source: “Functional Horsemanship,” [http://functionalthorsemanship.blogspot.com/2010\\_07\\_01\\_archive.html](http://functionalthorsemanship.blogspot.com/2010_07_01_archive.html)

- Wisdom or Power?
  - vv. 13-16: Contrast between wisdom and power

- “Poor and wise youth” vs. “old and foolish king”
- The youth rises to the throne; the king falls to the grave
- Even in wisdom, “those who come later will not rejoice in him”

- Lessons:

- The timing of God
- St. Paul:
  - “For while we were still weak, at the right time Christ died for the ungodly” (Romans 5:6)
  - “But when the fullness of time had come, God sent forth His Son” (Galatians 4:4)
- The fellowship of our salvation
- Fellowship with God
  - “Therefore, since we have been justified by faith, we have peace with God through our Lord Jesus Christ” (Romans 5:1)
- Fellowship with Jesus: “He has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you’” (Hebrews 13:5)
- Fellowship with other believers
  - “There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free, there is no male and female, for you are all one in Christ Jesus” (Galatians 3:28)
  - “But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light” (1 Peter 2:9)

## Session 5: Chapters 5-7

- True Worship

- Chapter 5:1-7: The danger of false worship

- v. 1: “Guard:” to do carefully or diligently” (TWOT)
- “Sacrifice of fools:” explained in vv. 2-3: “Be not rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be

hasty to utter a word before God... Therefore let your words be few”

- v. 4: Rash vows
- v. 5: “It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay
- cf. Luke 14:27-33: Count the cost before vowing to God or making a commitment you cannot keep
- vv. 6-7: Think before you speak
- “Worship is either an encounter with the reality of God, or it is some kind of attempt by man to raise himself by his own bootstraps. It then becomes an occasion for moralizing, a theatrical show, or a sort of



Source: <http://cyberbrethren.com/2010/02/20/what-is-the-chief-purpose-of-the-christian-worship-service/>

pep rally” (Earnest Koenker, *Worship in Word and Sacrament*, p. 47 HT: Weedon)

- Danger of Wealth

- Chapter 5:8-17: Greed leading to oppression

- vv. 8-9: Government officials oppress the poor for their own benefit

- Solomon’s answer: a wise and gracious king (v. 9)

- When the love of money rules: vv. 10-12

- “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income” (v. 10)

- Result: “the full stomach of the rich will not let him sleep” (v. 12)

- Hoarding and false investments: vv. 13-17

- v. 13: “grievous evil:” an “evil” that leads to physical illness

- Truth of ill-gotten wealth: “As he came from his mother’s womb he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand” (v. 15)

- True Wealth

- Chapter 5:18-20: True response to wealth

- Enjoy the results (v. 18)

- Accept God’s grace (v. 19)

- Live in God’s joy (v. 20)

- Remembering the joy of life minimizes the memories of pain

- Wealth, no Health
  - Chapter 6: Wealth or health?
    - vv. 1-2: “evil” in amassing wealth but lacking the health to enjoy it
    - v. 3: “evil” of fathering children but not enjoying the joy of their lives
    - v. 6: “Even though he should live a thousand years twice over, yet enjoy no good—do not all go to the one place?”
    - Wealth does not exempt one from death
- Proverbs for Life
  - Chapter 7:1-13 Proverbs for living
    - “Proverb:” “a short pithy saying in general use, stating a general truth or piece of advice”
    - Proverbs extol wisdom, caution against foolishness, and describe life in its gritty reality
    - Key proverbs:
      - Seek a good reputation
      - Avoid foolish seeking of pleasure
      - Listen to the wise
      - Guard against fits of temper
      - Face the present: “Say not, ‘Why were the former days better than these?’ For it is not from wisdom that you ask this” (v. 10)
- Life’s Key: Moderation
  - Chapter 7:14-22: Wisdom of moderation in all things
    - The wise sometimes perish while the foolish thrive (vv. 15-18)

- Understanding the limitations of wisdom (vv. 19-22)
- Solomon's Plight
  - Chapter 7:23-29: "A man among a thousand"
  - The danger of an ungodly harem: " I find something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart is snares and nets, and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her" (v. 26)

## Session 6: Chapters 8-10

- Life with a King
  - Chapter 8:1-9: Wisdom in the realm
  - The wise keep their emotions in check in the presence of authority
  - v. 2: “God’s oath:” God had chosen David’s family as king (2 Sam. 7)
  - No one tells a king, “What are you doing?” (v. 4)
  - Application: The Church is a kingdom, not a democracy; we obey God’s commands
- The Ways of God
  - Chapter 8:10-17: Our ways, God’s ways
  - Justice in life
    - v. 10: The wicked face judgment in death that they escape in life
    - v. 11: The danger of justice delayed
    - vv. 12-13: Contrast between the wicked and the righteous
      - The wicked may live a long life, but they still face justice
      - For the righteous, “it will be well”
  - Chapter 8:10-17: Our ways, God’s ways
    - vv. 14-17: Should we obsess over supposed injustice?
      - v. 14: Life sometimes seems backward; the righteous suffer, the wicked flourish
      - Solomon’s response: Only God understands life; we can only enjoy the life God gives us

- One Destination
  - Chapter 9: The result of all life
    - Everyone who lives will die
    - Regardless of wisdom or wickedness, all die
    - Solomon: “a living dog is better than a dead lion”
    - Limits of Solomon’s knowledge of the afterlife (vv. 5-6)
    - Solomon’s wisdom: “Love the one you’re with”
    - Who wins the race of life?
      - v. 11: Regardless of our preparations, “time and chance happen” to everyone
      - v. 12: “Man does not know his time”
    - The wise may die, but their works live after them
    - vv. 13-16: A poor wise man may remain unremembered after death, but “wisdom is better than might”
    - vv. 17-18: Quiet wisdom overcomes bombastic foolishness
  - Advantage: Wisdom
    - Chapter 10: Proverbs regarding wisdom
      - vv. 1-3: The danger of foolishness to the wise
        - “A little folly” proves dangerous to the reputation of the wise
        - The fool lacks the sense to hide his foolishness
      - vv. 4-7: Wisdom in high places
        - v. 4: Standing in the face of royal anger
        - vv. 5-7: Danger of misplaced responsibility
          - Moral: “Choose your leaders well”
  - Wisdom in Life

- vv. 8-10: Living is dangerous!
- vv. 12-15: The power of wise speech
- vv. 16-20: Wisdom among rulers
- Remember: Wisdom literature tells both how to live a righteous life and the realities of life

## Session 7: Chapters 11-12

- Chapter 11:1-4: Casting Bread
  - Several possible meanings:
    - Financial diversity
    - Giving to the poor
- The mysteries of God: vv. 5-8
  - Return to the mystery of God's work in creation (v. 5)
  - The abilities of God to reward those who work and give generously (v. 6)
  - Rejoice in the blessings of life (vv. 7-8)
- Knowing God in our youth: 11:9-12:8
  - Taking cheer in youth: vv. 9-10
    - Celebrate the blessings of God
    - Walk within God's plan and design for life
    - Learn early to avoid worry and stress in life
  - Praising God in youth: 12:1-8
    - "Remember," v. 1: to act on the remembrance
    - Metaphors of aging:
      - "Darkening" of creation:" the dimming of our eyes
      - "Clouds return:" storms of life
      - "Keepers of the house:" arms
      - "Strong men:" legs
      - "Grinders:" teeth
      - "Windows:" eyes
      - "Shut doors:" lips
      - The body ages, making praise and enjoyment difficult to achieve
- Final words of Solomon: 12:9-14

- Final task of Solomon: Teach the people (vv. 9-10)
- Blessings of wise words:
  - Serve as “goads” (motivators)
  - Serve as “nails” (anchors in life)
  - All wise words come from “one Shepherd” (v. 11)
- “The end of the matter”
  - Avoid endless searching for the meaning of life: God alone can give it meaning (vv. 12-13)
  - God will judge every human justly (v, 14)

## Session 8: New Testament Wisdom

- New Testament era wisdom: philosophy (Greek, “love of wisdom”)
- Major philosophies of Greek world that we see in the New Testament:
  - Epicureanism:
    - All the universe consisted only of the material matter
    - The greatest good in life was to seek pleasure
    - Pleasure leads to tranquility and contentment and eliminated any element of fear from one’s life
  - Stoicism
    - Emphasizes complete self-control in all situations, accepting whatever comes without question
    - Emotional self-control would lead to an unbiased opinion of all life, giving one contentment in all situations
- Influence of Greek philosophy: St. Paul
  - Quoted 2 Stoic philosophers:
    - Acts 17:28: “In him we live and move and have our being.” Epimedes of Crete, c. 600 B.C.
    - Acts 17:28: “For we are indeed his offspring.” (Aerates (c. 315-240 B.C.)
    - Titus 1:12: Cretans are always liars, evil beasts, lazy gluttons.” Epimedes of Crete, c. 600 B.C.
  - Knowledge of Greek philosophy:
    - Epicureanism: “Let us eat and drink, for tomorrow we die” (1 Corinthians 15:32)

- Stoicism: “Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content” (Philippians 4:11)
- Jesus’ philosophy of life: Matthew 5-7
  - God blesses believers with the assurance of His protection and provision
- Major difference between pagan philosophy and New Testament teachings of wisdom: The Resurrection of Jesus Christ
  - “But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead, the firstfruits of those who have fallen asleep” (1 Corinthians 15:20)
  - The Resurrection:
    - Clearly settles the question of life after death
      - Jesus: Luke 20:27-40: “He is not God of the dead, but of the living”
    - Gives new meaning to life because life continues after death
    - Gives new motivation to bless others so they, too, can enjoy eternal life
    - Teaches us to trust in God and His provision rather than worry about life

## Bibliography

Bauer, Susan Wise. *The History of the Ancient World: From the Earliest Accounts to the Fall of Rome*. New York: W.W. Norton & Co., Inc., 2007.

*ESV Study Bible*. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008.

Davis, Barry. "Ecclesiastes 12:1-8-Death, an Impetus for Life." Available online: [http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted\\_Hildebrandt/OTeSources/21-Ecclesiastes/Text/Articles/Davis-Eccles12-Death-BS.pdf](http://faculty.gordon.edu/hu/bi/Ted_Hildebrandt/OTeSources/21-Ecclesiastes/Text/Articles/Davis-Eccles12-Death-BS.pdf).

Harrison, R.K. *Introduction to the Old Testament*. Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers, Inc., 1969, 2004.

Lewis, C.S. *Mere Christianity*. San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1954, 2001.

Ross, Allen. *In the Paths of God*. Study guide for study trip to Israel, June 2011.