

Sunday, June 17, 2018—1 Kings 8-10

The Ark of the Covenant was so called because of its contents. The testimony of God to man, the stone tablets Moses brought down from Mt. Sinai, were inside the box. These two pieces of stone represented the great promises of God and the high standards He had for His people. When the priests brought this box into the Temple, God's Spirit so invaded the place that the priests had to leave. His glory was too heavy for them (8:10-11).

Solomon then prayed a powerful, beautiful prayer of humility and worship. God was too big for the Temple to contain Him, yet God had called for His people to build this place. Solomon prayed God would continue to bless His people with His presence, promises, and power as they followed faithfully after Him. Provision was only from Him. Forgiveness was totally His prerogative. They were nothing without Him, and this building would be a continual testimony to that.

The response of the king and the people was one of great joy and sacrifice (10:62-63). God responded to Solomon with an affirmation of His promise to keep a son of David on the throne forever. He reminded Solomon, however, of the consequences of turning away. God was pleased with their worship but would not tolerate any disobedience (9:6-9).

What God was doing through Solomon was breathtaking to the queen of Sheba (10:5). What He will do for His obedient children today can be equally amazing. His word and His practice do not change. Praise Him for His promises, and live in joyful obedience.

Saturday, June 16, 2018—1 Kings 5-7

Solomon shared great wisdom throughout his life, but his walk with God and kingdom leadership provide other lessons and application for modern believers. One is his partnership with King Hiram (5:1-10, 7:13-47). He enlisted the help of someone skilled to do good. Solomon also shows the marvelous plenty God blessed him with, annually giving 100,000 bushels of grain and 110,000 gallons of olive oil (5:11) to Hiram.

Solomon's life represents the value of perseverance, as he built the Temple 480 years (6:1) after the Exodus. What he did was something for which the people had longed for generations. In building the Temple, he demonstrated the value of the presence of God (6:2) and the practice of obedience (6:12). The people of God had no higher calling than to walk in holiness and no higher hope than that of God's being with them.

Their building Him a dwelling place was to fulfill a promise—that He would dwell among them (6:12). The Temple was not simply a place of worship like the other religions had, so they saw this accomplishment as unique among all the peoples of the earth. When, therefore, they brought the ark of the covenant (6:19), they were assured of His power.

Solomon also demonstrated the value of persistence. He took seven years to build the Temple (6:38) and 14 to build his palace (7:1). Obedience is a long walk in the same direction, Pray for faithfulness in walking with God and growth in valuing His presence and promises.

Friday, June 15, 2018—Song of Songs 5-8

God has designed marriage to be the single best proclamation of the gospel to the world. The husband is to love his wife the way Christ loves the church. The wife is to give honor and respect to her husband the way the church does Christ. Paul described this in Ephesians 5.

That relationship requires the continual effort of both parties. That self-sacrificial attitude is counter-intuitive and counter-cultural, yet that kind of relationship brings honor to God and blessing to the culture. That relationship is also an indescribable blessing to the partners. The

spiritual nurture, physical intimacy, and emotional growth between husband and wife are rich. These motivate both to grow and give continually.

In Song of Songs 5-8, the physical and emotional connection and enjoyment are on display. For many, the discussion in this chapter might even be blush-inducing, yet the friends of the couple celebrate. The church, too, ought to celebrate when marriage and sexuality are enjoyed in God's design. Too often, the church remains silent or hushed, and the roar of the culture and the saturation of immorality drown out its important voice.

The church needs to speak openly, yet carefully, about marriage, sex, and intimacy. Couples need to have that kind of open dialogue as well. The husband in Song of Songs makes sure his wife hears words of affirmation. She does the same for her husband. They talk to each other. They cover important topics. There is nothing to hide between them.

Pray for marriages to be God-honoring and partner-blessing.

Thursday, June 14, 2018—Song of Songs 1-4

Solomon wrote much about life. His Proverbs were the views of a mature man who had experienced much by the guiding hand of God. Ecclesiastes was the thoughts of an old man looking back on life with frustration and skepticism, but his song about love came from a young man enthralled with his wife. He called it his song of songs, the song which exceeded all the other songs.

The song includes the thoughts of several characters—the woman, a chorus of young women, and the man. The woman has a low view of herself because she has had to labor outside and finds herself unattractive. Her relationship with her man, however, breathes hope into her life and excites the chorus of friends who surround her.

The man continually affirms her with his words, building up her self-esteem. He shows her value through the joy she brings to him, with her appearance and her voice, even before their marriage. She longs for them to be together. She dreams about him at night, only increasing her desire for him, but she knows not to awaken this passion too quickly (2:7).

His descriptions of her are comical to modern readers. He compares her to a horse in Solomon's stables. Her hair is like a flock of goats. Her teeth are like newly-shorn sheep, and her brow is like a slice of pomegranate. To her, however, these words warmed her soul.

Pray for marriages to honor Him and one another. Pray for those waiting to do so with patience and praise.

Wednesday, June 13, 2018—Ecclesiastes 10-12

The Teacher has learned much from life, and he has put some of this truth into writing. He longs for his son to avoid folly and to gain wisdom. Folly, like a fly in a perfumer's oil, ferments the things of life and makes them stink (10:1). A single fly would be unattractive, so even the smallest amount of folly is to be avoided.

Wisdom, on the other hand, brings success to its owner (10:10) and grace to those who hear from him (10:12). Folly leads to laziness, but wisdom encourages hard work and produces abundance in life (10:18-19). Wisdom guards thoughts and words to avoid regretful statements (10:20).

The teacher saw wisdom motivating people to be generous and trusting (11:1-3), and wisdom motivated them to work and invest (11:4, 6). To gain wisdom is an important goal, but the Teacher realized that knowing all things was impossible. There were mysteries about the work of God (11:5). Wisdom helps its owner make the most of life, both in youth and in old age (11:7-10).

“So remember your Creator in the days of your youth” (12:1). The body will undoubtedly begin to break down, and life will have less ease and joy (12:2-7).

The teacher knew, with his great wisdom, he was limited. In the end, he encouraged his readers to fear God and keep his commandments, for “God will bring every act to judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil” (12:13-14). Pray for increasing wisdom, day after day, to know Him and make the most of life.

Tuesday, June 12, 2018—Ecclesiastes 7-9

“Hindsight is 20/20.” Most are convinced when looking back on a situation or life in general that they have a clear grasp of reality. The Teacher certainly thought so as he penned Ecclesiastes.

He knew the power of wisdom. Wisdom was valuable like silver but had an advantage. Wisdom could preserve the life of its owner (7:12). With his wisdom, the Teacher made this interesting observation. “Don’t be excessively righteous, and don’t be overly wise. Why should you destroy yourself? Don’t be excessively wicked, and don’t be foolish. Why should you die before your time?” (7:16-17). He knew there was no one perfect, so anyone who had the misguided notion he could be perfect would destroy himself—from an impossible pursuit or the arrogant misconception of self.

He also knew the destructive folly of wickedness. No one should go down that path. Was he saying to live in mediocrity? Was he encouraging people to sin in moderation and attempt to be good enough? No. He was telling them to live in the fear of God (7:18), not the guidance of self.

The Teacher saw the frustrations of life. He knew the wicked did not receive immediate punishment, and the righteous suffered unjustly. In the end, however, “it will not go well with the wicked” (8:13). Wisdom encourages its owner to remember that and remain patient and trusting.

“Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but the sinner can destroy much good.” Pray for plentiful wisdom. Pray for a growing fear of God.

Monday, June 11, 2018—Ecclesiastes 4-6

The suicides of celebrities cause their fans and the broader world to pause and realize that having fame and fortune do not solve all the issues of life. Solomon would concur. He had anything a person could want, yet he was dissatisfied, and he took a long look at life.

In Ecclesiastes 4, he identified two significant problems—oppression (caused by jealousy) and loneliness. Sometimes, these two problems went hand-in-hand (4:1). On the surface, the conclusion was death was better than life, and those who had never lived were better off than anyone else. What a depressing view of life this is!

The hope he saw was in wisdom, relationships, and honest work. “Two are better than one because they have a good reward for their efforts” (4:9). Like a braided rope, the bond between people in relationship is not quickly broken (4:12). These relationships can breed wisdom as they seek God together and promote His truth and righteousness. These relationships and successes can help enjoy the work, riches, and wealth God has given (to whatever degree that might be). The Teacher believed this would “keep him occupied with the joy of his heart” (5:20) rather than contemplating the frustrations and mysteries of life.

Despite his cynicism, the Teacher had a healthy view of God. “Guard your steps when you go to the house of God” (5:1). He encouraged his students to use few words, with God and in life in general. “For many dreams bring futility, so do many words. Therefore, fear God” (5:7).

