

Monday, June 17, 2019—1 Kings 8-10

In the fall of every year, God's people gathered in Jerusalem and lived in tents for a week of feasting. This Festival of Shelters commemorated the provision of God during the 40 years of wilderness wandering as well as the final harvest of each year. The week-long event was an annual reminder of how faithful God had been to His own.

Fittingly, during this feast of tabernacles, the Jews moved the sacred items from the Tabernacle to the newly-completed Temple. Just as God had given His people a permanent homeland, His people had built a permanent home for His presence. When the priests placed the Ark of the Covenant in the Most Holy Place, God's presence filled the Temple with such a powerful presence, the priests could not continue their work (8:10).

Solomon knew the building could not contain God Himself (8:27), but the building would be the place God's people came when there was trouble—domestically, naturally, internationally, and spiritually. The Temple would be a place of prayer and restoration. God affirmed the work Solomon had done but again warned the people He would not bless their idolatry or disobedience (9:6). They were to be His special possession, different from all the other nations around them.

What God was doing through Solomon was breathtaking, even to the richest of leaders from other countries (10:5). His wisdom and prosperity were a testimony to the greatness and grace of God (10:9). Pray for a life God can bless and through which be glorified.

Sunday, June 16, 2019—1 Kings 5-7

Think of someone wise. Likely, that person had a certain air of calm, an outlook on life that wasn't hurried or worried. Knowing truth and its application for life can provide extraordinary peace of mind.

Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived, and he lived with the certainty of God's presence with him. He knew the call of God on his life, so he lived with a confidence few people have ever known. God had given him military peace (5:3), so he could turn his attention to building the Temple God had promised King David his son would build.

His confidence in God and his abundant possessions moved him to call on King Hiram of Tyre to provide the wood for the building. With these materials in place, he organized labor from within Israel to begin the work. The Temple would be the result of international effort.

As they worked on the design, God gave Solomon a promise of peace for the entire nation. "Concerning this Temple you are building, if you keep all my laws and regulations and obey all my commands, I will fulfill through you the promise I made to your father, David. I will live among the people of Israel and never forsake my people" (6:12-13). His promised peace would be a result of their persistent pursuit of Him.

Wisdom seeks God and obeys His commands. Wisdom recognizes the skills of others and puts them to use for God's glory. Thank God for wisdom and the peace and prosperity He brings by providing it.

Saturday, June 15, 2019—Song of Songs 5-8

Marriage is God's metaphor for His relationship with His people. There can be no wonder, then, that the devil and the culture have every intention of destroying marriage as God intended it. In addition, fallen human nature makes the self-sacrificial roles of marriage hard to fulfill. Every marriage, therefore, will face difficulty.

In Song of Songs 5, Solomon speaks of the highs and lows of marriage. The rapture of the honeymoon (5:1) is followed by the difficulties of daily life (5:2f). He came home late one night, hoping for some intimate time together, and she rebuffed him (5:3) before changing her mind. As a gentleman, he walked away, not forcing himself on her. The certainty of the covenant means that the relationship remains despite disappointment.

The pace of life and the toll it takes can cause marriage partners to drift. Physical, emotional, and spiritual fatigue lead to neglect. Sometimes hurt is unintentional. Sometimes selfishness stings and scars the partner. The solution is to remember the foundations of the relationship (5:10-16), to pursue (6:2-3), and to forgive. The relationship founded in Christ can weather the storms and grow in strength and intimacy (7:1-8:2, 8:13-14).

The beloved knew the power of intimacy and the dangers of sharing something so precious without the certainty of covenant. "Do not awaken love before its time" (8:4). Families can set high standards for purity (8:8-9), despite cultural laxity, with confidence that this is God's best.

Thank God for marriage and the picture it paints of the love of Christ for His church. Pray for marriages and churches to be glorifying.

Friday, June 14, 2019—Song of Songs 1-4

Many Bible scholars consider Romans to be Paul's greatest letter. Many critics would say the Mona Lisa is da Vinci's greatest painting. Solomon would say this is his greatest song. It is, therefore, literally titled "The Song of Songs Which Is Solomon's."

He celebrates his love for his wife, and their relationship is a powerful metaphor for the love God had toward Israel and the love Jesus has for His church. There is constant communication between the two partners about how much they value each other, and there are friends watching their relationship who celebrate its beauty and worth.

She begins by admitting she is self-conscious about her appearance (1:6) because she has spent much time outside, having to work. Her lover, therefore, uses his words to express her beauty to him (1:8-11). Before he ever enjoys any physical intimacy, he is building emotional trust. Rather than looking toward selfish fulfillment, he seeks to invest in her.

Their physical attraction is strong, but she knows not to awaken love before its time (2:7, 3:5). Self-control helps relationship partners walk as God intended. They wait for the public commitment of the marriage ceremony (3:6-11) and the personal covenant of the vows before they enjoy the physical connection of sexual intimacy (4:1-16).

Thank God for the gift of marriage and its power to communicate the gospel. Thank God for His deep, husband-like love for you. Pray for an increasing awareness of this love and a growing love for Him.

Thursday, June 13, 2019—Ecclesiastes 10-12

As much as Solomon had in visible terms of worldly possessions and success, he knew the key to life was unseen. “The hearts of the wise lead them to do right, and the hearts of the foolish lead them to do evil” (10:2). The condition of the heart becomes the action of the body. “Happy is the land whose king is a nobleman and whose leaders feast only to gain strength for their work, not to get drunk” (10:17).

His advice to young people was to realize so much lay ahead. To be young was a gift (11:9), and to live to old age was worthy of rejoicing (11:8). Their lives would have a wide variety of experiences, including many dark days (11:8). They did not want to waste the opportunity God had given them with their lives. If they forgot their Creator in the excitement of their youth (12:1), they would live a life of meaninglessness. Then, when they grew old and their bodies began to betray them, God would be nowhere in the equation of life, purpose, and hope (12:2-7).

Solomon knew wise sayings were like a shepherd’s guidance of his sheep. “Here is my final conclusion: Fear God and obey his commands, for this is the duty of every person. God will judge everything we do, including every secret thing, whether good or bad” (12:13-14).

Thank God for the gift of life and the opportunity to know Him and make Him known. Pray for increasing wisdom from Him.

Wednesday, June 12, 2019—Ecclesiastes 7-9

In a day of Facebook posts and Instagram photos, people tend to focus on what is emotionally fulfilling and visually pleasing. This is what garners “likes” and become “favorites.” Wisdom is not always this way.

Solomon said, “It is better to spend your time at funerals than at festivals. For you are going to die, and you should think about it while there is time” (7:2). Imagines posting that on social media or having that printed and framed for the office wall. While uncomfortable, the truth is the truth. God doesn’t want anyone to waste the life He has given them, so considering the way one spends each day and the legacy he will leave behind is a vital step in being a good steward of God’s gift.

In reviewing life, Solomon concluded that everyone was flawed (7:29). They’ve all fallen short of God’s glory, and many will pursue a wicked course which seems to pay dividends of honor (8:9-10). Despite the frustration of the good’s suffering and the evil’s prospering (8:14), Solomon says, “But even though a person sins a hundred times and still lives a long time, I know that those who fear God will be better off” (8:12).

Because of God’s overall sovereignty, there is only so much each person can do to chart his life’s course. So much seems like chance (9:11), but the thing each person can control is his quest for righteousness and his satisfaction with each day. Pray for a daily dose of sobering wisdom and fresh encouragement from the Spirit to live in holiness.

Tuesday, June 11, 2019—Ecclesiastes 4-6

Friedrich Nietzsche was a German philosopher who caused many to believe life had no meaning and God was not necessary. The effects of his assessment of life without God continue to ripple today. Like Ecclesiastes, many come to the conclusion

that everything is empty. Seeing the oppression and evil so prevalent in daily news is depressing and discouraging and leads many to believe the dead are better off than the living (4:2) so they don't have to experience the evil of the world.

Within the darkness of Ecclesiastes are glimmers of light. The wisdom of Proverbs bubbles up into the hardened, darkened mind of Solomon as he writes. He sees political power as useless if one isn't willing to listen to advice and ends up ruling and walking alone (4:7-16). The joy of Song of Songs and the insight of Proverbs illustrate the power of companionship and wisdom, which are lacking in Ecclesiastes' world.

Despite the discouragement, the Preacher knows the irreplaceable need for fearing God (5:1-7). He is far more powerful than money (5:8-20) and worthy of reverence and the true source of joy. God is eternal. Everything else is temporary. "Enjoy what you have rather than desiring what you don't have" (6:9a). Knowing Him is better than anything else.

Praise God for the meaning He brings to life. Pray for greater appreciation for your relationship with Him and others. Pray for growth in wisdom and its application. Pray for a life of influence on others.