



ECCLESIASTES, SONG OF SOLOMON & LAMENTATIONS

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Read on your own or with others,
which ever you prefer.

This leaflet is just a brief overview of the 'big picture' of this book. If you have been reading the Bible for some time you will be aware there is much more to them than you'll find here.

If you are new to reading the Bible don't worry too much if there are details you do not quite get at the moment - focus on the 'big picture'.

INTRODUCTION

Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon and Lamentations are three very different books. Between them they deal with the meaning of life, the celebration of love and the pain of life when it all seems to be going wrong.

We are also dealing with at least two different biblical authors. King Solomon probably wrote both Ecclesiastes and the Song of Solomon. The prophet Jeremiah is the author of Lamentations.

However, despite these differences there is a unifying theme. Ultimately they all have the same author – God – and they take their place in the Bible alongside all the other books pointing us to Jesus.

ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes is a book that asks a really big question: what is the meaning of life? The author, probably Solomon (Ecclesiastes 1:1), is on a quest for meaning in life, but keeps coming up short.

You may be surprised as you read this book just how up to date it is. Although it was written nearly 3000 years ago Solomon identifies all of our modern answers to the meaning of life. From education to pleasure seeking, from relationships to wealth, from work to social standing, he looks everywhere, but cannot find a life that is filled with satisfaction and meaning.

Does this mean we are doomed only to a meaningless existence? Or is it that Solomon is looking in all the wrong places by merely looking at life 'under the sun'? The answer is revealed as we reach the end of the book. I won't give it away, but just to say it is a reality that is only possible through the Lord Jesus Christ (John 14:6).

SONG OF SOLOMON

The Song of Solomon is a love poem celebrating the love between a man and a woman from courting to marriage (Song of Solomon 3:11) and beyond. As you read it you might be shocked by the

graphic nature of the poem and be even more surprised that it is in the Bible. However, let's remember three things:

First, love and the physical expression of that love within marriage is a gift from God (Genesis 2:24). Therefore, this poem is celebrating something God given and encourages good and wholesome relationship within marriages.

Second, on three occasions (2:7, 3:5, 8:4) a warning is given about exciting and awakening love too early. The Bible is clear that marriage and sex go together and shouldn't be separated (Genesis 2:24). This warning reminds us that physical passion is a powerful force that needs to be kept in check.

Third, human marriage and all that God has given for it is a temporary picture of a greater reality – the relationship of Jesus and his church (Ephesians 5:22-33). The love we read of here is not a direct parallel, but it is a picture of the affection of Jesus for his people and the love of the church for her saviour.

LAMENTATIONS

Lamentations is filled with songs of lament. These are songs that express sadness and sorrow to God. These particular laments were written during the period after King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had destroyed Jerusalem and many of the people of Judah had been taken into exile.

However, these aren't just pity songs because the people find themselves in a hard place. There is real acknowledgement of sin (for instance Lamentations 1:8) and grief that God's blessing has been replaced with God's judgments on their sin (for instance 2:5).

Most surprising, though, as we read through Lamentations are the words of hope and confidence. The most famous verses of this book (3:19-24) speak of God's goodness day by day in the trials that the people are facing. All is not lost even when it appears that way. Similarly, the book ends with the hope of restoration and renewal at the hands of a gracious God. A renewal that will only ultimately come through Jesus.

ASKING THE QUESTIONS THE BIBLE WANTS YOU TO ASK

What do these books teach you about Jesus? (Luke 24:45-47)

What do these books teach you about yourself? (James 1:23 & 2 Tim 3:16-17)

How were you encouraged? (2 Tim 3:16-17)

How were you corrected? (Romans 15:4)

What difference do the truths of these books make in your life? (Matthew 7:24-27)