

Old Testament scholar, Walt Kaiser Jr., in his book, *Coping with Change* writes,

*No book of the Bible has been so maligned, and so misunderstood, as the Old Testament book of Ecclesiastes. The most frequent assessment of the book is summed up in such negative terms as nihilistic, pessimistic, fatalistic, skeptical, cynical, materialistic, experimental, and the like.*¹

So why, you may ask, should we devote any time to the study of a book that comes with such a negative description? Read the above quote again. Are not the terms used to describe the Book of Ecclesiastes words that could very well be used to describe our present culture? Could it not be said that the world around us exudes a pessimism, fatalism, skepticism . . . ?

Consider this assessment from Ian Provan, author of *Ecclesiastes*:

We, too, live in a world in which there is much “toiling after gain,” as people strive to get ahead of the game of life and exercise control over their lives. The oppression and injustice that such a pursuit of gain and advancement all too often produces is as much a feature of our own world as it is of [Ecclesiastes], and it is as obvious in our world as in [Ecclesiastes] that joy and fulfillment do not automatically flow from this pursuit.

*In extensive parts of the Western world, indeed, the ever-more-frantic pursuit of such things is evidently accompanied by spiritual emptiness and world-weariness, as people strive to achieve what they can never possess by the means they have chosen for the attempt. One important aspect of the pursuit is the part played by knowledge and technique. At the heart of the chase lies a conviction that the universe is ultimately comprehensible and therefore malleable; it can be fashioned to our own ends. Accumulating human wisdom can be brought to bear upon it, enabling the constant march of progress towards a universal, or at least a personal, utopia.*²

Today I want to begin a journey that will lead us to a greater sense of purpose and significance. We will begin by reading the text of Ecclesiastes 1:1-11, then taking three steps: **First, we will discover who is the “teacher”;** **Next, after disclosing the identity of the teacher, we will provide some context to the teacher’s thesis that “All is meaningless”;** **finally, we will uncover the task the teacher desires to accomplish.**

Ecclesiastes 1:1–11

1 The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem:

² “Meaningless! Meaningless!”

says the Teacher.

“Utterly meaningless!

¹ Kaiser Jr., Walter C. *Coping with Change - Ecclesiastes* (Kindle Locations 116-118). Christian Focus Publications. Kindle Edition.

² Provan, I. (2001). *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (p. 40). Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan.

Everything is meaningless.”

³ What does man gain from all his labor
at which he toils under the sun?

⁴ Generations come and generations go,
but the earth remains forever.

⁵ The sun rises and the sun sets,
and hurries back to where it rises.

⁶ The wind blows to the south
and turns to the north;
round and round it goes,
ever returning on its course.

⁷ All streams flow into the sea,
yet the sea is never full.
To the place the streams come from,
there they return again.

⁸ All things are wearisome,
more than one can say.
The eye never has enough of seeing,
nor the ear its fill of hearing.

⁹ What has been will be again,
what has been done will be done again;
there is nothing new under the sun.

¹⁰ Is there anything of which one can say,
“Look! This is something new”?
It was here already, long ago;
it was here before our time.

¹¹ There is no remembrance of men of old,
and even those who are yet to come
will not be remembered
by those who follow.