



The Book of Ecclesiastes

Introduction – Week 1

Wednesday Noon Bible Study

The Book of Ecclesiastes has long fascinated many people. Some feel it is the most puzzling book in the Old Testament. It has been called one of the most melancholy books of the Bible. It has been used by some to teach that man ceases to exist after death.

Ecclesiastes is not a book that Christians should ignore. As with all Old Testament Scripture, this book was written for our learning (**Romans 15:4**) and admonition (**I Corinthians 10:11**). It is therefore profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, and for instruction in righteousness (**2 Timothy 3:16-17**).

The book has special relevance today in our materialistic and humanistic society, for it helps us to see the vanity of many earthly pursuits. The Book of Ecclesiastes contains lessons for individuals of all ages, but especially for the young who have so much to lose should they make the wrong choices early in life.

The Book Title

In the Hebrew Bible, the book is called “**Qoheleth**” (Kohelah) which means “preacher” (cf. **1:1**). The term suggests one who speaks to an assembly. The translators of the Septuagint (a Greek version of the Old Testament) called it “**Ekklesiastes**”, which also means “preacher”. The word is derived from “ekklesia”, meaning “assembly”.

The Author and Date of Writing

Jewish and early Christian tradition attribute writing of the book to **Solomon**. The author identifies himself as “**the son of David, king in Jerusalem**” (**1:1**) He also refers to himself as “**the Preacher**” (**1:2,12; 7:27; 12:8-10**). Internal evidence throughout the text also points to Solomon.

Some scholars question whether certain conditions described in Ecclesiastes (**3:16; 4:13-16; 5:8**) existed during the reign of Solomon. But these conditions could have been noted by Solomon in neighboring countries, or in lower-level positions of his administration.

| Note comments to the Preacher's: | | |
|------------------------------------|----------------|------------------------------|
| Wisdom | 1:16 | 1 Kings 3:12 |
| Building activities | 2:4-6 | 1 Kings 7:1-12 |
| Wealth | 2:7-9 | II Chronicles 9:13-28 |
| Activities after writing this book | 12:9-10 | 1 Kings 4:30-34 |

PURPOSE FOR WRITING

The Preacher wondered what many have asked: **“What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?” (1:3)**. In other words, what value or purpose is there for living? What is the meaning of life? Having been blessed with great material resources and wisdom, the Preacher was able to explore all avenues in his search. He writes to share the results of his own investigation, and to offer observations and words of counsel gleaned from his search.

THE Messages

There are **two main messages in Ecclesiastes**. **The first is stated in the prologue: “All is vanity” (1:2)**.

Vanity means “futility, uselessness, nothingness.”

But a key phrase to be noted is **“under the sun”**

This theme is repeated by the Preacher multiple times in the book:

| | |
|--|---|
| Before describing his search for meaning - 1:14 | |
| Throughout the course of his search: | The vanity of pleasure - 2:1 |
| The vanity of industry (labor) - 2:11,22-23; 4:4 | The vanity of all life - 2:17 The vanity of human wisdom - 2:15 |
| Throughout his words of counsel and wisdom: | The vanity of earthly existence - 3:19-21 The vanity of acquiring riches over family - 4:7-8 |
| The vanity of political popularity - 4:16 | The vanity of many dreams and many words - 5:7 The vanity of loving abundance - 5:10 |
| The vanity of wealth without the gift of God to enjoy it - 6:2 | The vanity of wandering desire - 6:9 The vanity of foolish laughter - 7:6 |
| The vanity of injustice in this life - 8:14 | The vanity of the days of darkness - 11:8 The vanity of childhood and youth - 11:10 |

The key word in the book of Ecclesiastes is **“vanity”**. This word occurs 35 times in 29 verses. It is found 29 times in 27 verses. This suggests that this message of vanity is true when one looks at life purely from an earthly perspective. The common thinking of many is to Leave God and the afterlife out of the equation. What is not understood is to do so leads to a truly vain existence!

Yet The Preacher does not leave the reader to just focus on the fruitlessness of vanity. Another message in this book is **the importance of serving God throughout life**. This is the message the Preacher would leave with the young (11:9-12:1), and this is stated in his final words:

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” (12:13)

Throughout the book, we will find what the Preacher later as describes “goads” and “nails” (12:11). These are wise sayings that will “prod” our thinking, and exhortations that will provide stability and direction for living. Ecclesiastes is certainly a book that, when permitted, will reset one’s thinking and priorities in life and their relationship with the Father.

As a modern writer has expressed, the Book of Ecclesiastes teaches us to live life backward so that we Live in Light of the End.

Reflection:

Skip the Merry-Go-Round

An idea today is that in order to really know something you have to experience it. What a foolish idea. You don’t have to try something to know it.

You don’t have to stick your finger in a light socket to know that electricity shocks. And you do not have to experience everything there is in this world to know that the things of this world will not satisfy. If Solomon had paid attention, he could have followed closely the life of his own father and learned that no happiness is under the sun apart from God. He didn’t do that, so he wrote a book that says, in effect, “Don’t make the mistake I made, learn from my own sad experiences.” You could call Ecclesiastes the merry-go-round book because Solomon comes back to the same point every time. Learn from Solomon and skip the empty merry-go-round life.

