

Studying To Show
Ourselves Approved

Ecclesiastes

The Vanity Of Life Without God

New Caney Church of Christ
Adult Class

Many view the book of Ecclesiastes as being a pessimistic book that views life as meaningless. Some struggle to understand what is to be learned from this book, and so less attention is given to it than other portions of Scripture. It is a book with a message which we need to learn.

“Ecclesiastes” in English is taken from the Latin word *Ecclesiastes* means “speaker before an assembly.” The Latin is based on the Greek word *Ekklesiastes*, which is the title in the Septuagint translation, meaning “preacher.” It is derived from the Greek word *Ekklesia* meaning assembly. The original Hebrew is *Qoheleth* and is a word only found in this book. It comes from the word *qahal* “to convoke an assembly, to assemble” and means “one who addresses an assembly, a preacher.” So we read in 1:1 “*The words of the Preacher.*”

The book is written by King Solomon. He was granted great wisdom from God (1 Kings 3:9–14). The book refers to this wisdom and his exploration of all things, yet he says “*my wisdom stood by me*” (2:9). His explorations of great wealth and accomplishments (chapter 2) could only refer to Solomon. The book was written late in Solomon’s life, somewhere near 935 B.C.

“*Vanity*” is an important concept throughout the book. The Hebrew word is “*hebel/hābēl*” and is defined by Strong’s as “emptiness or vanity; figuratively something transitory and unsatisfactory.” Brown, Driver, Briggs in their definition adds, “vapour, breath.” This strong theme of vanity is all that many remember from the book, but in doing so they only indicate they have not learned the lesson which the preacher intends. “*Life under the sun*” has no purpose and is vain and meaningless without God. Satisfaction and purpose is only reached when serving God is the focus of our life. The soul will live on, everything else is “*striving after wind.*”

Ecclesiastes is a work of Hebrew poetry. It is grouped together with the other poetic books: Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and the Song of Solomon. Hebrew poetry does not rely on rhyme schemes, or syllabic rhythms, as does most English poetry. Hebrew poetry repeats and rearranges thoughts rather than sounds. There is a relatively greater conciseness or terseness of form, and a greater use of rhetorical devices. These include parallelism, rhythm, imagery, and figures of speech.

Written By: *Charles Willis*
© 2017, All Rights Reserved

Scripture taken from the
NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE®,
Copyright© 1960, 1962, 1963, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1995
by The Lockman Foundation.
Used by permission. www.Lockman.org

1. “*Vanity of vanities! All is vanity*” (1:2). This thesis statement for the book is repeated nearly thirty times. Define vanity.
2. What does Solomon have in view with the phrase “*under the sun*” (1:3)?
3. How is man (without God) in 1:4 compared with the earth (1:4–7)?
4. Without God, how does man view nature (1:8)?
5. For the believer, history points and leads to meeting the Creator in the end. Without God, how does man view history (1:9–11)?
6. What is the “*grievous task*” God has given to men (1:13)?
7. What was Solomon’s purpose with his wisdom (1:12–14)?
8. Explain 1:15 in connection with the preceding context.
9. What was Solomon setting his mind on? What were his conclusions (1:16–18)?
10. Chapter two begin an enlargement of what is stated in 1:17. What “*madness*” does he explore (2:1–2)?
11. Make a list of the specifics Solomon explored with his wisdom guiding him (2:3–10).
12. What “*madness and folly*” does Solomon explore next? Give the conclusion of each.
 - A. 2:12–17
 - B. 2:18–23
13. The views of the ideas of the world (under the sun) are next contrasted with a man who serves God. How should we think about our work (2:24–25)?
14. What “*too*” is “*vanity*” (2:26)?

1. The man who lives under the sun with God approaches the problems of life very differently. From 3:1–10 what does Solomon indicate should be our attitudes toward the troubles of life?
2. Discuss the meaning of “*He has set eternity in their heart*” (3:11).
3. What has Solomon been unable to explore (3:11)?
4. What things did Solomon “*know*” (3:12–15)?
5. As the king endowed with wisdom, what is Solomon’s understanding of justice “*under the sun*” (3:16)? What is understood of God’s justice (3:16)?
6. From 3:18–22
 - A. How are man and beasts the same?
 - B. How are man and beasts different?
 - C. Which man does Solomon have in view in 3:22 - man with God, or man without God?
7. Chapter 4 again considers life “*under the sun*” without God.
 - A. What does he conclude about those who are oppressed (4:1–3)?
 - B. What does he conclude about labor and skills (4:4–8)?
 - C. What does he conclude about companionship (4:9–10)?
 - D. What problems are indicated for those who rely on themselves and do not receive instruction (4:11–16)?

1. Be prepared to discuss the proper attitude toward God (5:1–7).
 - A. What are we to do as we draw near (5:1-3)?
 - B. Relay the importance of vows (5:4–5).
 - C. Explain the conclusion to “*fear God*” (5:6–7).
 - D. What “*dreams*” are referred to (5:3, 7)?
2. What should be the proper attitude toward government oppression (5:8–9)?
3. What warning is given about those who love money (5:10–12)? What New Testament passages agree with Solomon’s message about the love of money?
4. What is the “*grievous evil*” which Solomon has seen “*under the sun*” (5:13–17)?
5. What conclusion is said to be “*good and fitting*” (5:18–20)?
6. What is the evil that is prevalent among men (6:1–6)?
7. Why is the appetite not satisfied (6:7)?
8. Explain 6:9.
9. What increases futility (6:11–12)?

1. Make a list of the things Solomon says are “better” (7:1–8). Include why they are better.
2. How does Solomon describe the fool (7:4–9)?
3. What is the advantage of wisdom (7:10–12)?
4. Restate the following phrase in your own words: “*Why is it that the former days were better than these*” (7:10).
5. What truth is considered about God and man (7:13–14)?
6. Explain the meaning regarding the “*excessively righteous*” and “*excessively wicked*” (7:15–22).
7. What had Solomon’s wisdom not helped him understand (7:23–28)?
8. What did Solomon find out in his investigations (7:29)?
9. What “*oath*” is referred to (8:2)?
10. ...*A man’s trouble is heavy upon him*” (8:6). How does this verse relate to the surrounding context?
11. What is said of the wicked (8:10–13)?
12. For whom will it “*be well*” (8:12)?
13. Why does Solomon commend pleasure (8:14–15)?
14. What “*work*” could man not discover “*under the sun*” (8:17)?

1. What does 9:1 conclude from the points in 8:16–17?
2. What is the “*one fate for all men*” (9:2–3)?
3. What is the attitude of toward death by the one who lives without God (9:4–6)?
4. How does this view of death effect living “*under the sun*” without God (9:7–10)?
5. When does death come “*under the sun*” (9:11–12)?
6. What is the value of wisdom “*under the sun*” (9:13–18)?
7. How does the end of 9:18–10:1 agree with the context that precedes it?
8. How does a man prove himself a fool (10:3)?
9. What “*evil...under the sun*” is now considered (10:4–11)? What examples are given?
10. What is conveyed about the fools speech (10:12–14)?
11. Why doesn’t a fool know how to go to a city (10:15)?
12. What national foolishness is examined (10:16–20)?

1. Wisdom in Business
 - A. Explain the meaning of “*cast your bread upon the waters*” (11:1).
 - B. What motivates us to divide our portion (11:2)?
 - C. What is the lesson in 11:3–5?
 - D. What does the wise farmer do (11:6)?
2. Wisdom in Youth
 - A. What will the old man (without God) think is futility (11:8)
 - B. What is the attitude of the young (without God) (11:9)? What warning is included?
 - C. What will the wise young person put away from heart and body (11:10)?
 - D. Why should the youth “*remember your Creator*” (12:1)?
3. What is being described in 12:2–5?
 - A. Explain why the “*mighty men stoop*” (12:3).
 - B. Explain why “*one will arise at the sound of a bird*” (12:4).
 - C. Explain “*the almond tree blossoms*” (12:5).
 - D. Explain “*the caperberry is ineffective*” (12:5).
4. What point is being made with the imagery in 12:6 of the silver cord, the golden bowl, the pitcher, and the wheel?
5. What happens to a man at death (12:7)?
6. The Conclusion
 - A. What else had Solomon taught and searched (12:9–10)?
 - B. Why are words of the wise men like “*goads*” and “*well-driven nails*” (12:11)?
 - C. What is the final conclusion which is NOT vanity (12:13–14)?