

Ecclesiastes

“Life Under the Sun”

I. Introduction to Ecclesiastes

- A. Ecclesiastes is the 21st book of the Old Testament. It contains 12 chapters, 222 verses, and 5,584 words.
- B. Ecclesiastes gets its title from the opening verse where the author calls himself ‘the Preacher’.
 - 1. The Septuagint (the translation of the Hebrew into the common language of the day, Greek) translated this word, Preacher, as Ecclesiastes and thus titled the book.
 - a. Ecclesiastes means Preacher; the Hebrew word “Koheleth” carries the meaning of preacher, teacher, or debater.
 - b. The idea is that the message of Ecclesiastes is to be heralded throughout the world today.
- C. Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon.
 - 1. Jewish tradition states Solomon wrote three books of the Bible:
 - a. Song of Solomon, in his youth
 - b. Proverbs, in his middle age years
 - c. Ecclesiastes, when he was old
 - 2. Solomon’s authorship had been accepted as authentic, until, in the past few hundred years, the “higher critics” have attempted to place the book much later and attribute it to someone pretending to be Solomon.
 - a. Their reasoning has to do with a few words they believe to be of a much later usage than Solomon’s time.
 - b. The internal evidence, however, strongly supports Solomon as the author.
 - i. Ecc. 1:1 He calls himself the son of David and King of Jerusalem
 - ii. Ecc. 1:12 Claims to be King over Israel in Jerusalem”
 - iii. Only Solomon ruled over all Israel from Jerusalem; after his reign, civil war split the nation. Those in Jerusalem ruled over Judah.
 - c. Solomon alone, of all the kings of Judah and Israel, fits the man described in Ecclesiastes.
 - i. Eccl. 1:16 A man of unparalleled wisdom
 - 1. 1 Kings 4:30-31 “Thus Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt. For he was wiser than all men--than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the surrounding nations.”
 - ii. Eccl. 2:8-9 A man of great wealth
 - 1. 1 Kings 10:23 “So King Solomon surpassed all the kings of the earth in riches and wisdom.”
 - iii. Eccl. 2:4-6 A man of extensive building
 - d. No other descendent of David measures up to the man described in Ecclesiastes except Solomon.
 - e. Jewish tradition holds that while written by Solomon, Ecclesiastes was edited into its present form by the Scribes of Hezekiah.
- D. Ecclesiastes is more like a sermon or perhaps diary, than a biography.
 - 1. Solomon is using western poetic style to get his message across.
 - 2. While the historical books give us insight into Solomon the king, it is Ecclesiastes that reveals to us Solomon the man.
 - 3. It is an autobiographical work summing up his life’s pursuits.

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- E. There are three keys that will unlock the meaning of Ecclesiastes.
1. *Key One* The entire book of Ecclesiastes builds to a final conclusion:
Ecclesiastes 12: 13-14 “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.”
 - a. No part of the book can be understood if divorced from the conclusion.
 - b. Ecclesiastes is like a journey. It is not over until the destination is revealed.
 2. *Key Two* Life “under the sun”.
 - a. This phrase first used in Ecc. 1:3, occurs twenty-nine times in Ecclesiastes.
 - b. It is the key phrase that unlocks the mystery of the book. All of Solomon’s pursuits are based upon it.
 - c. The phrase “under the sun” means to view life at ground level without any thought of higher moral values, omitting any light from “special revelation” (Scripture) or any notion of the true God.
 - i. Psalm 19:1-3 “The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament shows His handiwork. Day unto day utters speech, and night unto night reveals knowledge. There is no speech nor language where their voice is not heard.”
 - ii. Psalm 19:7 “The law of the LORD is perfect, converting the soul; the testimony of the LORD is sure, making wise the simple; . . .”
 - d. Solomon’s search is limited to the natural.
 - e. He is looking at life without giving proper attention to the Scriptures.
 - f. The word “God” is used thirty-seven times, but never once is YHWH used.
 - i. He speaks of God only on general terms, as an unbeliever would.
 - g. Essentially, Ecclesiastes is the quest of the natural man to find meaning in life apart from God.
 - h. His views of life, God, values, morality, happiness, death and eternity are all determined by ignoring the Word of God and viewing life from an earthly perspective.
 - i. Without the revelation of God’s Word we would all come to Solomon’s conclusion.
 - j. William McDonald put it like this:
“At one time in his life, Solomon set out to find the true meaning of human existence. He was determined to discover “the good life”.
But there was a self-imposed condition to his search – he would do it on his own. He would search “under the sun” for the greatest good in life.”
 - k. In essence, Solomon represents the humanist or materialist who attempts to explain life apart from God.
 3. *Key Three* Vanity of vanities.
 - a. Vanity, first used in Eccl 1:2, occurs 39 times in Ecclesiastes.
 - b. Meaning: a breath or vapor
 - i. Like seeing your breath on a cold day morning; it soon vanishes
 - ii. Vanity speaks of all that is fleeting, temporal, and unsatisfying.
 - c. This is the conclusion Solomon reaches of life apart from God: vanity
 - d. The rest of the book is a commentary on Eccl 1:3: “What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?”
 - i. A life lived apart from God will amount to nothing when seen in the light of eternity.

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- e. J. S. Baxter points out ten general areas where Solomon saw vanity in life:
 - i. Ecc 2:15-15 The “vanity” of human wisdom
Wise and foolish alike have one end, death.
 - ii. Ecc 2:10-21 The “vanity” of human labor
Worker no better than shirker in the end.
 - iii. Ecc 2:26 The “vanity” of human purpose
Altho’ man proposes, it is God who disposes.
 - iv. Ecc 4:4 The “vanity” of human rivalry
Much success brings envy more than joy.
 - v. Ecc 4:7 The “vanity” of avarice
“Much” feeds lust for “more” yet oft eludes.
 - vi. Ecc 4:16 The “vanity” of human fame,
Is brief, uncertain, and soon forgotten.
 - vii. Ecc 5:10 The “vanity” of human satiety
Money does not satisfy. Increase only feeds others.
 - viii. Ecc 6:9 The “vanity” of human coveting
Often gain cannot be enjoyed, despite desire.
 - ix. Ecc 7:6 The “vanity” of human frivolity
It only camouflages the inevitable end.
 - x. Ecc 8:10, 14 The “vanity” of human awards
Bad often honored. Good and bad get wrong deserts.
- f. Looking at life through purely human eyes led Solomon to conclude:
Ecc 2:11 “Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.
- g. This dismal view of life led to “vexation of spirit”
- h. Solomon became a confused, angry, bitter, and pessimistic old man.

II. Why Study Ecclesiastes

- A. Solomon’s purpose is to convince us of the uselessness of life apart from God.
- B. God Himself is the ultimate good. He alone gives meaning and purpose to life.
 - 1. Happiness cannot be a goal, but must be seen as the bi-product of living in a right relationship with God.
 - 2. True life is found in the pursuit of God.
 - 3. A proper world view is one that makes God our greatest aim
- C. The central message of Ecclesiastes is: “Life is empty apart from God”
 - 1. Blaise Pascal, 17th Century Christian philosopher, said, “There is a God shaped void in the human heart.”
 - 2. Augustine, an early Christian theologian, said, “You have made us, O Lord, for Yourself and our heart will find no rest until it rests in You.”
 - 3. Jesus said, “Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life.” (John 4:13-14)
 - 4. Again in John 7:37-39: On the feast of tabernacle water was poured out daily at the altar to remind the people of how God miraculously provided water in the wilderness.
 - a. In a dry, barren, lifeless place, God provided life from a rock.
 - b. Ecclesiastes is one of the five Megillot or scrolls read throughout the year during the feasts.

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- i. Ecclesiastes was read during the Feast of Tabernacles
- ii. Water was poured out to remind us that God gives life
- iii. The scroll of Ecclesiastes is read to remind us that life cannot be found apart from God.
- iv. John 7:37-38, “On the last day, that great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, ‘If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture has said, out of his heart will flow rivers of living water.’”
- v. The Apostle John sums up the message of Ecclesiastes in 1 John 5:11-12
“And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”

III. Outline of Ecclesiastes

- A. Perhaps the key verse to unlock the lesson of Ecclesiastes is not found in the book itself.
1 John 2:15-17 “Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world--the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eyes, and the pride of life--is not of the Father but is of the world. And the world is passing away, and the lust of it; but he who does the will of God abides forever.”
 1. The things of this life are passing away. True happiness will only be found when we view life in light of God and live life after the precepts of His Word.
- B. Ecclesiastes 1:1-3 Introduced us to Solomon the author and the main point of this book
- C. Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 Reveals the ultimate take-away from the book
 1. Fear God and keep His commandments
 2. Put God first and live life in light of what the Word of God teaches.
- D. In between these verses we have Solomon’s journey
 1. Like the Prodigal Son, he leaves the instruction of his parents and begins to search for life apart from God.
 2. His journey will take him to many different stops along the way, but he will never reach the port of peace, happiness and purpose of life until he gets off the “highway of humanism” and begins to look for life within; a life submitted to the God of Scripture.
- E. Solomon’s Journey:
 1. Ecc. 1:12-18 The Path of Wisdom
 - a. John called it “The Pride of Life”
 - b. Solomon thought life could be attained by feeding the intellect and ignoring the Spirit
 - c. This pursuit led him to delve into the subject of religion.
 - i. He seems to have put equal weight on the Word of God and the practices of the pagan nation.
 - ii. Israel became littered with idols, high places and pagan temples.
 - iii. When this left him empty, confused and vexed in spirit, he took another road.
 2. Ecc. 2:1-3 The Path of Pleasure
 - a. John called it “The Lust of the Flesh”.
 - i. With his great wealth and intellect, Solomon sought to satisfy every craving of his flesh.
 - i. This left him with thousands of wives and concubines and a bitter and empty heart, and he chose another road.

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3. Ecc. 2:4-11 The Path of Possessions
 - a. John calls it “The Lust of the Eyes”
 - i. Solomon, like the rich, young ruler, sought to acquire more and more possessions to fill the void in his life.
 - ii. This too, left him empty and wanting
 4. Ecc. 2:17 “Therefore I hated life because the work that was done under the sun was distressing to me, for all is vanity and grasping for the wind.”
 - a. His journeys left him distressed and filled with despair.
 5. Ecc. 4:2 “Therefore I praised the dead who were already dead, more than the living who are still alive.”
 - a. He concluded, the only escape was death.
 - b. There is a big difference between a person who is waiting to die and one who is living for eternity
- F. Solomon’s Photo Album
1. One way to look at the body of this book is as a photo album of Solomon journey.
 2. These are the observations Solomon made along the way.
 - a. Some of the “pictures” are in focus, while others are skewed because they are viewed apart from the revelation of the Word of God.
 - i. Ecc. 2:24, “Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.”
 - ii. Ecc. 3:13 “. . . and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor--it is the gift of God.”
 - iii. Ecc. 5:18 “Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage.”
 - iv. Ecc. 8:15 “ He who keeps his command will experience nothing harmful; and a wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment,
 - v. Ecc. 9:7 “Go, eat your bread with joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has already accepted your works.”
Solomon concludes that apart from God, the best the world can offer is a good party.
 - b. “That was the best night of my life” is still a common experience, today.
 3. Ecc. 3:18-21 “I said in my heart, ‘Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are like animals . . .’ the Seeds of the evolutionary theory
 - a. He ignores a divine creator who fashioned man in His own image and concludes that man is only an animal
 - b. He refers to time and chance rather than a sovereign God reigning over the affairs of men.
 - i. Ecc 9:11 "I returned and saw under the sun that--The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to men of understanding, nor favor to men of skill; but time and chance happen to them all.”

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4. Ecc. 4:1 “Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun: And look! The tears of the oppressed, But they have no comforter--On the side of their oppressors there is power, but they have no comforter.”
 - a. Solomon looks at life through the eyes of oppression
 - b. We have to be careful that the filter we use to view life is not experience, but rather the inspired Word of God
 5. Ecc. 7:2-4 “Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, For that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart. Sorrow is better than laughter, for by a sad countenance the heart is made better. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.”
 - a. Solomon sees the value of considering there is an end to life.
 - b. His view of life after death is confused because he is only seeing from earth’s perspective.
 - c. Ecc. 9:5-6 “For the living know that they will die; but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, their hatred, and their envy have now perished; nevermore will they have a share In anything done under the sun.”
 - i. His advice here is of great value
 6. Ecc. 7:16-17 “Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourself? Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish: Why should you die before your time?”
 - a. Solomon sounds like many of our unsaved friends or relatives who warn us not to become fanatical in following the Lord.
 - b. This comes from the man who has a gold covered ivory throne, twelve pet lions and innumerable apes and monkeys, and thousands of wives and concubines.
- G. Chapter 12 is the conclusion of the matter.
1. It is here where he considers all else, in light of God and His Word

IV. Types of Christ

- A. There are no direct prophetic verses referring to Christ.
- B. He is clearly seen in Ecclesiastes 4:9-12
 1. The missing ingredient in Solomon’s life was the” three fold cord” spoken of in Ecc 4:12
 2. He tried to find life apart from Christ and ended up empty

1 John 5:11-12 “And this is the testimony: that God has given us eternal life, and this life is in His Son. He who has the Son has life; he who does not have the Son of God does not have life.”