

© Into Thy Word Ministries Bible Study www.intothyword.org

Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes Key verses: 2:11; 3:1-8; 12:11-14

Key personalities: Solomon

The Book of Ecclesiastes. This is perhaps the hardest Book of the Bible to understand. Most people give up or get it wrong because it needs a Hebrew philosophical mindset to decipher. Ecclesiastes means "one who address;" in English, the "Preacher." Solomon is believed to have written this Book, and no one else in history could have. This is like an autobiography, recording the fatalism, skepticism, and cynicism Solomon encounters at the end of his life, realizing his folly--chasing what is truly insignificant while pushing God away. Solomon gives a dire warning that chasing wealth, wisdom, pleasure or anything and everything "*under the sun*, is "vanity"--meaningless. These are not abstract philosophical ideas. This is the real life experience and observation pursued and lived by the richest and wisest person who ever lived. (A caveat: Jesus, without question, is the wisest, richest, and most powerful man to ever walk the Earth. Solomon is behind Jesus in this as Solomon's gifts were from God, and he was not Divine; Jesus IS.) After many depressing accounts, Solomon brings it home: We CAN have fullness of life and an impacting encounter with God when we recognize the things "*above the sun*"--things of God and by God, the real spiritual Truth--have more impacting meaning than the world's material (Ecc. 1:1, 12; 2:1-3).

Wisdom Literature: This is the literature of philosophy--the love of wisdom presented in abstracts, poetry, word plays, puns, maxims and sayings to include Job, Proverbs, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes, and in the New Testament, James. Wisdom Literature focuses on questions about the meaning of life and on practical living--how to honor God and common sense. This is not about being clever; rather, it is all about how living out our lives rightly, how to be God-pleasing by our reverence to His Holiness, and how to live out the application and trust of His precepts. This literature 'parallels' and 'contrasts' the relationships of our faulty human wisdom to God's reasoning perfection. This literature amplifies and explains life and warns us of our evil sinful nature and faulty desires. Thus, when we live for our own will and not His, we will experience grief and frustration. This is not because God is vengeful and angry, but because we led ourselves that way out of our pride and arrogance in the backdrop of a fallen world and natural law (Num. 6:24-25; Prov. 1:7; 3:5).

Theme: Our existence, existentialism, the cry of futility that life is meaningless, no matter what we have or can want, and the truth that we can enjoy life without God in our life. One of the other themes is the problem and the consequences of how we humans resent and fight against God's presence and control in our life while we seek what is vain, defective, and of no real eternal value. Thus, Ecclesiastes is a Book that helps us understand that real wisdom is applying God's Truth into our lives. It also shows us, in contrast, what happens when we do not.

Key Happenings: The Good life cannot be had without God!

Nothing in life will make us happy. The greatest, wisest and richest person who ever lived tried his darndest to pursue all that life could offer only to find there is NO satisfaction outside of a relationship with God. In a cycle, the more Solomon pursued the ways of the world, the further he drifted away from God, the more he became unhappy and disconnected to God and others; repeat. He knew it was wrong, but he kept pressing till sin took him over. For us, a new car, a better home, a big bank account, and/or a successful business only briefly brings a temporary satisfaction that never lasts. It

just beckons us to desire more in which we never find fulfillment. What matters most is the precious relationships with God and others; these bring the best contentment and joy and echo into eternity (Ecc. 12:13-14).

- **Vanity of vanity.** Means “vapor” as in ‘no substance,’ or the useless, utter futility of life, our inability to understand life. It is in the form of an expression of the ‘superlative’--to enhance the significance and meaning--of what is futile and meaningless. The point? All we can ever have with ambition is meaningless unless we have God. Even with God, all the stuff the world offers is still not important and will leave a person wrecked in this world and in the next (Ecc. 1:1-3; Rom. 8:20-23).
- **Hedonism.** Today, “*vanity*” can be seen as chasing the secular and forfeiting the eternal. What is my pleasure and will will be my goal? I seek what I want, when I want it, and I am careless about anything else. I trade a truth for a lie and die in meaninglessness. You can never attain it, and all you get is boredom and dissatisfaction, creating a frustrating folly driven with no real purpose of life, just vanity (1 Cor. 15).
- **Life under the sun.** Refers to the earthly domain--all human thoughts and endeavors. The meaningless circles of repeating the same mistakes over and over again and not learning from them (Ecc. 1:3-9; Gal. 1:4).
- **Under the heavens.** This refers to the works and the domain of God, yet the work of the Lord is never ineffective. Also, we see the enormous gap between God knowledge and man's wisdom (John 6:27-29).
- **Everything there is a Season.** Everything has a beginning and an end; what is appropriate and what is not. Death comes to us all, yet there are repetitions as we repeat mistakes and God calls us to turn to Him. Our life and time is ultimately in God's hand, not ours (Psalm 31:15; Ecc. 1:1-9; 3:1-8, 16).

Ecclesiastes calls us to be careful how we live. People will be watching us wherever we go; how we are and what we are will be scrutinized. Therefore, we must strive to do our best so our Lord is represented with excellence through us. Even if we never do wrong, we may be accused of wrong. However, character always triumphs because it convicts those who do not have it. They will see Christ through us, but we have to remain firm in our trust and obedience in Him. Others have the option to believe in Christ, but the key may be in how you remain faithful to Him as His witness!

Ecclesiastes beckons to us to:

- **Remain committed and respectful to those whom God has brought into our lives and has called us to serve, even in times of difficulty.** Our commitment to Christ is exhibited by our commitment--with discernment--to people and righteous causes at all times (**Prov. 17:17**; Eccl. 8:2-4)
- Do not be easily angered: (Prov. 12:16; Ecc. 7:9; Matt. 5:22; James 1:19-21)
- Be aware of anxiety and stress are often matters of outlook (Col. 3:23).
- Allow your work to develop your aptitude and confidence, and with patience, forgiveness, values, loyalty, and integrity, let it be a place to build and develop character (Ecc. 10: 10; Luke 16:10-12).

- Focus on God and not your circumstances. Obey your employer so you show them honor and respect. In so doing, you are honoring our Lord. See your work as a place to learn and grow in your skills. (Ecc. 10:10).
- Be industrious and proactive in your work (Ecc. 2:4).
- Do not take more work or responsibility than you are able to deal with effectively (Ecc. 5:12).

We are told what work is all about, that we are made for work. Ecclesiastes 2:4; 4:7-8 asks, *what benefit do we gain?* This passage gives us the impression that our toil and work are merely temporary. We may find work necessary in order to live, but it is not permanent or eternal. So, we can refocus on our character and behaviors in our work to be our best because that is pleasing to God as we are modeling Him. Work, then, is not just for a paycheck or a promotion; we are contributing to the Kingdom of God. A much greater value is given to us than just what is on a paycheck stub or a yearly evaluation. The importance becomes how people will see Christ through us in the workplace—either as one who is of God or one from whom to be repelled. How do people at work see Christ through you?

Ecclesiastes shows us that God's Word contains the directions for a life of real meaning and purpose. We can make good decisions and lead a godly life! This enables us to honor God and lead a healthy and well-balanced life because we are making those good decisions from His precepts. We will receive His blessedness. God bluntly tells us the godly will prosper in Him and in life and the wicked will be scorned in life and judged in death. This is all about what we choose to do and be in life that affects our future here and in eternity and those around us too. It may seem that only the most dimwitted person would choose the ungodly life, but the reality is that most will choose this way--even those who claim Christ as Lord. God desires us to love the significant life--a life that is pleasing, fruitful, faithful, purposeful, a life of distinction, value, and righteousness! He is hurt and disappointed when we choose to sin or hang with bad people and allow them to influence us. Yet, He does not force us to the righteous life. We have the choice to go our way or His Way to live with honor and renounce sin or to indulge in sin and be dishonorable to self, others, and God. Beware! We will be held to account for our actions and decisions!

Key Takeaway: Life in this world is empty and meaningless when it is cut off from God. The prime purpose of life is to know and "fear" God and give Him glory; in this, we can enjoy life now and forever (Ecc. 12:13-14).

The goal of the Christian life is our wondrous fear/friendship with Christ! We start with Him, and we end well with Him. We are to receive His election, to know and pursue Him. He is the One we are to follow--not the ways of distraction and destruction. This is the Wonder of simplicity that is to fulfill and sustain us. Our value and worth is real and depends on who we are in Christ. You are wonderfully made and made to proclaim Him. You are to embrace His love and let it flow to others from your "rooftop." This is who we are, our identity that will keep us firm in Him. We will be able to grow in times of suffering, waiting, and confusion. It is when we experience darkness and confusion in our lives that is the time to listen to our Lord, and to learn and to grow from the darkness. When the Light comes and takes us out of the darkness, we can proclaim what we have learned (Psalm 29: 2; 73:24-28; 112; John 17:21-23; Rom. 11:36; 1 Cor. 6:20; 10:31; Phil. 1:20; 3:1-14; 1 Pet. 4:11).

The bottom line is that the choice of how to live your life is yours; you have the choice to be *blessed*, as a *tree*, *nourished* by His Living Water (John 7:37-39) or *perish* as the *chaff* that is worthless and blows away (Matt. 3:12; 10:34-39; 13:47-50).

The foreshadow of Jesus Christ? Jesus is The One True Shepherd who gives us abundant life and the love and care of a real loving God who is here. Jesus is the One who redeems us from meaninglessness by taking the curse of sin and its resulting frustration away so now in Him we have significance and purpose (Ecc. 12:11; Matt. 27:45-46). Christ knows all as there is nothing that is inaccessible to Him, including the secrets in the recesses of our innermost personal being (1 Sam. 16:7; Job 26:6; Psalm 139:8; Prov. 15:11). Thus, we must allow His conviction and our accountability to others to examine who we are and who we ought to be. If we are in a self-indulgent lifestyle, with the desire to live and do as we please, we are headed for trouble.

Questions to Ponder

1. Have you ever pondered why we exist? What did you find? How does Ecclesiastes help?
2. What are the “vanities” you have experienced or seen in your course of life?
3. How have you tried to line up with God, and His Will?
4. Why do those who have in sin had a great need to rationalize that it is OK? How have you seen such people gather with others with the same mindset and fight those who are good and righteous?
5. What does it mean to prosper in God's economy? How have you seen righteous people prosper?
6. What are the circumstances that cause you to be aware of God's presence in your life?
7. What would your life be like without God's sovereign control?
8. Why do we humans resent God's presence and control in our life?
9. How can you be better to hear God's call?
10. The goal of the Christian life is our wondrous “fear” friendship with Christ, so what does this do for your vanities?
11. How can you better focus on God and not your circumstances?
12. Do you know that your value and worth is real and depends on who we are in Christ? What can you do to solidify this?