
Ecclesiastes

Book Background and History

Ecclesiastes means “the convoking of an assembly.” The very title identifies this book as a sermon.

Author Background and History

Internal evidence indicates that Solomon wrote the book of Ecclesiastes. Critics have some problems with the authorship of the book. Here are two of the more popular criticisms.

- supposed theological difficulties.
- pessimistic and skeptical tone found in the book.

Critics fail to take into account the global context of the book and the conclusion. Solomon is simply listing the various philosophical approaches to life, correctly identifying them as vanity, and concluding that the whole duty of man is to fear God.

Book Outline

Ecc 1-2	vanity of personal experience
Ecc 3-5	vanity of personal observation
Ecc 6-8	vanity of practical morality
Ecc 9-12	vanity of world-view

Key Chapters and Verses

The key word in Ecclesiastes is vanity. The word vanity occurs 38 times and means emptiness.

The key phrase in Ecclesiastes is “under the sun” which occurs 28 times, reminding us that these words come from man’s perspective. The perspective of man is empty.

Book Highlights

Ecclesiastes speaks to man’s hunger for purpose in life.

The book of Ecclesiastes contains the reflections of King Solomon. Solomon had the mental, social, and financial resources to explore a wide variety of philosophies during his lifetime. Solomon looked everywhere under the sun for meaning in life. He decided to rigorously examine each philosophy he could find ([Ecc 1:12-14](#)). After each investigation, Solomon concluded that life without God led to a life of vanity (emptiness or meaninglessness).

In the final chapters, Solomon urges people to begin seeking God and His ways when they are young. In the end, Solomon concluded that life was about God and His commandments ([Ecc 12:13-14](#)).

Application

Everything about our existence is pointless outside the context of fearing God (**Ecc 12:13**).

Without God, we feel empty. God designed us this way (**Rom 8:20**).

<i>body = physical</i>	<i>soul = mental, emotional</i>	<i>spirit = spiritual</i>
need = air, water, food, shelter	need = love, security, purpose	need = God
need not met = death or illness of body (Rom 13:14, Rom 7:24)	need not met = mental and emotional distress (Rom 8:20)	need not met = spiritual death or distress (1John 5:11-12)
physical joy is short-lived, we get hungry or ill (1Tim 6:6-8)	mental joy becomes dull, there's nothing new (1John 2:16-17)	spiritual treasure is permanent (1Pet 1:3-5, Col 2:10)

Personal Reflection and Application

Read **Ecclesiastes 2:11** and **Ecclesiastes 2:20**. Life can be frustrating, full of unfulfilled longing, empty, and monotonous.

What is the cause of frustration and what is the cure? Consider the following table:

<i>Cause</i>	<i>Cure</i>
Trying to find fulfillment in physical things causes frustration. Life is more than food (Luke 12:23, Pro 13:7).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Give spiritual needs top priority (seek ye first, Mat 6:33). Know with confidence that you cannot lose spiritual treasure; it lasts (1Pet 1:3-5).
<i>under the Sun</i>	<i>in the Son</i>

Small Group Conversation Guide

As a group, make a list of the 10 vanities in the following verses.

01. [Ecc 2:13-15](#)
02. [Ecc 2:18-19](#)
03. [Ecc 2:26](#)
04. [Ecc 4:4](#)
05. [Ecc 4:7-8](#)
06. [Ecc 4:15-16](#)
07. [Ecc 5:10](#)
08. [Ecc 6:9](#)
09. [Ecc 7:6](#)
10. [Ecc 8:10](#)

Leadership Principles from Ecclesiastes

Bravely Honest

On first reading Ecclesiastes, you may find the tone to be entirely pessimistic.

Read [Ecclesiastes 12:7-14](#). Consider that as a leader, Solomon was being bravely honest. He told us the truth. Life under the sun can never satisfy us ([Ecc 5:10-12](#) and [Ecc 6:7](#)). Laying up treasures for yourself on earth is a poor strategy ([Mat 6:19-21](#)).

Solomon's conclusion is that our best course of action is to set our affection on things above, to live in the Son ([Col 3:2](#)).

As a leader, are you bravely honest with yourself and others about where we should place our focus in life?

Something to Find in Each Chapter

As you read through the book, it may help to have something to find in each chapter. Try these:

01. How history has and always will repeat itself	02. What Solomon acquired to evaluate consumerism
03. What Solomon said about human and animal mortality	04. What Solomon said are the benefits of friends
05. What Solomon said were the weaknesses of money	06. What Solomon said about the inability to enjoy success
07. Whether Solomon said sorrow or laughter was better	08. What Solomon said are the limitations of our wisdom
09. Why Solomon said to eat, drink, and enjoy life	10. Why Solomon said not to think or say criticisms aloud
11. What Solomon advised those who are young	12. What Solomon did for people because he was wise