

Ecclesiastes: Life Under the Sun



Background Information

Traditionally attributed to King Solomon, the "Preacher" (Qoheleth) explores the futility of life apart from God. The book examines the limitations of human wisdom, wealth, and pleasure when pursued "under the sun," emphasizing that true meaning and lasting satisfaction are found only in a relationship with the Creator.

Book Connections

Ecclesiastes provides a realistic, philosophical balance to the wisdom literature of Proverbs. While Proverbs offers general principles for righteous living, Ecclesiastes acknowledges the complexities and apparent contradictions of life where those principles are not easily seen. By highlighting the insufficiency of worldly pursuits, the book creates a "thirst" that points toward the necessity of the gospel, where ultimate meaning is found in Christ rather than in earthly labor.

About the Author

The book is attributed to King Solomon. This is King David's son whom he bore with Bathsheba. Solomon was chosen by God to be David's successor. King Solomon had pursued wisdom, wealth, and worldly pleasure to the full extent. He writes from a place of experience. King Solomon recognized that there is a void in all of us. He urges the reader toward the necessity of finding meaning in God rather than earthly endeavors.

Section 1: The Problem of Futility (Read chapters 1–2)

Focus Scripture

"'Vanity of vanities,' says the Preacher; 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity.' What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?" —
Ecclesiastes 1:2-3

Observation & Context

- **The Cycle:** The Preacher examines the wind, sun, and streams to show that nature moves in wearisome loops.
- **The Test:** He pursues worldly avenues like intellectual wisdom, building projects, wealth, wine, and pleasure.
- **The Verdict:** Every material pursuit ends up feeling like "grasping for the wind" when God is left out.

Key Terms

- **Vanity (Hevel):** A Hebrew word meaning "vapor" or "mist," used to describe the fleeting and intangible nature of life.
- **Under the Sun:** A recurring phrase referring to life on earth from a human, earthly perspective, often apart from God's eternal viewpoint.
- **The Preacher (Qoheleth):** The title used for the author, meaning "teacher" or "gatherer" of wisdom.

Discussion Questions

- How does the phrase "there is nothing new under the sun" (1:9) challenge modern culture's obsession with innovation?
- Why do major accomplishments often leave people feeling empty once the initial excitement wears off?
- Read **Ecclesiastes 2:24**. What is the first glimmer of true perspective shift we see in this book?

Scripture Review (Fill in the Blank)

1. *"'_____ of vanities,' says the Preacher; '_____ of vanities, all is vanity.'" —*
Ecclesiastes 1:2

2. *"That which has been is what will be, that which is done is what will be done, and there is nothing _____ under the _____."* — **Ecclesiastes 1:9**
 3. *"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 _____ for the _____."* — **Ecclesiastes 2:11**
 4. *"The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. Yet I myself perceived that the _____ event happens to them _____."* — **Ecclesiastes 2:14**
 5. *"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 _____ of _____."* — **Ecclesiastes 2:24**
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Section 2: Time, Eternity, and Community (Read chapters 3–4)

Focus Scripture

"To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven... He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts..." — **Ecclesiastes 3:1, 11**

Observation & Context

- **Sovereignty:** Chapter 3 highlights God's perfect, unchangeable timing over cosmic and human events.
- **Design:** God built a divine longing ("eternity") into humans that temporary things cannot satisfy.
- **Societal Brokenness:** Chapter 4 shifts to oppression, isolation, and working hard purely out of envy.
- **The Remedy:** Community and shared labor offer genuine protection and comfort in a broken world.

Key Terms

- **Eternity in their hearts:** The divine, God-given longing for something beyond the temporary, material world.

- **Threefold cord:** An illustration of the strength and security found in community, where people support and protect one another.

Discussion Questions

- Read the seasons in **Ecclesiastes 3:2-8**. Which season are you walking through, and how does God's control bring comfort?
- What does it mean practically in daily life that God has placed "eternity in our hearts"?
- Read **Ecclesiastes 4:9-12**. Why is isolation dangerous, and how does your church community provide a "threefold cord"?

Scripture Review (Fill in the Blank)

1. "To everything there is a _____, a time for every _____ under heaven." — **Ecclesiastes 3:1**
 2. "He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put _____ in their _____..." — **Ecclesiastes 3:11a**
 3. "Then I returned and considered all the oppression that is done under the sun... and look! The tears of the oppressed, but they had no _____." — **Ecclesiastes 4:1**
 4. "Again, I saw that for all toil and every skillful work a man is _____ by his _____." — **Ecclesiastes 4:4**
 5. "Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their labor... and a _____ cord is not quickly _____." — **Ecclesiastes 4:9, 12b**
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Section 3: Reverence, Riches, and Wisdom (Read chapters 5–8)

Focus Scripture

"Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools... Do not be rash with your mouth..." — **Ecclesiastes 5:1-2a**

Observation & Context

- **True Worship:** The Preacher warns against casual prayers and empty vows, urging holy awe.

- **Wealth's Mirage:** He observes that people who love money are never satisfied with their current income.
- **Hard Wisdom:** Chapters 7 and 8 show that painful trials build a better heart than shallow celebrations.

Key Terms

- **Sacrifice of fools:** Empty, thoughtless, or insincere religious ritual that lacks true reverence or obedience.
- **Hard Wisdom:** The concept that suffering and trial can produce a more righteous heart than shallow joy or success.

Discussion Questions

- Why does the Preacher advise keeping our words few before God? How should this change your prayer life?
- Look at **Ecclesiastes 5:10**. In what ways do you see modern culture validating this statement?
- According to **Ecclesiastes 7:2-4**, why is going to a funeral spiritually better than going to a party?

Scripture Review (Fill in the Blank)

1. "Walk _____ when you go to the house of God; and draw near to _____ rather than to give the sacrifice of fools..." — **Ecclesiastes 5:1**
 2. "He who loves _____ will not be satisfied with _____; nor he who loves abundance, with increase." — **Ecclesiastes 5:10**
 3. "Better to go to the house of _____ than to go to the house of _____; for that is the end of all men..." — **Ecclesiastes 7:2**
 4. "Do not be hasty in your spirit to be _____, for anger rests in the bosom of _____." — **Ecclesiastes 7:9**
 5. "Though a sinner does evil a hundred times, and his days are prolonged, yet I surely know that it will be _____ with those who _____ God..." — **Ecclesiastes 8:12**
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Section 4: The Conclusion of the Matter (Read chapters 9–12)

Focus Scripture

"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..." — Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

Observation & Context

- **The Equalizer:** Chapter 9 notes that physical death comes to all, which should make us enjoy our days as gifts.
- **Aging:** Chapter 12 uses striking poetry to depict bodily decay and final mortality.
- **The Climax:** The book's agonizing horizontal questions dissolve. Real life is found only in fearing the Creator.

Key Terms

- **Fear of the Lord:** A holy, reverent awe and deep respect for God that leads to obedience and trusting Him above all else.
- **Judgment:** The ultimate accountability where God evaluates every work and action, providing the final resolution to life's mysteries.

Discussion Questions

- Read **Ecclesiastes 12:1**. Why is it crucial to build a relationship with God before "difficult days" arrive?
- How does the ultimate conclusion in verses 13–14 resolve the apparent hopelessness found in early chapters?
- Since our purpose is to fear God and keep His commandments, how should this impact your career and family goals?

Scripture Review (Fill in the Blank)

1. "This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one _____ happens to _____." — **Ecclesiastes 9:3a**
2. "Cast your _____ upon the waters, for you will find it after _____ days." — **Ecclesiastes 11:1**

3. "Remember now your _____ in the days of your _____, before the difficult days come..." – **Ecclesiastes 12:1**
 4. "In the day when the keepers of the house _____, and the strong men _____ themselves..." – **Ecclesiastes 12:3a**
 5. "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: _____ God and _____ His commandments, for this is man's all." – **Ecclesiastes 12:13**
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Master Answer Key

Section 1

1. Vanity, Vanity
2. new, sun
3. grasping, wind
4. same, all
5. hand, God

Section 2

1. season, purpose
2. eternity, hearts
3. comforter
4. envied, neighbor
5. threefold, broken

Section 3

1. prudently, hear
2. silver, silver
3. mourning, feasting
4. angry, fools
5. well, fear

Section 4

1. event, all
2. bread, many
3. Creator, youth
4. tremble, bow
5. Fear, keep