

Ecclesiastes - Introduction

Why Study It?

- Why was the Old Testament written? (Rom 15:4, 1 Cor 10:11, and 2 Tim 3:16-17)

The theme of Ecclesiastes is the futility of everything when viewed from a purely earthly viewpoint. The world sometimes recognizes this at unexpected times, at the peak of success, they sometimes ask, "Is this all there is"?

- Is Fame enough? Robin Williams hanged himself in August 2014
- Is Accomplishment enough? Ernest Hemingway shot himself in July 1961
- Is Power enough? Cleopatra killed herself with poisons in 30 BC
- Are Riches enough? Eli M Black multi-millionaire CEO of United Brands leapt to his death out of a 44th floor window in Feb 1975

We know better, but with all of the troubles in the world, we can forget and face difficulties ourselves. Or, we can get so caught up in the race for pleasure and success in this world, we make it our goal and forget they won't satisfy us.

Name

In Greek this book was named Ekklesiastes, based on translating the Hebrew term Qoheleth (#6953 assembler). We can recognize the Greek name as being similar to ekklesia (#1577 assembly). Both terms, Ekklesiastes and Qoheleth, describe a Preacher or Teacher who convenes or addresses an assembly. While not addressed to a physical assembly, this teacher addresses all, with a message that all need to hear.

Author

Although not named, the verses within Ecclesiastes clearly point to Solomon.

- Son of David (Ecc 1:1)
- Ruled Israel in Jerusalem (Ecc 1:12, 1 Kings 11:42)
- Later the divided kingdom left Israel ruled from somewhere else (1 Kings 12:20-21)
- Great riches (Ecc 2:7,9)

Solomon's Background

- He was a son of David (1 Chronicles 28:5).
- David was a man after God's heart (Acts 13:22)
- An afflicted family after David's sin (2 Sam 12:10-11, 2 Sam 13:20,32)
- Half-Brother Absalom rebelled (2 Sam 15:10)
- Given instruction by David (1 Chronicles 28:9-10)
- Asked for wisdom (1 Kings 3:5-10, 2 Chronicles 1:7-12)
- Famous for his wisdom (1 Kings 4:34)
- Attained Fame (1 Kings 10:6-7)
- Attained Riches (1 Kings 10:27)
- Turned to foreign women (1 Kings 11:1-4)
- Rebuked by God (1 Kings 11:9-11)
- Rebellion of servant Jeroboam (1 Kings 11:26)

When?

Unknown - many verses show that it was after obtaining great wealth. We also can't imagine God inspiring him during his time of active rebellion against God.

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Outline

- Introduction (Ecc 1:1-3)
- Search for Meaning (Ecc 1:4-2:26)
- Observations (Ecc 3:1-6:12)
- Counsel for Life (Ecc 7:1-12:7)
- Conclusion (Ecc 12:8-14)

Phrases Used Repeatedly within Ecclesiastes:

Vanity/Meaningless/Futility

Hebel (#1892) which is generally translated vanity occurs 38 times in Ecclesiastes. While vanity is a good translation, the literal meaning is vapor. Solomon uses vapor as a metaphor similar to the New Testament use in James, where one aspect of the idea is the transitory, limited time of life is stated. Ecclesiastes explains that many of the things that people seek are like a vapor, they won't last. A second aspect of a vapor is its lack of substance. There just isn't much substance to a vapor. Ecclesiastes again makes the comparison showing the lack of substance to things that many would consider important. A vapor also has limited power, limited reliability. A vapor can't be depended upon to accomplish things. Similarly, a vapor is beyond our control.

Chasing After the Wind

An extension of the idea of many things being a vapor (vanity), is this idea that pursuing them is like chasing the wind. The thing pursued includes the ideas from vapor of transitory, lacking substance, etc., but goes further in stressing the impossibility of the pursuit. Chasing the wind is a useless pursuit. We may put in a lot of effort, but won't accomplish our goal. What would someone do if they caught the wind, could they in any sense hold it without destroying it in the process.

Under the Sun

The phrase "under the sun" is used 29 times in Ecclesiastes. It is used to refer to life on Earth, the physical realm. Specifically he is not talking about the totality of everything, which would also include the spiritual realm. As such, it also includes an element of the temporary, as nothing physical on this Earth is permanent (Matthew 24:35). It is important that we remember this distinction. Looking at life from a purely physical, Earthly perspective leads to certain conclusions. Ecclesiastes examines these conclusions and shows their limited ability to explain life.