



# **Ecclesiastes**

**Life Under the Sun**

# 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.

## Introduction (1:1 - 1:2)

The book begins, as discussed in our introduction, with a statement of the author, Solomon.

The topic is introduced in verse 2. Vanity of vanities. This phrase introduces the book here,

# Ecclesiastes Chapter 1

and closes the book (except for the conclusion) in Ecc 12:8.

- Is a vanity of vanities different from a vanity?
- Do many in the world live a life of vanity?
- Are we at risk of being influenced in the world to pursue a life of vanity?
- All is vanity (v2), does anything earthly have real value

## What Profit? (1:3-1:11)

The question in verse 3 can be asked in many forms. Here it is phrased “what profit?”. Today we often hear variations, “What is my purpose?”, “What is the meaning of life”. Even people who don’t believe in God find it difficult to deny that there must be a purpose behind it all. Solomon takes these verses to consider it from an “under the sun” approach.

- What profit does any earthly thing have compared to the eternal? (Matt 16:26)

He discusses activity/movement, using several examples, but showing that for all that is done, from an earthly viewpoint nothing is really accomplished. The sun completes its cycle, only to do it all again. Powerful winds can blow, but only to blow again. Water falls and runs to the sea, only to fall again. Our lives can seem like that, a daily repetitive cycle.

- Can life seem full of toil and trouble (v8)?
- We rush to see and hear, but is it ever enough (v8)?
- Is there ever really anything new (v9,10)?
- Of all that we accomplish, is anything remembered for long (v11)?

He has described the problem faced by looking at life from an “under the sun” approach. Lots of toil, but nothing really accomplished. When examined closely, life (under the sun) would be depressingly pointless.

## Investigate the Matter (1:12-13)

- What qualified Solomon to answer this problem (did he have time, did he have resources) (v12)?
- How seriously did he investigate the issue (v13)?
- What approach did he use (v13)

## Is Knowledge and Wisdom the Answer? (v14-18)

- What does he mean by comparing these things to grasping the wind (v14)?
- Is it possible to grasp the wind (v14)?
- Can we finish a task of straightening crooked things (v15)?
- Is it possible to make up for all that is lacking (v15)?
- How did Solomon’s wisdom compare to everyone else (v16)?
- How can knowledge and wisdom bring us sorrow (v18)?

## Ecclesiastes Chapter 2

### Pleasure/the Good Life (2:1 - 2:11)

Solomon next turns his attention to pleasure, living the good life. He concludes that this also is vanity. This section is important, because the world believes that just getting a bit more is an appropriate goal in life. We may face criticism, as if we aren't earnest enough, if we don't make it our absolute priority as well. The world does press us into the idea of keeping up with friends and neighbors.

- What type of pleasure is he discussing (v4,5)?
- Was Solomon qualified to discuss this?
- How can laughter be madness (v2)?
- What does pleasure accomplish (v2)?
- In this search, did he understand there are guiding limits (v3)?
- Did he explore both possessions and activities (v4,8)?
- Did he rejoice in what he found (v10)?
- Did it have any lasting meaning or value (v11)?

- Does labor provide any absolute meaning (v22)?
- Where does the good come from (v24)?
- Can we enjoy the good without letting it become our absolute goal (v24)?
- For all the pride we take in our accomplishments, who really determines the results (v26)?

### Wise vs Fool (2:12-2:16)

In chapter 1, Solomon discussed that knowledge/wisdom couldn't be the absolute meaning of life goal. Here he returns to the subject, but balances that conclusion by comparing the wise to the fool.

- Can anything really new be done (v12)?
- How does light exceed darkness (v13,14)?
- Under the sun, what happens to both (v15)?
- Is much remembered after we're gone (v16)?

### Despair Under the Sun (2:17-2:26)

Looking deeply at it, from an "under the sun" approach, Solomon examines the result of our toils in this world.

- Under the sun, can this life be depressing(v17)?
- What is the result of all the earthly treasure we accumulate (v18-19)?

## Ecclesiastes Chapter 3

### A Time (3:1 - 3:8)

The next thing Solomon considers is Time. Not time as in a duration, but time as in an event or occurrence. He does this through a series of contrasts showing the God retains ultimate control of events and the lack of events being an ultimate, permanent answer. We generally consider one of the contrasted items to be negative from our standpoint.

- Is there a time to die? Why? (Heb 9:27)
- Is there a time to kill? (Gen 9:6)
- Is there a time to weep? (Matt 5:4, 2 Cor 7:9)
- How much control do we have over the times?
- Under the sun, does any time prove an ultimate answer?

### God-Given Task (3:9-3:10)

Again Solomon considers what profit is there in toil and labor. He says that this is a God given task.

- Why was man given labor? (Gen 3:17-19)

### God is eternal (3:11-15)

Solomon contrasts the temporary results of man's efforts with the eternal nature of God's efforts.

- Can we know all of God's works? (Isaiah 55:9)
- How has eternity been put into our hearts (Gen 1:26)
- What gift has God given man (3:12-13)?
- Can we add anything to what God does (3:14)?
- What does God require of what we do (3:15)?

### Injustice (3:16-17)

Next Solomon considers the injustice he sees.

- Is there injustice in the world (3:16)? Why?
- Why does injustice bother even non-Christians?
- What is the ultimate result of evil (3:17)?

### Man vs Animals (3:18-22)

Solomon next compares man to animals, in an under the sun way.

- How are men like animals?
- How are men different from animals?

# Ecclesiastes Chapter 4

## Oppression (4:1-4:3)

Next under the sun, Solomon looks at oppression. Similar to his earlier look at injustice. Both show the futility of life from a purely under the sun approach (Job 3:1-5, Jeremiah 20:14-18). He's not saying that life is worse than death, but that looking at life we can see it isn't what it ought to be. It was meant to be better (Genesis 1:31).

- Why is there no comforter (v1)?
- Is power a temptation?
- In what sense are the dead better (v3-4)?

## Toil and Idleness (4:4-4:8)

Toil and idleness can both lead to problems. We can focus on getting ahead, climbing the ladder, not minding who we hurt on our way up (Prov 16:8). We can be idle and unable to help ourselves, much less anyone else (Ephesians 4:28). We often focus on one or the other, but there are warnings against both (1 Timothy 6:9).

- Is some toil done to be envied (v4), does it accomplish anything?
- Does idleness accomplish anything (v5)?
- Can toil for only ourselves be pointless (v8)?
- Will getting what we want ever satisfy us (v8)?
- Can a focus on toil and attaining harm us (v8)?
- Under the sun, is there any real satisfaction from doing things just for ourselves (v8)?

## Value of a Companion (4:9-4:12)

No man is an island (John Donne). We are responsible for our effect on others (Rom 14:7,12,15). We need each other to complete ways we are incomplete (1 Cor 12:12-26). We need others when we fall (Galatians 6:1-2). Our society seems to be emphasizing the ideas of isolation and self-reliance in an increasing way. God didn't make us to be that way.

- How are two better than one (v9)?
- Can we say, "it's their own fault" when others fall (v10)?
- Can we withstand adversaries easier when not alone (v12)?

## Popularity Fades (4:13-4:16)

We tend to think that the rich and powerful have it made, but all things happen in God's time.

- Can you think of a poor, wise (shepherd) boy who trusted God and a king who followed his own ways and didn't listen to correction? What was the result?
- Under the sun, is either a permanent answer?
- In what way is seeking power, like grasping for the wind?

## Ecclesiastes Chapters 5 and 6

### Speech and Vows (5:1-7)

In chapters 5 and 6 Solomon turns to some more practical advice, including being careful of what we say.

- Why go prudently to the house of God (Ecc 12:13, Prov 9:10)?
- What is the sacrifice of fools (1 Samuel 15:22)?
- Why should we avoid hasty words (James 1:19)?
- Why should our words be few (Prov 10:19)?
- Why shouldn't we delay keeping vows (James 4:17)?

### Vanity of Riches (5:8-17)

Solomon returns to the topic of the futility of riches.

- Why should we not be surprised at oppression and injustice (v8)?
- Why does one official need to watch over another (v8)?
- Who benefits from the profit of the land (v9)?
- Can having things ever satisfy us (v10)?
- When we have more, do we just find more demands on our resources (v11)?
- How does abundance prevent sleep (v12)?
- How can riches hurt us (v13, 1 Timothy 6:9-10, James 5:3)?
- Will riches last (v16, Matthew 6:19-21)?
- What can we actually take out of this life (v15, Mark 8:36-37)?
- How can a focus on riches leave us sick and sorrowful (v17)?

### Gift of God (5:18-20)

If riches are vain, how should we think about the good things of this life?

- Where do the good things of this life come from (v18, James 1:17)
- Can we dwell unduly on this life (v20)?

### Fleeting Riches (6:1-6)

In chapter 5 we saw that God is the one who gives good things. Now, Solomon addresses having good things, but being too focused on riches to actually enjoy them.

- Can we have everything we desire and still not be happy (v2)?
- In what way can a stillborn child be better than a rich man (v3-6)?
- Can we be rich and still not see goodness (v6)?

### Vanity (6:7-12)

Under the sun, we labor without being satisfied.

- How is seeing better than desiring (v9)?
- Can the things we labor for, in any way, make us better (v11)?
- Who does know what is good for man (v12, Jeremiah 10:23)?

# Ecclesiastes Chapters 7 and 8

## Unexpected Comparisons (7:1-8)

Solomon next turns to some practical sayings. This section includes several unexpected comparisons.

- How valuable is your reputation (v1, Prov 10:7, Prov 22:1)?
- How is our reputation like an ointment (v1)?
- How is the day of death better than the day of birth (v1)?
- How is mourning better than feasting (v2)?
- How is sorrow better than laughter (v3-4)?
- How is rebuke better than praise (v5-6)?
- How is the end better than the beginning (v8)?

## Advice (7:9-14)

Next we see a series of short statements (almost like those in Proverbs) giving advice

- Why shouldn't we be quick to anger (v9, Prov 19:11, James 1:19-20)?
- Are we tempted to think that the former days were better (v10)?
- How is wisdom a defense (v12)?
- How should we look at what happens to us (v14, Philippians 4:11-12, Romans 8:28)?

## Wisdom about Justice and Wickedness (7:15-24)

- Does righteousness guarantee everything will go our way in this life (v15)?
- What does Solomon mean by overly righteous and overly wise (v16)?
- If our wisdom and righteousness isn't the answer, what is (v18)?
- Is anyone always good (v20, Rom 3:10,23)?
- How concerned should we be about what people say about us (v21)?
- Even extensively seeking wisdom, what will be true (v23-24)?

## Warnings (7:25-29)

Next some warnings, also with some similarities to Proverbs.

- Is it more bitter than death to be deceived by someone who pretends to care for us (v26)?
- Do we recognize sin as entrapping us, contrary to the world's view of sin as freedom (v26)?
- How rare are good people (v28)?
- Why isn't man good (v29)?

## Obey Authorities (8:1-9)

We are instructed to obey authorities. We have similar New Testament instructions in Romans 13:1-7 and 1 Peter 2:13-17.

- Are we similarly bound to obey by a commitment to God (v2, 1 Cor 6:20)?
- Where does the king get his power (v4, Rom 13:4)?
- Is verse 5 a guarantee (consider Uriah and Jesus)?
- Do we often act like we know what will happen in the future (v7, James 4:14)?

## Death Comes to All (8:10-17)

Returning to his theme of vanity under the sun, Solomon again reminds us that we all face death.

- We sometimes don't live that way, but will we all face death (v10, Heb 9:27)?
- The wicked in verse 10, did they start out evil?
- Why don't we react to evil speedily (v11)?
- What confidence do we have, even when surrounded by evil (v12)?
- Do bad things sometimes happen to good people (v14)? Give some biblical examples.
- Even seeing everything around us, what has God given us (v15)?
- Are there limits to what we can know (v16-17)?



# Ecclesiastes Chapters 9 and 10

## Everyone Will Die (9:1-12)

Solomon again considers the reality of life “under the sun” reminding us that we all face death.

- Who is in control of everything (v1)?
- Are we fooled sometimes by what is right before us (v2)?
- What is the one thing that happens to all (v2-3)?
- How is living better than death (v4-5)?
- Will the dead ever have any share or role of any kind in the world “under the sun” (v6)?
- What “religious” errors are ruled out by v6?
- Even knowing we will die, has God given us much good to enjoy (v7-9)?
- Why should we do things with all our might (v10)?
- We plan (James 4:13-16), but who is really in control of outcomes (v11-12)?

## Value and Limits of Wisdom (9:13-18)

Solomon again reminds us of the value of wisdom, but also that in the ultimate sense it too has limits.

- Is Solomon considering wisdom from a spiritual or physical approach (v13)?
- Can wisdom outdo strength (v14-16, Prov 21:22)?
- Are we tempted to ignore or dismiss the poor (v15,16, Prov 14:20, Prov 18:23)?
- In arguments are we sometimes tempted to use volume instead of wisdom (v17)?
- How much harm can one person cause (v18)?

## Danger of a Little Folly (10:1-3)

Solomon shows that even a little folly is dangerous

- Can small things cause big problems (v1, Galatians 5:9)?
- Are we tempted sometimes to ignore “small” problems?
- Are we tempted to allow a little folly from an otherwise respected person (v1)?

- What does he mean by saying his heart is in his right hand(v2)?
- Can actions without words expose a fool (v3)?

## Rulers and Princes (10:5-7)

Here we have a few nuggets of advice concerning rulers.

- How much harm came to Israel under evil kings (v5)?
- Even with bad rulers, were some in Israel faithful?
- Does the world sometimes elevate the wrong things (v6-7)?

## Unexpected Outcomes (10:8-15)

Even with all of our plans, as humans we don't know how things we start will end.

- Do sometimes bad results happen, even with hard work (v8-9)?
- Do we improve our chances by using wisdom (v10)?
- Is there danger from foolish babblers (v11-12)?
- Does foolishness have a tendency to increase, if not stopped (v13)?
- Is there a danger in many words (v14, Prov 10:19)?

## Kings and Princes (v16-20)

Solomon returns with more about kings.

- Why can a child king bring woe (v16)?
- What would princes feasting in the morning be a symptom of(v16)?
- Can things get worse through simply doing nothing (v18)?
- Do we need to be careful about what we think as well as what we say (v20, Matt 15:18)?

# Ecclesiastes Chapters 11 and 12

## Uncertainty Doesn't Mean Do Nothing (11:1-8)

In this section of Ecclesiastes, we begin moving toward a conclusion. Solomon has spent much of Ecclesiastes reminding us of things “under the sun” that are vanity, and like chasing the wind.

As Solomon discusses (and has discussed), there are limits to knowledge, much we don't or sometimes can't know. But that isn't an excuse to give up and do nothing.

- What does it mean to cast your bread upon the waters (v1)?
- Why give a serving because of evil on the Earth (v2)?
- Are there things we just don't know (v3)?
- Can we know what we need to know (2 Peter 1:3)?
- Too close a focus on what we don't know has what results (v4)?
- Not knowing the results, what must we do (v6, Matt 13:3-8)?
- Is there good in this life (v7)?
- Is there evil in this life(v7)?

## Seek God in Your Youth (11:9-12:1)

Next Solomon gives instructions to the youth. In youth, we often feel that special time will last forever.

- What needs to be kept in mind about how we spend our youth (v9)?
- What two things are to be avoided in your youth (v10)?
- How are childhood and youth vanity (v10)?
- Why should we remember our Creator in our youth (v1)?
- What difficult days is Solomon discussing (v1)?

## Description of Difficulties of Aging (12:2-8)

There are different opinions about some of the specific references in this text, but the general theme that it will become more difficult for us is obvious.

- How do things become more difficult for us as we age?
- Are there also advantages as we age?
- What should we do regardless of our age (v6)?
- What is the end of all (v7)?
- Knowing all of this, what conclusion do we reach with a strictly “under the sun” approach (v8)?

## Conclusion (12:9-14)

Having concluded that from a strictly “under the sun” approach that all is vanity, Solomon switches to the broader topic to discuss the real meaning of life.

- Had Solomon put much effort into this topic (v9-11)?
- Who is the one shepherd (v11)?
- Can we get distracted in studying everything without realizing the importance of the conclusion(v12)?
- What is man's all (v13)?
- What important reminder did Solomon give as reason for this (v14)?
- Can anything we do really be hidden (v14)?