

*From the Garden to Glory*

# **Ecclesiastes**

**Author:** Solomon

**Timeline:** c. 935 B.C.

**Location:** Under the Sun

**Category:** Poetical

**Theme:** Emptiness and Frustration vs. The Meaning of Life

## **Overview:**

King Solomon, the wisest and richest man in life, tried living his life "under the sun". He tried everything in this life that could be tried to bring happiness and fulfillment and he found that it was empty and frustrating (1:14). Jesus said in John 4:13, "*Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again*". The water of this world cannot provide lasting satisfaction but, "*whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst.*"

Life is only worth living when Jesus is Lord over a life.

## **Introduction:**

Before beginning your study of Ecclesiastes, consider the following questions and write your answers:

1. What gives your life purpose and meaning? Be specific.
2. What motivates you to "keep going" in the midst of the trials, difficulties and "daily-ness" of life?

3. Make a list of the "worldly" ways you have attempted to find purpose, meaning and satisfaction in life. What was the result?
  
4. Name some pursuits which seemed meaningless before you knew the Lord but which, now, are very important in your life?
  
5. According to Pastor Damian Kyle, "When you have been created for a specific purpose, you can only be satisfied with that for which you were created." How has this been true in your own life?

### **"All is Vanity"**

Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11

1. Look at verse 1. Many commentators believe that the "Preacher", or "Teacher" as the word is sometimes translated, was Solomon. List everything you know about Solomon. What would have qualified him to be an effective preacher or teacher?
  
2. Look at verse 2. The word *vanity* or *vanities* is used thirty-seven times in the book of Ecclesiastes. According to Walvoord and Zuck, "(Solomon) used this metaphorical term throughout the book to refer to what is without real substance, value, permanence, significance, or meaning." Re-write verse 2 using synonyms for the words *vanity* and *vanities*. In your own words, explain the meaning of this verse.
  
3. Look at verse 8. People today are consumed with an endless search for "something new". Why do you think this is so? List examples of how advertisers appeal to this sense of discontent. How do you protect yourself and your family from the constant desire for more?

## **Proof that "All is Vanity" from Experience**

Read Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26

1. Look at 1:12-18. Where do these verses indicate that Solomon tried to find meaning in life? What was his conclusion? How have you attempted to do this? Explain your understanding of verse 18.
2. Look at 2:1-3. Verse 1 from the New Believer's Bible says, "I said to myself, 'Come now, let's give pleasure a try. Let's look for the "good things" in life.' But I found that this, too, was meaningless." What "pleasures" have you tried? In what ways did they prove to be "meaningless"?
3. Look at 2:4-17. List the great accomplishments Solomon mentioned in verses 4-9. Look at verse 10. What was the *temporary* result of his efforts? Look at verses 11 and 17. What was his "final verdict" concerning great accomplishments? Can you think of something you accomplished which brought temporary joy but eventually proved meaningless?
4. Look at 2:24-26. What is Solomon's conclusion? How would you complete verse 24? "There is nothing better for a woman than that she \_\_\_\_\_."

## **Proof that "All is Vanity" from Observation**

Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-6:12

1. According to Pastor Damian Kyle, the Preacher gave himself over to fatalism in this section of Ecclesiastes. Look up the word *fatalism* in a dictionary and write the definition. Why would a fatalistic philosophy of life lead one to view life as "vanity"? As you read 3:1-6:12, note each instance of Solomon's fatalistic philosophy.

2. The word *purpose* in verse 3:1 means "deliberate, willful acts" and literally means "what one desires". Briefly describe the "season of life" which you are in presently. What "deliberate willful acts" do you desire to do during this time in your life?
  
3. Look at 3:11. How has God made something "beautiful in its time" in your life? Praise Him for His *perfect* timing.
  
4. In contrast to the fatalistic philosophy of most of this section of Scripture, in 4:9-12 Solomon spoke of the *advantages of companionship*. Using your own words, what are these advantages? Write down a specific example of a time when "two were better than one" in your own life.

## **Counsel for Coping in a Wicked World**

Read Ecclesiastes 7:1-9:18

1. Look at 7:1. According to Walvoord and Zuck, "Solomon combined the ideas of joy, prosperity and reputation with the ideas of birth and death. So he suggested that it is better to come to the end of life with a good reputation (good name) than to have a joyful and auspicious beginning which, because of folly, might result in nothing." What do you do you protect your "good name"? Be specific. What "folly" might cause one's life to "result in nothing"? How do you avoid "folly" in your own life?
  
2. Look at 7:2-6. According to John MacArthur, "The point of this section is to emphasize that more is learned from adversity than from pleasure. True wisdom is developed in the crucible of life's trials." How has this been true in your own life?
  
3. Look at 8:2-8 and the following verses: Exodus 22:28, Matthew 17:24-27, Matthew 22:15-22, Romans 13:1-7, Titus 3:1-2, and

1 Peter 2:13-17. Make a note of everything you learn about submission to those in positions of governmental authority.

4. Look at 9:16-18. The phrase "wisdom is better than" is used twice in these verses. From your own experience, what have you learned that "wisdom is better than"? Make a list of at least five things that you have learned are inferior to wisdom.

## **Counsel for the Uncertainties of Life**

Read Ecclesiastes 10:1-12:8

1. Look at 10:1. According to Pastor Damian Kyle, "It's the *little things* that can destroy a witness." Ask the Lord to show you if there are any *little things* that are hurting your witness.
2. Look at 10:4. The word *conciliation* in this verse literally means "healing, health". Read the following verses and note everything you learn about dealing in a "healing" way with angry people: Proverbs 12:20b, Proverbs 15:1, Romans 12:18, Romans 14:19, Ephesians 4:2-3, Colossians 3:13, Hebrews 12:14, and James 3:17-18.
3. Look at 11:3-6. Although we are to be cautious, there are many things in life which we cannot control. If we wait until the circumstances are perfect, we will never act. Consider these two adages: "Look before you leap" and "He who hesitates is lost." Either taken to an extreme will lead to sin. Do you tend to err on the side of being overly cautious or overly impulsive? How can you find a balance between the two?
4. Look at 12:1. According to Walvoord and Zuck, "Remember now your Creator" means, to "revere God, to keep His laws faithfully, to serve Him responsibly, remembering that because He created people, everyone owes Him his life." How do you "remember now *your* Creator" in practical ways in your daily life?

## **"Fear God and Keep His Commandments"**

Read Ecclesiastes 12:9-14

1. Look at verses 9-10. Who are you teaching? What knowledge are you teaching them? How do you make sure you are teaching "acceptable...words of truth?"
2. Look at verse 11. Look up the word *goad* in a dictionary and write the definition.
3. Look at verses 13-14. Herein lies the supreme lesson of the book of Ecclesiastes. Summarize it in your own words.
4. Consider this quote from Merrill F. Unger, "It is the message that everything on earth, even at its best, is fleeting and unsatisfying, and that the heart of man was made for God and will not find rest and satisfaction till it finds realization in Him who is changeless, absolute, and permanent." How has this been true in your own life?

## **Summary**

As you conclude your study of the book of Ecclesiastes consider the following questions and write your answers:

1. What is the most important lesson you have learned from your study of this book? How can you apply this lesson in your life this week?
2. What "new insights" did you learn about the Lord and yourself from your study?

- 3.** List one way in which your study caused you to do each of the following:

Praise and worship the Lord:

Confess an area of sin to the Lord:

Thank the Lord:

Ask for something from the Lord: