

Ecclesiastes Introduction

Wisdom Belongs to God

I. Ecclesiastes Inspired Inerrant Word of God

Title: "Ecclesiastes" Lit. The Preacher/Philosopher

- **Quoted** by cults, atheists, and cynics as proof text for their position
 1. No life after death
 2. No judgment
 3. This is all there is...**humanism**

- **Inspired Word of God**
 1. Jewish historical writings acknowledge Ecclesiastes as Scripture
 2. Historian Josephus infers Ecclesiastes is Scripture
 3. Dead Sea Scrolls contain fragments of Ecclesiastes
 4. Early church fathers accepted Ecclesiastes as Scripture
 - Melito of Sardis
 - Epiphanius
 - Origen
 - Jerome
 5. Proverbs, Song of Solomon, Psalm 72 and 127 are accepted as Scripture

Ecclesiastes is the Inspired Word of God

2 Timothy 3:16 All Scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness, 17 that the man of God may be complete, **thoroughly equipped for every good work.**

II. Author and Date

- **Solomon:** Wisest man who ever lived apart from Jesus
- **Writer of 3 Old Testament Books:**
 1. **Proverbs:** God's Wisdom
 2. **Song of Solomon:** God's Love
 3. **Ecclesiastes:** God's Warning [Foolishness of Solomon JV McGee]

No matter how much we achieve...Doing Life without God does not work!

Ecclesiastes 1:16 I communed with my heart, saying, "Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge." 17 And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is **grasping for the wind.**

- **Solomon:** Son of King David

Ecclesiastes 1:1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

Unlike David, Solomon was not a man "after Gods own heart" ... Solomon began in humility but was eventually consumed by self

- **Chronology: Life of Solomon Son of David**

1. David's 1st son with Bathsheba dies as a consequence of David's sin

2 Samuel 7:12 [God speaking to David] "When your days are fulfilled and you rest with your fathers, I will set up your seed after you, who will come from your body, and I will establish his kingdom. 13 He shall build a house for My name, and I will establish the throne of his kingdom forever. 14 I will be his Father, and he shall be My son. **If he commits iniquity**, I will chasten him with the rod of men and with the blows of the sons of men. 15 But My mercy shall not depart from him, as I took it from Saul, whom I removed from before you. 16 And your house and your kingdom shall be established forever before you. Your throne shall be established forever." [Dual prophesy of Solomon/Jesus]

2. David's and Bathsheba's 2nd son born. Named Solomon by David

- **Solomon** means "Peace"

2 Samuel 12:24 Now the Lord loved him, 25 and He sent word by the hand of Nathan the prophet: So he called his name Jedidiah, because of the Lord.

- **Jedidiah** mans "**friend of God**"

3. David makes Solomon King over Israel

1 Kings 2:1 Now the days of David drew near that he should die, and he charged Solomon his son, saying: 2 "I go the way of all the earth; be strong, therefore, and prove yourself a man. 3 And keep the charge of the Lord your God: to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His judgments, and His testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn..."

4. David dies and the Lord appears to Solomon as young king...

1 Kings 3:4 Now the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place: Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. 5 At Gibeon **the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream by night**; and God said, "Ask! What shall I give you?" 6 And Solomon said: "You have shown great mercy to Your servant David my father, because he walked before You in truth, in righteousness, and in uprightness of heart with You; You have continued this great kindness for him, and You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as it is this day. 7 Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king instead of my father David, but I am a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in. 8 And Your servant is in the midst of Your people whom You have chosen, a great people, too numerous to be numbered or counted. 9 Therefore give to Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people, that I may discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" 10 The speech pleased the Lord, that Solomon had asked this thing. 11 Then God said to him: "Because you have asked this thing, and have not asked long life for yourself, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have asked the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself understanding to discern justice, 12 behold, I have done according to your words; see, I have given you a wise and understanding heart, so that there has not been anyone like you before you, nor shall any like you arise after you. 13 And I have also given you what you have not asked: both riches and honor, so that there shall not be anyone like you among the kings all your days. 14 So if you walk in My ways, to keep My statutes and My commandments, as your father David walked, then I will lengthen your days." 15 Then Solomon awoke; and indeed it had been a

dream. And he came to Jerusalem and stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord, offered up burnt offerings, offered peace offerings, and made a feast for all his servants.

5. **Solomon chose wisdom** over riches
6. **Solomon builds Temple:** Lord appears to Solomon twice
7. Solomon becomes the richest man in world
8. Solomon loses the Kingdom due to disobedience to God's command:

Deuteronomy 17:16 [The King]...shall not multiply horses for himself...17 Neither shall he multiply wives for himself, lest his heart turn away; nor shall he **greatly multiply** silver and gold for himself.

- Solomon given wealth by God but as Rockefeller...wanted "**just a little bit more**"
- Life of the Rich and Famous

Unlike his father David, Solomon had soft hands and dressed in soft clothing [JV McGee]

1 Kings 10:24 Now all the earth sought the presence of Solomon to hear his wisdom, which God had put in his heart. 25 Each man brought his present: articles of silver and gold, garments, armor, spices, horses, and mules, at a set rate year by year. 26 And Solomon gathered chariots and horsemen; he had one thousand four hundred chariots and twelve thousand horsemen, whom he stationed in the chariot cities and with the king at Jerusalem. 27 The king made silver as common in Jerusalem as stones, and he made cedar trees as abundant as the sycamores which are in the lowland.

- **Yet never satisfied by his own admission:** Discontent

Ecclesiastes 5:10 He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver; Nor he who loves abundance, with increase. **This also is vanity.**

- Solomon happily married [Song of Solomon]
- Wanted "just a little bit more" and lost the kingdom

1 Kings 11:1 But King Solomon loved many foreign women, as well as the daughter of Pharaoh: women of the Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Sidonians, and Hittites— 2 from the nations of whom the Lord had said to the children of Israel, "You shall not intermarry with them, nor they with you. Surely they will turn away your hearts after their gods." Solomon clung to these in love. 3 And he had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines; and his wives turned away his heart. 4 For it was so, when Solomon was old, that his wives turned his heart after other gods; and his heart was not loyal to the Lord his God, as was the heart of his father David. 5 For Solomon went after Ashtoreth the goddess of the Sidonians, and after Milcom the abomination of the Ammonites. 6 Solomon did evil in the sight of the Lord, and did not fully follow the Lord, as did his father David. 7 Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, on the hill that is east of Jerusalem, and for Molech the abomination of the people of Ammon. 8 And he did likewise for all his foreign wives, who burned incense and sacrificed to their gods. 9 So the Lord became angry with Solomon, because his heart had turned from the Lord God of Israel, who had **appeared to him twice**, 10 and had commanded him concerning this thing, that he should not go after other gods; but he did not keep what the Lord had commanded. 11 Therefore the Lord said to Solomon, "Because you have done this, and have not kept My covenant and My statutes, which I have commanded you, I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant.

- 700 wives and 300 concubines

- **Same Old Temptation:** Just a “little bit more” than what God says is good

Genesis 3:4 ...the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. 5 For God knows that in the day you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” [God is keeping His best from you...go beyond the boundaries for happiness]

- **Date of Writing:** After Solomon’s told he will lose everything [930 BC?]

....I will surely tear the kingdom away from you and give it to your servant.

- **Ecclesiastes:** About to lose everything, Solomon takes a good/hard look at...

1. What life was like when he began with God

- **Song of Solomon:** Love/Fulfillment

Song of Solomon 2:10 My beloved spoke, and said to me: “Rise up, my love, my fair one, And come away. 11 For lo, the winter is past, The rain is over and gone. 12 The flowers appear on the earth; The time of singing has come, And the voice of the turtledove Is heard in our land. 13 The fig tree puts forth her green figs, And the vines with the tender grapes Give a good smell. Rise up, my love, my fair one, And come away!

- **Proverbs:** Wisdom and Walking with God

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Proverbs 3:5 Trust in the Lord with all your heart, And lean not on your own understanding; 6 In all your ways acknowledge Him, And He shall direct your paths. 7 Do not be wise in your own eyes; Fear the Lord and depart from evil. 8 It will be health to your flesh, And strength to your bones. 9 Honor the Lord with your possessions, And with the first fruits of all your increase...

- **In Ecclesiastes** Solomon also reflects on...

1. What life is like now without God [Offering his children to false gods]

- Narcissistic? Inside-out

2. What consequence his choices will have on others [Kingdom split]

Most importantly for us...

What his life could have been if he continued to he loved [obeyed] God

Deuteronomy 28:47 [Israel warned they will be cursed] “Because you did not serve the Lord [their] God with joy and gladness of heart, for the abundance of everything...

- **Author:** Solomon. Started well. Left his first love and lost his joy

1. AKA King Lemuel in Proverbs 31 written by his mother Bathsheba

- **Recipients:** All who want to finish well, both old and young...don’t be like me...

Ecclesiastes 12:1 Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, Before the

difficult days come, And the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them..."

III. Theme

- **Existence Under the Sun?**

Ecclesiastes 1:12 I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. 14 I have seen all the **works that are done under the sun**; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind.

Life without Christ is vanity, grasping the wind, emptiness...not life at all

A right relationship with God, in any age, through the way He has made, brings the only abiding satisfaction. What a difference between the man "under the sun" and the man "in Christ" seated in the heavenlies far above all suns! [JVMcGee]

- There is NO LIFE apart from Jesus... NONE.

John 1:1 In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God. 2 He was in the beginning with God. 3 All things were made through Him, and without Him nothing was made that was made. 4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men.

John 10:10 The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it **more abundantly**.

God formed us for Himself: [Tozer, the Pursuit of God] The Shorter Catechism... asks the ancient questions **what and why** and answers them in one short sentence hardly matched in any uninspired work...

Question: What is the chief End of Man? [What is this all about?]

Answer: Man's chief End is to glorify God and enjoy Him forever."

Psalms 37:4 Delight yourself also in the Lord, And He shall give you the desires of your heart.

- **Man's Universal Perpetual Consuming Desire for Purpose:**

*And you can't fight the tears that ain't coming. Or the moment of truth in your lies. When everything feels like the movies ... **you bleed just to know you're alive** And I don't want the world to see me 'Cause I don't think that they'd understand When everything's made to be broken **I just want you to know who I am** [Goo-Goo Dolls]*

For the World: What is the chief end of man? An Unending Unrewarding Unfruitful and Unsuccessful Mission to find Purpose and Fulfillment apart from God [NJC]

Some of us need to say it's not working

- **Key Word Ecclesiastes:** Vanity; i.e. Emptiness. **Occurs 37 Times!**
- **12 Chapters:** Solomon tried everything to find satisfaction "under the sun"
 1. Science
 2. Wisdom
 3. Philosophy

4. Pleasure
5. Materialism
6. Fatalism
7. Egotism
8. Religion
9. Wealth
10. Morality apart from God [Godless goodness]

- **Key Concept:** Found in the last two verses

Ecclesiastes 12:13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all.¹⁴ For God will bring every work into judgment, Including every secret thing, Whether good or evil.

VI. Interpretation

**Ecclesiastes is not a book establishing doctrine. Period.
In fact... it is filled with contradicting concepts:**

- **Ecclesiastes contradicts well-established Doctrine:** Heart is Evil

Numbers 15:39 ... remember all the commandments of the Lord and do them...[do] not follow the harlotry to which your own heart and your own eyes are inclined

Jeremiah 17:9 "The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?"

Ecclesiastes 11:9 Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, And let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth; **Walk in the ways of your heart, And in the sight of your eyes;** But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment.

- **Ecclesiastes contradicts Solomon:** Acquiring Wisdom is Good

Proverbs 1:7 The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, But fools despise wisdom and instruction.

Ecclesiastes 7:16 Do not be overly righteous, Nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourself?

- **Ecclesiastes contradicts Ecclesiastes:** Which is better, Sorrow or Laughter?

Ecclesiastes 2:2 I said of laughter—"Madness!" and of mirth, "What does it accomplish?"

Ecclesiastes 7:3 Sorrow is better than laughter, For by a sad countenance the heart is made better.

Ecclesiastes 8:15 So I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry; for this will remain with him in his labor all the days of his life which God gives him under the sun.

- **Literal Interpretation of The Scripture: God expects His people to THINK**

...the literal method of interpretation does not mean that everything in the Bible is true literally, rather it means that everything in the Bible is literally true. It does not mean that the Bible contains no figures of speech...

E.g. We understand that God does not have feathers or wings in light of John 4:24 stating that God is Spirit.

E.g. When Jesus says that "He is the vine" in John 15 is not physically actual.

"That He is a vine is literally true, but it is not true literally (i.e. physically) ... the literal truth behind this metaphor, viz., that we are the branches on the vine, our source of spiritual life literally (actually/truly) comes from Christ."
[Geisler]

Just because a personality in Scripture truly said something... Does not mean that what they said is a truth. [E.g. accusations about Jesus]

"Do not misunderstand 'inspiration' when we say that the Bible is inspired by God. Inspiration guarantees the accuracy of the thought that is expressed. The context should be considered, and attention paid to the person who made the statement and under what circumstances the statement was made. [JV McGee]

It is literally [factually] true that Solomon penned Proverbs and equally correct that all Proverbs are true literally

- Not so much in Ecclesiastes

It is literally true that Solomon penned Ecclesiastes but *not equally correct* that all of Ecclesiastes is true literally [see below for examples]

1. Different time in Solomon's life. After falling away
2. Different [strained at best] relationship with God
3. Different perspective than Proverbs: "Under the sun".
 - Regretful, ashamed...Bitter?

In the Book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon *is not* establishing doctrine nor is he *representing the Heart of God*; but simply reflecting/musing on a period of life disconnected from his Creator; i.e. his life "Under the Sun". [NJC]

- **E.g. No Judgment?** Literally/Factually true?

Ecclesiastes 3:18 I said in my heart, "Concerning the condition of the sons of men, God tests them, that they may see that they themselves are like animals." 19 For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all is vanity. 20 All go to one place: all are from the dust, and all return to dust.

- Solomon *seems* to be saying "**there no judgment**" and "**no life after death**"
- **Clear teaching of Scripture:** Judgment will determine your eternal destination:

Hebrews 9:27 ... it is appointed for men to die once, but after this the judgment...

Luke 12:4 "And I say to you, My friends, do not be afraid of those who kill the body, and after that have no more that they can do. 5 But I will show you whom you should fear: Fear Him who, after He has killed, has power to cast into hell; yes, I say to you, fear Him!"

- Solomon acknowledges/warns of judgment in his last chapter of Ecclesiastes...

Ecclesiastes 12:13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all. 14 For **God will bring every work into judgment**, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

Some Psalms are written with an "Under the Sun" outlook...

- **Imprecatory Psalms:** "Under the Sun" cries to the Lord
- **Psalms:** 5, 10, 17, 35, 58, 59, 69, 70, 79, 83, 109, 129, 137, 140

Psalm 58:6 Break their teeth in their mouth, O God! Break out the fangs of the young lions, O Lord! 7 Let them flow away as waters which run continually; When he bends his bow, Let his arrows be as if cut in pieces. 8 Let them be like a snail which melts away as it goes, Like a stillborn child of a woman, that they may not see the sun.

- **Imprecatory Psalms: Human heart cry...** God not condoning but allowing

These prayers can also articulate our own disquiet when we are caught in the agony and emotional upheaval of life's incongruities and injustices. When, for whatever reasons, we find ourselves unable to appropriate the mind of the Master for "the enemy," these prayers can provide a place of prayer from which to start, leading through the desire for vengeance to the prayer for blessing and redemption to which we are called. Further, having begun with their primary point, the forceful response to actual sin and evil against the people of God, one can walk through this door to the larger arena of our own desires for the destruction of evil in our own lives and our disdain for those enemies within. [Asbury Bible Commentary]

Ecclesiastes should be interpreted in light of its conclusion!

Ecclesiastes 12:13 Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all.

V. Why Ecclesiastes? What not to do...

- God's people began taking pagan wives and Solomon's name was brought up...

Nehemiah 13:26 Did not Solomon king of Israel sin by these things? Yet among many nations there was no king like him, who was beloved of his God; and God made him king over all Israel. Nevertheless pagan women caused even him to sin. 27 Should we then hear of your doing all this great evil, transgressing against our God by marrying pagan women?"

- **Solomon's Legacy:** Don't do what Solomon did...do the opposite

"Thou hast formed us for thyself and our hearts are restless till they find rest in thee" [Augustine]

- Greatest hindrance to living the resurrected life today is discouragement!
- Greatest reason for discouragement is following after things that are meaningless!
- Greatest encouragement and meaning in life comes from "doing life with God"

God is Life and there is no Life apart from God

John 1:4 In Him was life, and the life was the light of men...9 [Jesus is] the true Light which gives light to every man coming into the world.

John 10:10 I have come that they may have life, and that they may have it more abundantly.

▪ Solomon was dead inside:

1. Nothing would float his boat...anymore
2. Nothing got him excited ...anymore
3. Nothing was worth living for ...anymore
4. Nothing was giving him hope...anymore

Discouraged, Hopeless, Life just not working? Lots of hurt. Our Creator is willing to heal us...

Matthew 12:20 A bruised reed [Jesus] will not break, And smoking [wick] He will not quench...

Jesus sees the value in a bruised reed, even when no one else can. He can make beautiful music come from a bruised reed, as He puts His strength in it! Though a smoking flax - used for a wick on an oil lamp - is good for nothing, Jesus knows it is valuable for *what it can be* when it is refreshed with oil. Many of us are like the bruised reed, and we need to be strengthened with might through His Spirit in the inner man (Ephesians 3:16). Others are like the smoking flax, and can only burn brightly for the LORD again when we are drenched in oil, with a constant supply coming, as we are filled with the Holy Spirit. [Guzic]

- In order to find Life in Jesus *we must be willing* to lose our own
- Take the plunge. All in. No compromise...

Matthew 10:39 ... he who loses his life for [Jesus] sake will find it.

- Solomon did it all...had it all... left with nothing but wind!

Contentment/Solid True Life is knowing Jesus and doing life with Him 24/7

- Nothing else will satisfy our thirst for purpose/meaning/joy
- Samaritan woman had 5 Husbands and shacking up with a potential 6th

...Just not working!

John 4:13 [Living Water] "Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, 14 but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."

Jesus is here to bring us life and life...Abundant Life...Real Life...True Life...a Life lived on the Solid Rock...A Life enjoyed a broad and spacious place

Ecclesiastes 3:1 To everything there is a season, A time for every purpose under heaven...

Jesus came to give us Life...Time take it