

# *Ecclesiastes*

## *"Vanity of Vanities"*

### Background Information

The name "Ecclesiastes" comes from a Greek term meaning "preacher" (see 1:1).

Along with Ruth, Song of Solomon, Esther, and Lamentations, Ecclesiastes is contained in the Jewish "five scrolls" and is read on special days. This book is read on Pentecost.

While no name is given for the author, nearly all scholars agree that Solomon is the penman.

### Time Covered and Outline

If Solomon is the author, the time covered is his lifetime, and this book was likely written late in his life, to warn young people about the dangers of trying to live life without God.

An outline of the book could be as follows:

- I. Introductory matters (1:1-12)
- II. The Search for the Good Life (1:12-6:9)
  - A. The search begins (1:12-18)
  - B. Pleasure-seeking (2:1-11)
  - C. Wisdom and folly (2:12-17)
  - D. Investigating labor and rewards (2:18-6:9)
- III. The Conclusions of the Search (6:10-12:8)
  - A. The problem of not knowing (6:10-12)
  - B. Man's wisdom is limited (7:1-8:17)
  - C. Man cannot know what will come after him (9:1-12:8)
- IV. "The conclusion of the whole matter" (12:9-14)

### Major Themes

Futility of life without God  
True meaning of life  
Balance in life (3:1-8)  
Fearing the Lord

#### The "Vain Things" of Ecclesiastes

Human wisdom (2:14-16)  
Human effort (2:18-23)  
Human achievement (2:26)  
Human life (3:18-22)  
Human rivalry (4:4)  
Human selfishness (4:7-8)  
Human power (4:16)  
Human greed (5:10)  
Human accumulation (6:1-12)  
Human religion (8:10-14)

Since all these "human" things are vain, the conclusion drawn by Solomon is only fitting: "Fear God and keep His commandments!"

# God's Character in Ecclesiastes

Patient (8:11)

Powerful (3:11)

## Jesus in Ecclesiastes

While there is no direct reference to Jesus in this book, nor a prophecy about Him, the point of this book is that a life without God is futile (or vain). Jesus said that His purpose in coming to the earth was to give people a more abundant life (John 10:10). Only a life with Christ is worth living, and only that life is the full and true life.

## Key Words in Ecclesiastes

Vanity (Hebrew *hebel*). Literally a "vapor," the meaning is "fleeting." 1:2; 2:1; 4:4; 6:2; 6:11; 7:15; 8:14; 9:9

Labor (Hebrew *'amal*). "toil," generally for material gain, but also "trouble" or "sorrow." 1:3; 2:10; 2:21; 3:13; 4:8; 5:19; 6:7; 10:15

## Elsewhere in the World...

During the days of Solomon, the Chinese developed theories that would soon become the study of geometry, and also developed multiplication tables.

## Elsewhere in Scripture...

If Solomon is the author, Ecclesiastes can be seen as an "overlay" of his life. His wisdom surpassed all others, but he made foolish decisions. 1 Kings shows these stories in more detail.

### Some Words about "Vanity" in Ecclesiastes

"The key word [of Ecclesiastes] is 'vanity,' which expresses the futile attempt to be satisfied apart from God. The word is used thirty-seven times expressing the many things hard to understand about life. All earthly goals and ambitions when pursued as ends in themselves produce only emptiness. ...

"A proper balance of the prominent 'enjoy life' theme with that of 'divine judgment' tethers the reader to Solomon's God with the sure chord of faith."

—John MacArthur