

I OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

- PURPOSE:** To spare future generations the bitterness of learning through its own experiences that life is meaningless apart from God.
- AUTHOR:** Although no passages mention him by name, the general consensus of Bible scholars believes that Solomon was the author.
- TIMELINE:** Late in Solomon's life around 935 BC after Solomon made many unwise choices.
- SETTING:** Solomon looks back on his life, much of which was lived apart from God.
- BLUEPRINT:**
- A. Solomon's personal experiences (1:1-2:26)
 - B. Solomon's general observations (3:1-5:20)
 - C. Solomon's practical counsel (6:1-8:15)
 - D. Solomon's final conclusion (9:1-12:14)**

MEGATHEMES

THEME	EXPLANATION	IMPORTANCE
Searching	Solomon searched for satisfaction almost as if it was a scientific experiment. He discovered that life without God was a long and fruitless search for enjoyment, meaning and fulfillment. True happiness is not in our power to accumulate or attain because we always desire more than we can have. There are also circumstances beyond our control which can snatch away our possessions or attainments.	People are still searching. Yet the more they try to get, the more they realize how little they really have. No pleasure or happiness is possible without God. Above everything we should strive to know and love God.
Emptiness	Solomon shows how empty it is to pursue this life's pleasures rather than a relationship with an eternal God. The search for pleasure, wealth, and success is ultimately disappointing. Nothing in his world can satisfy our longing, restless hearts.	The cure for emptiness is to center on God. Fear God throughout your life and fill your life with serving God and others rather than selfish pleasures.

THEME	EXPLANATION	IMPORTANCE
Work	Solomon tried to shake people's confidence in their own efforts, abilities, and wisdom, and direct them to faith in God as the only sound basis for living. Without God there is no lasting reward or benefit in hard work.	Work done with the wrong attitude leaves us empty and work accepted as an assignment from God can be seen as a gift. Examine what you expect from your efforts. God gives you abilities and opportunities to work so you can use your time well.
Death	The certainty of death makes all merely human achievements futile. God has a plan for human destiny that goes beyond life and death. The reality of aging and dying reminds us of the end to come when God will judge each person's life.	Because life is short, we need wisdom which is greater than the world can offer. We need the words of God. If we listen to Him, His wisdom spares us the bitterness of futile human experience.
Wisdom	Human wisdom doesn't contain all the answers, as knowledge and education have their limits. To understand life, we need the wisdom that can be found in God's Word to us, the Bible (Basic Instruction Before Leaving Earth).	When we realize that God will evaluate what we do, we should learn to live wisely, remembering that He is present every day, and obeying His guidelines for living. We can only have God's wisdom when we find God.

II BACKGROUND

Ecclesiastes was written by King Solomon who ruled Israel at its political zenith. Under his rule, Israel had its largest borders, its greatest political stability, and its most robust economy. Under his rule, there was peace and prosperity with all surrounding nations and Israel had its largest borders. He was also without peer in the region and its people paid heavy tribute to him (**II Chronicles 9:22; II Chronicles 10:14-29**). Unfortunately, despite the divine gift of wisdom which he received when he was 20 years old, Solomon eventually exhibited foolish behavior, as his extravagant lifestyle did not conform to the terms of God's covenant. He also made foolish decisions as king, conscripting labor for his building projects in a manner similar to the military draft. This led to internal strife that resulted in the loss of unity as a nation as the 10 nations to the north seceded from Israel. Israel was never the same after Solomon made his mistakes. However, Solomon learned from his errors and advocated that other people should follow the path of godly wisdom. At the end of his life, Solomon, after making many mistakes, was inspired to write the book of Ecclesiastes.

In **Ecclesiastes 1-3**, Solomon pointed out the futility of seeking fulfillment in life through human wisdom or through "the good life". In **Ecclesiastes 4-6**, Solomon moved on to discussing the wise and unwise use of wealth, of which he had plenty. In **Ecclesiastes 7-8**, he focused on

life's wisdom, life's extreme's and life's inequities, to teach future generations, including ourselves, how God's wisdom keeps us on course as the best guide for living in an imperfect world. It is one of 66 books that God provided in His **Basic Instruction Before Leaving Earth**.

Now, in **Ecclesiastes 9**, Solomon examines the world's value judgments and concludes they don't work, as worldly values and judgments are inaccurate and ultimately end in death. In **Ecclesiastes 10**, Solomon exhorts us to maintain discretion in life, by being temperate, diligent, cautious, accommodating, and trying to get by as best you can and concludes that this approach is still only an enlightened expression of selfishness. Finally, in the early verses of **Ecclesiastes 11**, he showed that success is simply a matter of diligence (e.g., in order to get something out of life, you need to work and apply yourself). Most people acknowledge that life is filled with uncertainties and they tend to play it safe by avoiding activities with uncertain outcomes, **including God-given responsibilities that appear to have risk. If we truly trust God, we will do whatever He asks regardless of the uncertainties (Proverbs 3:5-6).**

III SCRIPTURE

LIVING IN SPITE OF DEATH (9:1-10)

(1-3): The only certainty is that we're all going to die. The only certainty in life is that we are headed to physical death whether we: (1) are righteous or wicked; (2) live a good or bad lifestyle; or, (3) sacrifice or don't sacrifice. All of our human wisdom can't be applied to escape death, and all of our wealth can't purchase escape from death. Solomon was horrified of the hopelessness of our position relative to physical death.

Death is a consequence of sin in people's lives. It entered the world when we rebelled against God (**Genesis 3:19-24**). When God created Adam and Eve, He intended them to live forever.

You can't escape death was the conclusion of Solomon's human wisdom, **but Jesus taught us how to escape death.** Jesus said, "He who lives and believes in Me shall never die" (John 11:26). You can escape death by living and believing in Jesus Christ. But the human mind and human wisdom won't bring you to that conclusion, as it takes the revelation of God. And if you're only approaching life from the human level and trying to find God from the human level, you'll never make it. God must reveal Himself to you by His Holy Spirit. God has revealed Himself through His Word, "And this is the record, that God has given to us eternal life and this life is in the Son, and he who has the Son has life" (1 John 5:11-12). "He that lives and believes in Me," Jesus said, "will never die."

(4-6): The myth of soul annihilation: Solomon lived almost 1,000 years before God revealed Himself as Jesus Christ and so his understanding of life after death was severely limited. At his time, all men believed that after death your soul goes to Sheol and there is nothing more. This has led people to pull this Scripture out of context and reinforce their belief that once you die, the soul is annihilated. But God has progressively revealed to us more information about life after death, as Jesus tells us that there clearly is consciousness that exists after death in **Luke 16:19-31, regardless of the venue.**

(7-10): Enjoy life as God's gift: Considering the uncertainties of the future and the certainty of death, Solomon recommends enjoying each minute of life as God's gift. Although life is short and often troubled, God's presence in one's life makes a marked difference in one's perspective of a given situation. God, not circumstances, should determine one's attitude

toward life. We should follow God's principles and do the very best we can in all circumstances (**Colossians 3:23**).

TIMING AND PROVIDENCE (9:11-18)

(11-13): Life is purposeless and random: Solomon concludes that there is no purpose in life, nor is there any guiding hand in life. It doesn't matter how swift or slow we are, how weak or strong, or how wise or foolish. Regardless of our hard and diligent work, we may sometimes experience defeat, deprivation, or disfavor. What happens to us in life is all a matter of time and chance, which is under God's sovereign control, and we cannot escape this existence.

Note that this is Solomon's opinion and not Scriptural doctrine. Rick Warren's "A Purpose-Driven Life" is filled with Scripture, mainly written after Solomon's time, that shows us the purpose we have in life once we know Jesus (Romans 8:28). What appears arbitrary is by God's design, and we must trust Him for He will always do what is right.

(14-18): God's Wisdom is low on America's priority list: Often people pay more attention to status than to deeds, as our contemporary society honors wealth, physical attractiveness, and financial success above achieving and living by God's wisdom. It is a sad state of affairs to see so many people strive to look important in man's eyes while concomitantly ruining their relationship with God (**Matthew 6:1-2**).

WISDOM AND FOOLISHNESS (10:1-20)

(1): What do dead flies and foolishness have in common? Dead flies cause a fine perfume to smell bad. So does a little foolishness from a person of reputation for wisdom and honor. When you are a person of integrity, and your life is out of place, you make a poor ambassador for Jesus Christ. **It only takes a single thoughtless act to ruin a career.**

(2-3): The wise can do great and dumb things: Wise men are capable of sustained exceptional behavior (i.e., right), yet at any given time they can do dumb things (i.e., left). Both are based on personal decisions. A foolish person lives without thinking and commonly makes irrational choices, while the sign of Christian maturity is to make consistently wise decisions, which is only possible through the power of the indwelt Holy Spirit.

(4): Yielding can pacify great offenses: If we would only learn just to yield a point, it can pacify great offenses and can stop big arguments (**Proverbs 15:1**). This can actually save a lot of pain, as a lot of people have been injured or killed by insisting on their points of view. It's also not wise to argue over an unimportant point. Choose the battles that you want to fight and also exercise self-control.

(5-7): Wisdom cannot bring justice: Solomon describes circumstances that aren't fair or which do not make sense to show that **wisdom alone cannot bring justice**. He continues to build his conclusion that everything we have is meaningless without God, and what little we have, if God is using it, becomes all we would ever want.

(8-11): A series of traditional wisdom sayings: (1) If you contrive harm against others it may backfire. (2) The wise worker will take appropriate safety measures to prevent accidents. (3) If

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you chop wood with a dull axe it will take more strength to get the job done as you lose the mechanical advantage. Planning and preparation by sharpening the tool makes more sense.

(12-14): A fool and his words do not know the future: Some people talk confidently of future things, but they don't really know what the next hour brings. Don't be fooled by their verbosity.

(15-19): Laziness and leadership is non-miscible: Under the "leadership" of immature and irresponsible leaders, the Hebrew nation fell, as shown in **I Kings** and **II Kings**. The underlying problem of these selfish leaders (i.e., laziness) is pointed out in verse **18**. People who succumb to drunkenness will accomplish nothing meaningful with their lives. Even those who inherit money, will, in time, lose it, if they do not do constructive things with it.

(20): Trusting people with confidential matters: When you say something in confidence thinking that that won't go any further, you trust that person, yet it still gets back to the person as if it flew like a bird. That's where the phrase, "A little bird told me" came from. If you are entrusted with information from someone, honor it.