

# Ecclesiastes

**MEANING:** “Speaker before an assembly.”

**AUTHOR:** Solomon

**TIME WRITTEN:** Ecclesiastes was probably written late in Solomon’s life, about 935 B.C.

**NOTE:** Jewish tradition asserts that Solomon wrote:

1. Song of Solomon in his youthful years.
2. Proverbs in his middle years.
3. Ecclesiastes in his later years.

**POSITION IN THE BIBLE:**

- 21st Book in the Bible
- 21st book in the Old Testament
- 4th of 5 Poetical Books
- 20 have preceded it. 45 to follow it.

**CHAPTERS:** 12

**VERSES:** 222

**WORDS:** 5,584

**KEY WORD:** Vanity

**TWO KEY PASSAGES:**

1. **Ecclesiastes 2:24** - “Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.
2. **Ecclesiastes 12:13-14** - “Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all.”  
For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.”

**KEY CHAPTER:** Ecclesiastes 12

1. At the end of the Book of Ecclesiastes, the Preacher looks at life through “binoculars.”
2. He concludes that “all is vanity.”
3. Life’s every activity, even though pleasant for the moment, becomes purposeless and futile when viewed as an end in itself.
4. Every earthly prescription for happiness has left the same bitter aftertaste.
5. Only when the Preacher views his life from God’s perspective “above the sun” does it take on meaning as a precious gift “from the hand of God” (**2:24**).
5. Chapter 2 resolves the book’s extensive inquiry into the meaning of life with the single

conclusion found in **12:13** - “Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man’s all.”

### **OBSERVATIONS ABOUT ECCLESIASTES:**

1. The key word in Ecclesiastes is Vanity.
2. Vanity is the futile emptiness of trying to be happy apart from God.
3. Solomon looks at life “under the sun” (1:9) from the human perspective, declares it to be all empty.
4. Power, popularity, prestige, pleasure—nothing can fill the God-shaped void in man’s life but God Himself.
4. But once life is seen from God’s perspective “above the sun”, it takes on new meaning and purpose.
6. The word “vanity” appears 37 times in Ecclesiastes.
  - a. It expresses the many things that cannot be understood about life.
  - b. All earthly goals and ambitions when pursued as ends in themselves, lead to dissatisfaction and frustration.
  - c. Life (“under the sun” used 29 times) seems to be filled with:
    1. Inequities.
    2. Uncertainties.
    3. Changes in fortune.
    4. Violations of justice.
  - d. Ecclesiastes does not give the answer of atheism or skepticism, but rather the answer from God.
  - e. The search for man’s summum bonum (The highest or supreme good) must end in God.
  - f. Satisfaction in life can be found only by looking beyond this world.
7. Wisdom involves seeing life from a divine perspective and trusting God in the face of apparent futility and lack of purpose.
8. Life is a daily gift from God and it should be enjoyed as much as possible.

## **SUMMARY OF ECCLESIASTES**

### **INTRODUCTION:**

- A. The Book of Ecclesiastes is the record of an intense search for meaning and satisfaction in life on this earth.
- B. There are three divisions of the book.
  1. The Thesis That “All is Vanity.: (1:1-11)
  2. The Proof That “All is Vanity.” (1:12-6:12)
  2. The Counsel for Living with Vanity. (7:1-12:14)

### **THE THESIS THAT “ALL IS VANITY.” (1:1-11)**

- A. The thesis of the preacher is that life lived without regard for god is of no value. It is indeed vanity (emptiness).
- B. The phrase, “vanity of vanities is the Hebrew way of describing the most vain thing imaginable.

### **THE PROOF THAT “ALL IS VANITY.” (1:12-6:12)**

- A. The Preacher describes his multiple quest for meaning and satisfaction as he explores his vast personal resources.
  - 1. He begins with wisdom (1:12-18) but finds that “he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.”
  - 2. He moves from wisdom to laughter and wine (2:1-3).
  - 3. Next he turns to works, women, and wealth (2:4-11), but all lead to emptiness.
  - 4. He realizes that wisdom is far greater than foolishness, but both seem to lead to futility in view of the brevity of life and universality of death (2:12-17)
  - 5. He concludes by acknowledging that contentment and joy are found only in God.
- B. Time is short and there is no eternity on earth. (3:1-15)
- C. Chapters 4 and 5 explore the futility in:
  - 1. Social relationships.
    - a. Oppression
    - b. Rivalry.
    - c. Covetousness
    - d. Power
  - 2. Religious relationships.
    - a. Formalism
    - b. Empty prayers
    - c. Vows.
- D. The world’s offerings produce disappointment, not satisfaction.
- E. Ultimate meaning can be found only in God.

### **THE COUNSEL FOR LIVING WITH VANITY. (7:1 -12:14)**

- A. A series of lessons on practical wisdom is given in 7:1 - 9:12.
  - 1. Levity and pleasure-seeking are seen as superficial and foolish. It is better to think seriously.
  - 2. Wisdom and self-control provide perspective and strength in coping with life.
  - 3. One should enjoy prosperity and consider in adversity that God made both.
  - 4. Avoid the twin extremes of self-righteousness and immorality.
  - 5. Sin invades all men, and wisdom is cut short by evil and death.
  - 6. The human mind cannot grasp ultimate meaning.

7. Submission to authority helps one avoid unnecessary hardship, but real justice is often lacking on earth.
  8. The uncertainties of life and certainty of the grave show that God's purposes and ways often cannot be grasped.
  9. One should magnify opportunities while they last, because fortune can change suddenly.
- B. Observations on wisdom and folly are found in 9:13 - 11:6.
1. Wisdom, the most powerful human resource, is contrasted with meaningless talk and efforts of fools.
  2. In view of the unpredictability of circumstances, wisdom is the best course to follow in order to minimize grief and misfortune.
  3. Wisdom involves discipline and diligence.
- C. In 11:7 - 12:7 the Preacher offers exhortations on using life well.
1. Youth is too brief and precious to be squandered in foolishness or evil.
  2. A person should live well in the fullness of each day before God, and acknowledge Him early in life.
  3. This section closes with a tremendous allegory of old age in 12:1-7.
- D. The Preacher concludes that the "good life" is only attained by revering God.
1. Those who fail to take God and His will seriously into account are doomed to live lives of foolishness and futility.
  2. Life will not wait upon the solution of all its problems.
  3. Life is real!
  3. Real meaning in life can be found by looking not "under the sun" but beyond the sun to God.