

ABIDE

DISCOVERING YOUR OLD TESTAMENT



UNDER THE SUN

ECCLESIASTES

Now this is an interesting book. The book of Ecclesiastes is the only book of philosophy in the Bible. Throughout history and to our present, this book has been and continues to be, the intrigue of many thinkers and philosophers from all over as they attempt to understand this message.

The naming of the book of Ecclesiastes takes a Latin root word 'Ecclesia' which means, "To call out." This is the actual definition of what it means to be a New Testament Church. If you attend a local New Testament congregation, you are "called out" to that location; you are part of that church. Well, since "ecclesia" means church, then we deal with the last part of the word "stes." This ending of the word changes the meaning a bit and it can be literally translated to, "One who speaks before an assembly."

Now, the Hebrew name is different. The name of this book in the Hebrew language is the word "Kohleth" and it is a word taken from Chapter 1 of verse 1, "The words of the "Preacher..." That's the word Kohleth— The Preacher.

As previously discussed, it is believed that Solomon was the author of this book, and we find that also in verse 1 of chapter 1 when the Bible says, "The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king of Jerusalem." That's Solomon. And it is believed that Solomon wrote this book when he was an old man and reflecting on the waste of his life.

What Solomon is doing here is he is delivering a sermon to the people. The preacher, Jerry Vines, says that it was almost as if Solomon had been dabbling in the old songbooks his father had written and came across Psalm 39. Then while reading there he came across these words in verses 4-5, "LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is; that I may know how frail I am. Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah." And then, he made it to verse 11 of this same Psalm, "When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makes his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man is vanity."

Then, Solomon reading this said, "That's my life! I've got to keep people away from making the same mistake I have. I know, I'll write a sermon and deliver it to the people."

And as you read this, you are reading the cries of a man that takes you to the glories of his wisdom, to the folly of its abuse. So let's see what the Preacher has to say.

How to Think About Ecclesiastes

The Introduction (Ecclesiastes 1:1-11): The overall purpose, to state it another way, is to get people to move away from life in the world. Solomon is seriously crying out for us to listen to him when it comes to the way we live our lives. Solomon said that he had literally tried everything there is to do apart from God, and by the end of his life, he had nothing to show for it and now would soon stand before God.

Just like any good preacher would write a sermon, Solomon's sermon is broken up into three main points. That is said in a little bit of jest, but there is truth in that statement. You see, in verses 1 and 2 of chapter 1, you see Solomon picking his text, starting in verse 3 and moving into verse 11, Solomon launches into his subject, and then, by the time you reach verse 12, Solomon starts making his main points for his sermon.

The Search is On (Ecclesiastes 1:12-2:26): In this section, Solomon begins to describe his search for meaning in life apart from God. It is important to remember that at this point in history, Solomon's wealth was beyond compare, and he had made up his mind that he would conduct a series of tests, or experiments, in order to see if the wisdom of man would ever amount to anything. What is interesting is that he knew what God said. He knew full well God's law, His standards, and His ways. Solomon knew what God required and what God had said about living life apart from Him. But it was as if Solomon told God, "I know what you said, but I want to actually experience all of this for myself."

So the whole of this part of the sermon is Solomon trying out a "party life", a life centered around building great structures and wealth, a life of learning, and then a life of madness and folly. He tried everything.

The Scenes of Life (Ecclesiastes 3-6:12): Solomon begins to recall all of the different kinds of change that inevitably happen in life. If it has a start date, you should just as well have an end date that goes along with it as well. Solomon says at the beginning of chapter 3, "To everything there is a season..." The present continually passes. This section is written to cause us to really look deeper than the surface of life.

As Solomon looks around he tells us that everywhere he has ever looked, he has found the world full of people who just do not get life. He says in chapter 4 that he looked at the injustice found in the business world. In chapter 5 Solomon looked at those religious people who were just trying to live a good life. In chapter 6 Solomon once again starts talking about those who work for riches. And on every single occasion, because in all of these things, the end was not considered. The fact that in every instance people were just going about their lives toiling and not giving serious thought to the fact that one day, all of this would change; the season of this life would be over, and says, "It is all meaningless in the end."

The Somber Explanation (Ecclesiastes 7-10): In this third point of the sermon, Solomon appears to get very serious and sad. With every passing day he is realizing that as he gets older, the more real the reality of his death is becoming. Everywhere he looks, he still finds that "nothing" is the ultimate end. There is just busyness but no substance; people trying to live a virtuous life, but with no gain.

The Conclusion (Ecclesiastes 11-12): In chapter 11 the sky still looks cloudy. If you can imagine the audience listening to all of this, Solomon literally covers every portion of life and virtually every pursuit in it. We can see these people with tears filling their eyes, using their garments to wipe their noses, occasionally making short whelping sounds as they realize "That's me! He's talking to me! God is talking to me! What do I do about this? How do I fix it?"

Then, as chapter 12 opens, we find one solid and overarching theme: "Once you find God, don't stop in your pursuit of Him."

What to Look for in Ecclesiastes

The outline given in this chapter is very simplified, but remember when you are reading this book, it is very challenging even for the most knowledgeable. Further, just as we have spoken about before regarding the erroneous thoughts of God's people contained in Scripture. Well, Solomon is a perfect example of this. Some of the thoughts he has are not of God but are accurately recorded in Scripture, and so when you read Ecclesiastes, some of what Solomon says makes you turn your head a little bit and think, "That doesn't sound right." And that's because some of it isn't. However, there are a few areas you should look at a little more closely to help you understand the book a little better.

Key Words— This is of vital importance. This book being a sermon, it should be understood as such. And in a sermon, a singular thought is made known, and there are keywords to drive the point home. That said, this is primarily what you need to be looking at when taking in the meaning of the book.

Man: You will find this word mentioned 47 times during your reading of Ecclesiastes. This is a reference to the life lived in the normal, everyday courses of mankind. When you go to an event, how do people normally act? In a court of law, what do you see among the people there? When you go to the market, what do you observe about those around you? That's where Solomon is drawing your attention with this word "man".

Labor: The word labor occurs 46 times during Solomon's Sermon. This word usually has reference to a type of toil, or work for material gain. However, this word can also mean a type of "trouble" or "sorrow" experienced. And in the context of this book, an individual is solely working for some sort of gain from a human perspective, that is exactly what it becomes. But this word is used as a type of good that can happen when we are working, or laboring, for God.

Vanity: You'll see this word 37 times. Clarence Sexton says that vanity is the substance left after you pop a soap bubble. The Biblically definition has to do with a "vapor" or a "breath" taken on a cool day. This is a very prominent word in the book and has to do with the end results of every life pursuit of this world.

Under the Sun: This phrase occurs 30 times and it is really the key to the book. The reason there are courses of man, the reason there is ungodly labor, the reason every life pursuit of the world ultimately ends in vanity is that it is a life lived "under the sun." That is to say, God has a plan for man, and a way to live, but anything less than that becomes a life lived "under the sun" meaning that it is a life lived apart from God.

What to Gain from Ecclesiastes

The Lost Would be Saved: This sermon was written so that a lost person would not have to go through life and live exactly like Solomon did just to find out exactly what Solomon found out. This is an evangelistic book. Its message is that there is nothing in this life that can satisfy the deepest needs of the heart except for God.

The Saved Would Wake Up: For some reason, God's people hear God, they see the poor examples of others, they know the ultimate outcome of the world but still think, "I believe I would still like to try living apart from God." Well, for the believer, the book of Ecclesiastes says, "Think again." Solomon says, "I tried and it seriously cannot be done." Instead, he says that you have a duty as a follower of Christ... and that is this, "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).



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