

Bible Study notes and Questions on Ecclesiastes

Overview: Although the writer of the short book is not named once in the text the evidence seems to point without question to Solomon, king of Israel. The main theme he is attempting to give to people is an answer to the question, "How do we find meaning to life"?

Solomon became the richest and wisest king in Israel. God had appeared to him in a dream, **1Kings 3:5-14; 2Chronicles 1:7-12**. Solomon had requested wisdom, knowledge and an understanding heart to judge Israel. He obtained along with wisdom great wealth. He was able to see the temple built to receive God's blessing.

Sadly, Solomon fell in deep sin in later years because he was married to 700 wives and acquired 300 concubines many of them being foreign women. They turned his heart away from the Lord to allow worship of pagan deities namely Ashtoreth, Milcom, Chemosh and Molech, **1Kings 11:1-11**. The Lord was angry with Solomon and told him that his kingdom will split into two after his death, the northern kingdom of Israel and the southern kingdom of Judah. Solomon had wisdom but he neglected the word of the Lord having failed to walk in the law of God showing disobedience to his commandment.

It could be the book of Ecclesiastes was written at a time when Solomon had realised his folly in acting foolishly to encourage idolatry. The evidence from this book has shown that Solomon wrote this book late on in life not so long before his death. He had come to have much knowledge but failed to really find the meaning of life. He had become disillusioned, disappointed and depressed having not discovered the way God wanted him to live.

Solomon had spent much of his life in unprofitable activity which had led him away from the Lord. However, it seemed that he had recognised his folly in old age and had been inspired by the Holy Spirit to write this book as a warning of the danger of living without God. Such a life referred to "*under the sun*" (31 times in the KJV) seems to imply human life lived without God having no purpose. We have insight into just how meaningless man's wisdom can be and what activities that continue in the world. We have here a critique of secularism and secularised religion. The writer of Ecclesiastes has used such an approach to convict people of sin, righteousness and judgment and to consider that there is a creator who can bring purpose to why we live in this needy world. A man who may have much honour, respect and a good reputation without God will perish as seen in **Psalm 49:20**: "*Man (that is) in honour, and understands not, is like the beasts (that) perish.*"

May we pick up much instruction to live in obedience to God's word with much respect for God, knowing God will judge every work done whether good or evil (**12:13-14**). As believers may we seek to do God's good works (**Ephesians 2:10**) and apply **Colossians 3:2**: "*Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth.*" It is the writer's view that Solomon came to true repentance in old age to restore his relationship with the Lord as seen in **12:13-14**.

Additional notes

I) David Pawson has written a useful paragraph in his book "Unlocking the Bible Omnibus" (P 405). He has said: "But despite its strangeness, Ecclesiastes has a very contemporary ring to it and features many of the philosophical ideas of our own day:

*Fatalism: whatever will be, will be.

*Existentialism: live for the present moment – who knows what the future will bring?

*Chauvinism: men are better than women.

*Hedonism: living for pleasure.

*Cynicism: even good things aren't what they seem.

*Pessimism: things are bound to get worse.

Additional notes continued

II) Words: A) Elohim (430) is the Hebrew word for God 40 times in the KJV Bible.

B) Koheleth or qoheleth (6953) is a Hebrew word for preacher/teacher, **Ecclesiastes 1:1-2,12; 7:27; 12:8, 9, 10**. It can also mean “caller” or “congregator”. In Greek the word for preacher is “ecclesiastes” meaning “one who convenes an assembly” interpreted as “convener, assembler, debater, spokesman and preacher.”

C) Vanity in Hebrew (1892) is the word “hebel” or “habel” meaning “emptiness” or “vanity.” The Hebrew for Abel, name of the second son of Adam and Eve (**Genesis 4:2-9**) is “hebel” (1893). The name, Abel, means “vanity, vapour, breath, transitory, fading away, withering.” The Hebrew words “hebel” (1893) and “habel” (1892) are from the root word (1891) meaning “to be vain in act, word or expectation specifically to lead astray.” The numbers in brackets show where the Hebrew or Greek word can be found in the dictionary of Strong’s Complete Word Concordance.

III) Brief overview of the book:

I) Name of author not specifically stated but it seems most likely to be Solomon in view of one of the main themes being on wisdom. **1:1**.

II) Theme: the meaninglessness of life when man lives without God. “*Vanity of vanities*” says the Preacher, “*vanity of vanities; all is vanity.*” **1:2**.

III) The labours of men prove to be meaningless even after obtaining much wealth there is no real happiness or fulfilment. **1:3-11**.

IV) Main discourse, **1:12-11:6**. Life has been seen as a mystery but God has given to man life to be enjoyed.

V) Discourse, **11:7-12:7**. There is a message to the youth to remember God as his Creator of life. Inevitably old age and death will come and God will judge all things.

VI) The theme of meaningless of life has been repeated in **12:8**: “Vanity of vanities” or “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the preacher, “all is vanity” or “Everything is meaningless!”

VII) Conclusion: The preacher has sought for sound teaching having stressed reverence for God and obedience to his commandments, **12:9-14**.

Questions on Ecclesiastes

Q.1) Read **1:1, 12**. Who has written this book?

Q.2) What seems to appear to be the main message of this book? See **1:2; 12:8**.

Q.3) Why did the writer say there is nothing new “*under the sun*” in **1:9**? Look at the evidence in **1:3-11**.

Q.4) What did Solomon seek to search out in **1:12-18**? Can you see the problems he discovered from personal observation?

Q.5) Show the personal works that Solomon did in seeking after pleasure in **2:1-11**. You may find it helpful to make a list. Did Solomon seem satisfied in what he achieved?

Q.6) Read carefully **2:12-26**. What had Solomon discovered in all his labours? Show what he had found was meaningless.

Q.7) Show clearly whether God has a time for things to take place. See **3:1-17**.

Q.8) Compare what happens to animals and men at the point of death. See **3:18-22**.

Q.9) Show the matters of concern to the writer in **4:1-16**. Consider some helpful instruction and any proverbs shown in this chapter such as **4:6**.

Q.10) Read carefully **5:1-7**. Can you see at least three things that are acceptable to God? What have we been warned to avoid doing?

Q.11) What lessons can be learnt about the problem of wealth in **5:8-6:12**? Can you say there are benefits in being poor from the text?

Questions on Ecclesiastes continued

Q.12) Read carefully **7:1-10**. Show the comparison between the wise man and the fool.

Q.13) Read **7:11-27**. What lessons can we learn about wisdom? Show the warnings for those who reject wisdom.

Q.14) Read through **8:1-17**. A) Consider the instructions that prove helpful in **vs1-18**.

B) What has been revealed about wicked and just men in **vs9-17**.

Q.15) What has the writer revealed of how we should live in **9:1-12**? Is there anything helpful in these verses?

Q.16) Show the value of wisdom in **9:13-18**. Who were the people that can be left unnoticed for their wisdom?

Q.17) Read **10:1-20**. A) What things are shown to be foolish? B) What things are considered to be wise?

Q.18) Look carefully at **11:1-8**. Can you see wise sayings that we need to apply in our lives?

Q.19) What advice has been given to a young man in **11:9-10 & 12:1**?

Q.20) Show the description of old age in **12:2-7**.

Q.21) Consider carefully the conclusion to this book in **12:8-14**. Despite Solomon's failures, do you think in old age he had sought to live in the way God had intended to live?

Miscellaneous Questions

Q.1) What does this book reveal of who God is? The following references are helpful: **2:24-26; 3:1-17; 5:1-7, 18-20; 7:13-14, 28:2-3, 13;9:1; 11:5; 12:13-14**.

Q.2) Consider the main message of this book.

Q.3) Write down the main themes that come out of reading this book. You may wish to refer to the verses where they appear.

Q.4) What was known of the writer of Ecclesiastes? Show the evidence that Solomon was the writer of this book. See **1:1-2, 12; 2:9; 7:27; 12:8-10**.

Q.5) What has this book taught about wisdom?

Q.6) Can you see what the book of Ecclesiastes has intended to teach us in how to live despite the negative outlook it appears to give us? It is helpful to read **11:1 & 12:9-14**.

Q.7) Read carefully through the book and make a note of the references that are proverbs. You may wish to write them down. Are they helpful in teaching us various lessons about life?

Q.8) Why had Solomon failed to live according to God's word even though he was known to have wisdom? See also **1Kings 11:1-13**.

Bibliography

The list of resources available will be helpful in studying the scriptures. The author may not necessarily agree with all of the views of the writers of the reading material.

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