

Introduction to Ecclesiastes

Title: Ecclesiastes

- 1) What does the word “Ecclesiastes” mean?

Author

- 2) Read the following verses: *(1:1,16; 2:9; 12:9)* Who is the author?

Scope of Book (Portion of human existence under consideration in the book)

- 3) What is the common phrase found in *1:3,9,13,14; 2:3,11,17,18,19,20,22?*

(a phrase found in that form or similar form 42 times in the letter)

Theme of Book

- 4) Look at the following verses and see if a theme emerges: *(1:2,14,17; 2:1, 11,15,19,26)*

(These related phrases occur 47 times in the letter)

- 5) So, looking at *1:2-3*, what is the theme of the book?

(Not to say God, Judgment, and the future are completely eliminated – *7:18; 8:12-13; 11:9; 12:7, 13-14* - However, they are not the primary view or perspective.)

(Faith in God is also included in the book: *2:24-26; 3:10-12; 5:1* – But the primary view of our letter is perspective on life “under the sun.”)

- 6) To appreciate the special view of this book, compare *Eccl. 3:19-22* with *II Co. 5:1-7*

Purpose of this Letter (To set forth proper philosophy of life in view of earthly truths and give wise counsel for living life under the sun. See *12:9-14*)

Outline

Theme: *1:1-2*

Futility and “evil” of life under the sun: *1:3-6:12*

Wisdom for troubled times: *7:1-12:8*

Concluding exhortation: *12:9-14*

Ecclesiastes Chapter 1

Review:

- a) *What does "Ecclesiastes" mean?*
- b) *Who is the author?*
- c) *What is the theme of the book?*
- d) *What is the scope under consideration in the book?*
- e) *Give a brief outline of the book.*

Marking for Chapter 1:

- i. *Mark "under the sun" "under heaven" "on earth" phrases*
- ii. *Mark "vanity" "futile" "striving after wind" phrases*
- iii. *Mark "what advantage" "what good is there" no profit" phrases*

1:1-11 – Prologue: All is Vanity!

- 1) **What is the question of the book? (v.3)**

- 2) **How does the author illustrate this theme? (v.4-11)**

1:12-18 – Personal quest for answers (to question in verse 3)

- 3) **What did the Preacher aim to do?**

- 4) **Why was he eminently qualified for this task?**

- 5) **What was his conclusion?**

Ecclesiastes Chapter 2

Class Preparation: Please read chapter 2 before class. (Also, please read *Psalm 49*)

Marking for Chapter 2:

- i. Mark “under the sun” “under heaven” phrases”*
- ii. Mark “futility” “vanity” “striving after wind”*
- iii. Mark “what does it accomplish” “no profit” “what does a man get”*
- iv. Circle “for myself” phrases. Circle “labor/labored” words.*

2:1-11 – Test of Pleasure (“folly”)

Use a pencil and circle the phrase “for myself” in verses 4-8.

- 1) List the things the Preacher had for enjoyment.**
- 2) What profit did the Preacher reap from these things? (Why?)**
- 3) Of the list of things, which did Jesus possess?**
- 4) What profit was realized as a result of His life? (Why?)**
- 5) What do we learn from this comparison? (Solomon’s goods w/ Christ’s)**

2:12-17 – Comparison of Wisdom and Pleasure (“folly”)

- 6) Why is wisdom better than folly?**
- 7) Why is it yet futile? (no matter which you excel in)**

2:18-23 – Futility of Labor (count the words “labor” and “labored” in this section. How many?)

- 8) What are some sobering truths about labor and the product of labor “under the sun?”**
- 9) Does this passage speak to whether we should work and save and leave inheritance to kids?**

2:24-26 – Recommended Solution

- 10) In view of the futility of life, how then should we live?**

Ecclesiastes Chapter 3

Review:

- a) *What does "Ecclesiastes" mean?*
- b) *Who is the author?*
- c) *What is the question of the book (ch1)? And what is the answer?*
- d) *What is the author's recommendation as to how we ought to live (ch2)?*
- e) *Give a brief outline of the book.*

Marking for Chapter 3: (Please read chapter 3 before class)

- i. *Mark "under the sun" "under heaven" "on earth" phrases*
- ii. *Mark "vanity" "futile" "striving after wind" phrases*
- iii. *Mark "what profit" "no advantage" phrases*
- iv. *Circle "God" in this chapter*

3:1-15 – God's sovereignty and man's limitations

- 1) **Circle the word "time" in this chapter. How many times does it appear?**

Though man desires to more fully understand the providential government of God, he cannot. Nor can he alter it. These limitations upon man's knowledge and ability serve a moral purpose.

- 2) **What is that purpose?**
- 3) **How then shall man live? (v.12,13,22)**

3:16-17 – God's sovereignty and justice

- 4) **Is the fact that "in the place of justice there is wickedness" inconsistent with the sovereignty of a righteous God? How does the author deal with this dilemma?**
- 5) **Thought question: If Solomon is the author, is v. 16-17 a self-indictment of his reign?**

3:18-22 – God's sovereignty and the vanity of earthly existence

- 6) **How are men and beasts ALIKE?**
- 7) **How are men and beasts DIFFERENT?**
- 8) **Is any purpose served in man being made to realize his likeness to beasts? Explain.**

Ecclesiastes Chapter 4

Class Preparation: Please read chapter 4 before class.

Review:

- a) *What does "Ecclesiastes" mean?*
- b) *What is the theme of the book?*
- c) *What is the author's recommendation as to how we ought to live (ch2)?*
- d) *How can it be said that "there is no advantage for man over beast (ch3)?*

Marking for Chapter 4:

- i. *Mark "under the sun" "under heaven" phrases*
- ii. *Mark "futility" "vanity" "striving after wind"*
- iii. *Mark the word "BETTER" 4 times in the chapter*

4:1-3 – A look at the oppressed

- 1) **What makes their condition so bleak?**
- 2) **Why are the dead and non-existent *better* off?**

4:4-6 – Moderation is *better* than rivalry and slothfulness

- 3) **What are the two very different lifestyles described in verses 4-5?**
- 4) **Does verse 6 represent a better way? (perhaps consider I Tim 6:6-9)**

4:7-12 – Lasting relationships *better* than selfish pursuit of riches

- 5) **What is the "grievous task" or "grave misfortune" (NKJV) of this section?**
- 6) **Why are lasting relationships better than the selfish pursuit of riches?**

4:13-16 – Wisdom *better* than folly: illustrated in kingships

- 7) **Why is the poor lad better than the old king?**
- 8) **Do we have a Biblical example of such a lad?**
- 9) **If such is true, why then (verse 16) is all still vanity?**

Ecclesiastes Chapter 5

Marking for Chapter 5: **(Please read chapter 5 before class)**

- i. Mark “under the sun” “under heaven” “on the earth” phrases
- ii. Mark “vanity” “emptiness” “toils for the wind” phrases
- iii. Mark “what is the advantage” “what profit” phrases
- iv. Mark one more “better” in this chapter. Circle “God” in this chapter

5:1-7 – Fear God and pay what you vow

- 1) Explain the phrase at the end of verse 2: “therefore let your words be few”
- 2) Does verse 6 discuss a penalty for violation of our vows?
- 3) Having first examined the context, interpret verse 3.

5:8-17 – Desire for riches and its effect on life under the sun

- 4) In the following sections, what does the Preacher say about how the desire for riches affects life under the sun?
 - i. Vs. 8-9 -
 - ii. Vs. 10-12 -
 - iii. Vs. 13-17 –
- 5) In verse 12, what is the difference between the “working man” and “rich man?”

5:18-20 – Recommendation: Enjoy the life God has given you under the sun

This is the 4th time such a recommendation has been given: **2:24; 3:12-13; 3:22** (mark them all)

- 6) What do all four instances counsel a person to do with his possession, abilities, etc.?
- 7) Why do all four passages say that we should live in such a way?
- 8) Certainly it is not wrong to be wealthy; but what are some lessons rich, greatly blessed people ought to learn from this chapter? *(Is it wealth that makes one happy, or attitude towards it?)*

Ecclesiastes Chapter 6

Review:

- a) *What is the question of the book? And what is the answer?*
- b) *What portion of human existence is under consideration in the book?*
- c) *In what 4 places so far do we have recommendations on how to live?*
- d) *What is that recommendation?*
- e) *Give a brief outline of the book.*

Marking for Chapter 6: (Please read chapter 6 before class)

- i. *Mark "under the sun" "under heaven" "on earth" phrases*
- ii. *Mark "vanity" "futile" "striving after wind" phrases*
- iii. *Mark "what advantage" "profit" phrases*
- iv. *Mark one "better" in this chapter. Also find and circle "a man" or "the man" 3 times*

6:1-6 – A prevalent "evil"

- 1) **Circle the phrase "a man" and "the man" in 6:2,3,6. Three circumstances are described.**
- 2) **What were the first man's circumstances, financially and socially?**
- 3) **What more does the man in verse 3 have than the first?**
- 4) **What dimension is added for the man in verse 6?**
- 5) **QUESTION: What "evil" is characteristic of all of them?**

6:7-9 – The reason for this "evil"

- 6) **This section explains one reason men suffer this "evil." What is it?**
- 7) **Answer the 2 questions of verse 8.**

6:10-12 – An attitude that compounds "evil"

- 8) **Why is fighting against the natural transitions of life and its possessions so futile?**

Ecclesiastes Chapter 7

Class Preparation: Please read chapter 7 before class.

Marking for Chapter 7:

- i. Mark “see the sun” “on earth” phrases
- ii. Mark “futility” “vanity” “striving after wind”
- iii. Mark “what advantage” “an advantage”
- iv. Mark the words “better” and “good” in this chapter
- v. Circle references to “God” in the chapter

7:1-12:8 – Most of the rest of the letter deals with **Wisdom for bad times**

Outline of Chapter 7: Wisdom for times of

(Death – v.1-4) (Rebuke – v.5-6) (Oppression – v.7-10) (Poverty – v.1-14)

(When things go opposite of what we expect – v.15-18) (Prevalence of sin – v.19-22)

NOTE: To understand this wisdom, we must not forget the THEME of the book: **1:2-3**

1) Circumstances of adversity run through this section. Select words or phrases through vs. 1-21 to illustrate and emphasize this:

v.1 -

v.2 -

v.3 -

v.4 -

v.5 -

v.7 (2) -

v.10 (phrase) -

v.14 -

v.15 (phrase) -

v.15 (phrase) -

v.20 (phrase) -

v.21 (phrase) -

2) What is the reason given for not being...

i. “excessively righteous” –

ii. “excessively wicked” –

3) Read verse 19-22 – How does wisdom give strength to people who live in trouble times?

4) (v.23-29) – How is Solomon’s search for understanding going?

5) What things has his search taught him concerning women?

Ecclesiastes Chapter 8

Review:

- a) *What does “Ecclesiastes” mean?*
- b) *Who authored the book and what evidence do you have to prove it?*
- c) *What is the theme of the book?*
- d) *How is the day of one’s death better than of one’s birth? (7:1)*
- e) *Give a brief outline of the book.*

Marking for Chapter 8: (Please read chapter 8 before class)

- i. *Mark “under the sun” “under heaven” “on earth” phrases*
- ii. *Mark “vanity” “futile” “striving after wind” phrases*
- iii. *Find both references to “fear God” and circle God in those places*

8:1-10 – Wisdom for living under a powerful and capricious ruler

- 1) **Select (maybe circle) phrases in the section that indicate the nature of the ruler in the text**
 - a. Ex) 8:3: “an evil matter”
- 2) **Select (maybe underline) phrases in the section indicating advice to those living under rule.**
 - a. Ex) 8:2: “keep the command of the king”
- 3) **There are two truths concerning rulers that are revealed. Note them:**

V8 –

V10 –

8:11-15 – Justice nor wickedness guarantee longevity

- 4) **What encourages the multiplication of criminal activity?**
- 5) **In the author’s observation, do righteous men live longer and wicked men die young?**
- 6) **What is the recommendation and why is it recommended? (v15)**

8:16-17 – God’s moral government beyond man’s research

- 7) **The message: you cannot comprehend or learn the full truth of God’s design for life here, or His moral government behind the scenes. So, how can recognizing this help us?**

Ecclesiastes Chapter 9

Review:

- a) *What portion of human life is under consideration in this book?*
- b) *What is the great question of the book, as found in chapter 1?*
- c) *From chapter 8, how should one live if under a foolish king/government?*

Marking for Chapter 9: (Please read this chapter BEFORE class)

- i. Mark "see the sun" "on earth" phrases
- ii. Mark "fleeting life" "vanity" "striving after wind"
- iii. Circle references to "God". Mark the word "better" 3 times.

9:1-6 – Death is the common fate of all men

- 1) **What is the evil that is common to all men, be they righteous or wicked?**
- 2) Back in **7:1-4**, the author says the day of one's death is better than the day he was born. Now **(9:4)** he's telling us "a live dog is better than a dead lion." **What is the meaning here?**
- 3) Materialists use v.5-6 to teach man has no consciousness after death – that he knows and feels nothing. **Is that what Solomon is teaching here? How does understanding the theme/scope of the book help us interpret this passage?**

9:7-9 – Counsel in view of this

- 4) **How should man live, knowing that life under the sun is uncertain and so very short?**

9:10-12 – Death comes without planning, exception, or warning

- 5) **Why is procrastination unwise?**
- 6) **How should these truths help one organize (or re-organize) priorities?**

9:13-18 – Quiet wisdom better, but rejected by fools

- 7) **Can you think of modern day examples where the quiet voice of wisdom goes unheard, while the powerful voice of the foolish rules among fools to their own destruction?**
- 8) **What is the meaning of verse 18: "Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good"?**

Ecclesiastes Chapter 10

Review:

- a) *What does "Ecclesiastes" mean?*
- b) *What is the author's recommendation from chapter 9:7-9?*
- c) *Give a brief outline of the book.*

Marking for Chapter 10: (Please read chapter 10 before class)

- i. *Mark "under the sun" "on the land" "on earth" phrases*
- iii. *Mark "the advantage" "no profit"*

10:1-20 – Foolishness and wisdom, particularly as it relates to foolish rules and their subjects

1) For the following passages, fill in the blank with the best answer you see in the text:

- a) **10:1-3** – Foolishness leads to _____
- b) **10:4** – Subjects should be _____ to rulers
- c) **10:5-7** – Sometimes authority is distributed _____
- d) **10:8-11** – In seeking to reform, please be very _____
- e) **10:12-15** – A fool's multiplied words often lead to _____
- f) **10:16-19** – It is troubling to live under a _____ government
- g) **10:20** – No matter where you are, be careful of _____ remarks

Foolish rulers are a recurring subject in this book: **2:18-19; 3:16-17; 4:13-16; 5:8-9; 7:7-10; chapter 8; 9:13-18**. Perhaps the author is looking back over his own history.

2) Advice is trickled throughout this chapter. Identify that advice in the following verses:

- a) **V. 1-3** –
- b) **V. 4** –
- c) **V. 8-11** –
- d) **V. 12-15** –
- e) **V. 20** –

Ecclesiastes Chapter 11

Marking for Chapter 11: (Please read chapter 11 before class)

- i. Mark “under the sun” “on the earth” “see the sun” phrases*
- ii. Mark “fleeting life” “futility” “striving after wind”*
- iii. Circle references to God. Mark “you do not know” four times in this chapter.*

11:1-6 – Optimism versus pessimism

- 1) **Circle or underline “you do not know” phrase in first 6 verses.**

- 2) There is so much we don’t know about how life progresses, future events, etc. But things happen, and we accept them, because we cannot predict, change or even fully understand them. So, with these melancholy truths in tow, **there are two ways we can go about life:**
 - a. **V. 4 –**

 - b. **V. 6 –**

- 3) **Think of practical applications of the text and choices in the text as related to:**
 - a. Business -

 - b. The Family -

 - c. Evangelism –

11:7-8 – Enjoy life, for night is coming!

- 4) **Why should man enjoy the life he now has?**

11:9-10 – Rejoice responsibly in youth

- 5) **Finish these sentences (based on the text) in your own words:**
 - a. **Rejoice**, young man _____

 - b. **Yet Know** _____

 - c. **So, Remove** _____

 - d. **Because** _____

- 6) **Think of applications of this section to dating, drinking, drugs, etc.**

Ecclesiastes Chapter 12

Marking for Chapter 12: (Please read chapter 12 before class)

- i. Mark “vanity” phrases.
- ii. Circle at least 4 (maybe 5) references to God in this chapter.
- iii. Make sure you noted all references to “fearing God”: **3:14, 5:7, 7:18, 8:12-13, 12:13**
- v. Make sure you noted all Life Recommendations: **2:24, 3:14, 3:22, 4:18, 8:15, 9:7-9**

12:1-8 – Remember your Creator!

- 1) “Remember” connotes more than “call to mind.” Explain.
- 2) Why should young men and women remember their Creator? (see 11:7-8)
- 3) Use vs. 2-7 to define and describe the “evil days” of the 12:1. Assign values:
 - a. Light, the moon and the stars are darkened -
 - b. Clouds return after the rain -
 - c. Mighty men stoop -
 - d. The grinding ones stand idle because they are few -
 - e. One will arise with the sound of the bird -
 - f. All the daughters of song will sing softly -
 - g. The almond tree blossoms –
 - h. The grasshopper drags himself along -

12:9-10 – The Preacher’s written work

- 4) Why does the Preacher recommend himself (his own literature)?

12:11-12 – Discerning worth-while wisdom

- 5) Why are these words of wisdom (Ecclesiastes) worthy of study?

12:13-14 – The Conclusion

- 6) Why should every person fear and serve God under the sun? (*II Co. 5:10*)