

Ecclesiastes: An Introduction

Author: Solomon

- God gave Israel's king extraordinary wisdom (1 Kings 3), unmatched wealth, and vast building projects, including the Temple.
- Solomon's wives and concubines turned his heart from the Lord (1 Kings 11:3).
- Ecclesiastes is Solomon's reflection on pursuing everything the *world* offers, finding it meaningless, and finally returning to the Lord.

Genre: Wisdom and Poetry

- **Wisdom:** One of the "wisdom books" (with Job, Psalms, Proverbs, and Song of Solomon), teaching through acute observation and honest struggle.
- **Poetry:** Many sections are written in Hebrew poetic form, using parallelism, repetition, and imagery. Poetry uses figurative language that is meant to be felt and pondered.

Key Words & Phrases

- **Vanity/vanity of vanities:** something elusive that disappears easily, often translated as "meaningless" or "futility," and often linked with the phrase "striving after wind."
- **Under the sun / under heaven:** Life as it's experienced in this fallen world.
- **Fear God:** loving what God loves, hating what He hates, and having a reverent, obedient love for God Himself.
- **Wisdom:** Living in light of God's truth.
- **Folly:** Rejecting the Lord and His way of life to live according to worldliness.

The View From "Above the Sun"

- Life "under the sun" (every pursuit, pleasure, and achievement) never adds up to lasting meaning on its own, no matter how much wealth or success we accumulate.
- Life lived in the fear and worship of God becomes a gift as every joy, every burden, every relationship, and every task has purpose in His hands. (Ecclesiastes 12:13–14)

Is It Really Meaningless?

An Endless Cycle

1:1–11

- Solomon, son of David, king of Israel, introduces his big question: what does anyone gain from all their labor “under the sun”?
- With a cynic’s eye, Solomon questions the value of hard work, concluding there is no lasting profit in it.
- With a scientist’s eye, he observes the cyclical patterns of the natural world: sun, wind, and water, always moving but never arriving anywhere new.
- With a weary eye, he admits that words run out, eyes are never satisfied, and nothing under the sun is genuinely new.
- With an understanding eye, he acknowledges that even those who do great things are quickly forgotten, and so will we.

An Endless Search

1:12–18

- Solomon turns from observing creation to testing wisdom itself, devoting himself to searching out “all that is done under heaven.”
- With an observant eye, he records his pursuit of wisdom and what he found from his own experiences and learning.
- With a resolute eye, he acknowledges that a deeper understanding of the world *apart from God* only leads to deeper grief.

Ecclesiastes challenges us to:

_____ *what is meaningless and what is meaningful.*

_____ *what tempts us to seek meaning apart from God.*

_____ *a God-centered view of life.*

James 4:13–14

Now listen, you who say, “Today or tomorrow we will go to this or that city, spend a year there, carry on business and make money.” Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes. (NIV)

1 John 2:15–17

Do not love the world or the things in the world. If anyone loves the world, the love of the Father is not in him. For all that is in the world—the desires of the flesh and the desires of the eyes and pride of life—is not from the Father but is from the world. And the world is passing away along with its desires, but whoever does the will of God abides forever.

Mark 8:36

For what does it profit a man to gain the whole world and forfeit his soul?

Psalms 16:11

You make known to me the path of life; in your presence there is fullness of joy; at your right hand are pleasures forevermore.