

ECCLESIASTES

INTRODUCTION

1. AUTHOR – Claims to be (1:1) the son of David, king in Jerusalem, and wise (1:16). In spite of some problems, (see 1:12,16) the most likely candidate is Solomon.
2. DATE WRITTEN – probably late in Solomon's life, after the backsliding of 1 Kings 11. Solomon appears to have repented and finished his days in the wisdom of God (1 Kings 11:41).
3. PURPOSE – Because of his international reputation, Solomon may have written the book as an appeal to the other nations. See Deuteronomy 4:6-8.
4. THEME – to convince readers that unless one recognized God as judge of all and Giver of life, life is "meaningless" and the future is to be feared. The goal of life then is to accept what God has given and enjoy it.

OUTLINE

Ecclesiastes divides into four sections. The first three each end with the fact that to realize the benefit of one's own labor is a gift from God.

1. Life's experiences are meaningless unless seen as a gift from God. CH 1-2
 - A. Pleasures of life are meaningless. Ch1:1-2:11
 - B. Human wisdom and work are meaningless too. Ch2:12-23
 - C. The answer. Ch2:24-26
2. Only the plan of God makes life worthwhile. CH 3-5
 - A. God's plan makes everything fit in its own time. Ch3:1-15
 - B. Problems with this thesis are explained. Ch3:16-4:16
 - C. Cautions in our relation to God and the conclusion. Ch5:1-17
3. An explanation of apparent contradictions to God. CH 6-8
 - A. Outward appearances are not the most important. Ch6:1-7:15
 - B. Be careful in judging a man's character. Ch7:16-29
 - C. A righteous government will remove many inequalities. Ch8:1-15
4. An encouragement to those applying God's plan to their life. CH 9-12
 - A. Lacking some answers doesn't change the main point. Ch9:1-9
 - B. Work hard even if not all the answers are seen. Ch9:10-11:6
 - C. Remember, God is the Creator and Judge. So serve Him. Ch11:7-12:8
 - D. Conclusion. "Fear God and keep his commandments." Ch12:9-14

IMPORTANCE OF ECCLESIASTES

1. The book clearly explains the emptiness of trying to find fulfillment in life apart from the plan of God. Some of the areas of dissatisfaction are pleasure, money, wisdom, work, and oppression of others. This is a common theme in Christian apologetics and is a God-arranged opening for witnessing. God created us with this emptiness in us and it will only be filled by him. Any attempt to fill it with something else will fail.
2. Accumulation of anything in this life is useless because of death, and the uncertainty of those to whom our riches or wisdom are passed on.
3. Another prominent theme is the joy and satisfaction life in God can bring. See 3:13, 2:24, 5:18-20, 8:15, and 9:7-10. Accept all God gives you in life with joy.
4. The accountability of man to God's judgment should affect all we do.
5. The passages on the uncertainty of death must be taken in the context of the appearance to a worldly man who does not see death from God's perspective. See 3:18-21; 9:1-6; and 12:7.
6. Recommended book, "Ecclesiastes, Total Life", by Walter Kaiser.

ECCLESIASTES

1 – It seems the author sets out to use all his resources to find out the purposes of God. At first glance, there seem to be no purposes. Everything seems to be the same and continue to always be the same. V2 “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity!” The author systematically examines various approaches to life to see if they will yield different conclusions. The first attempt is wisdom. V17 “Then I applied my heart to know wisdom, and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind.” V18 “For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.” As great as wisdom is, it does not seem that the author believes it is the answer to life.

2 – Is the meaning of life to do good, or laughter or pleasure? Those turned out to be all chasing after the wind. Is it to build “great projects”? Everything he tried, he did to the ultimate extent. He tried wisdom as well as madness and folly but found that while wisdom is better than folly, the same fate awaits both. It sounds like this is death. Even hard work is useless because you have to leave everything to the one who comes after and they may waste it all. V21 “...because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil.” It appears to the writer that the purpose from God is to do all our work and find satisfaction more in the work than in the result. As long as the satisfaction is found in God in the work, everything satisfies. V24-25 “There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him, who can eat or who can have enjoyment?” The key to the book of Ecclesiastes is that pleasures find fulfillment only in God. In God all has meaning but apart from him, nothing does.

3 – V14 says, “God has done it so that people fear before him.” It appears that the purpose, as the author uncovers it, is for humans to do all to learn to revere or fear God. He accomplishes that by only granting satisfaction in life to those who seek to do whatever they do with God in mind. Satisfaction in life comes only as a gift from God. Death reveals that there is nothing else because to outward appearance, both humans and animals end with the same fate, death. V10-11 may be key to the entire book. “I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end.”

4 – Especially frustrating in life are those who are oppressed, or whose achievement springs from envy of neighbor, or someone who is alone. There seems to be no purpose for them. This reinforces that only God can give satisfaction and purpose in life. So it is with one who rules. Who knows what his successor will do to ruin it all!

5 – There is wise counsel regarding our relation with God in V2. “God is in heaven and you are on earth. Therefore let your words be few.” The theme continues that nothing in life is worth it or satisfying unless it comes as a gift from God. V19-20 “Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil – this is the gift of God. For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart.” That is especially true of money. V10 “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this too is vanity.”

6 – That thought is continued in V1-2 here. “There is an evil that I have seen under the sun, and it lies heavy on mankind: a man to whom God gives wealth, possession and honor, so that he lacks nothing of all that he desires, yet God does not give him the power to enjoy them, but a stranger enjoys them. This is vanity; it is a grievous evil.” No matter how much of anything a person has, unless he enjoys them, all the possessions are useless. V12 “For who knows what is good for man while he lives the few days of his vain life, which he passes like a shadow? For who can tell men what will be after him under the sun?”

7 – General pessimism about life dominates this chapter. The only hope will be found in God. V14 “In the day of prosperity be joyful, and in the day of adversity consider: God has made the one as well as the other, so that man may not find out anything that will be after him.” He is especially skeptical about women. V26 “I find something more bitter than death: the woman whose heart is snares and nets and whose hands are fetters. He who pleases God escapes her, but the sinner is taken by her.” V12 “For the protection of wisdom is like the protection of money, and the advantage of knowledge is that wisdom preserves the life of him who has it.” In the light of Romans, note V20 “Surely there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins.”

8 – It seems the purpose of life is found in V15-17. “And I commend joy, for man has no good thing under the sun but to eat and drink and be joyful, for this will go with him in his toil through the days of his life that God has given

him under the sun. When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, how neither day nor night do one's eyes sleep, then I saw all the work of God, that man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. However much man may toil in seeking, he will not find it out. Even though a wise man claims to know, he cannot find it out." Thankfully, God knows and understands and if we trust him and walk with him, when we come to the end of our life we will find that we fulfilled our purpose.

9 – Verses 7-10 outline the purposes of God with this instruction. "Go, eat your bread in joy, and drink your wine with a merry heart, for God has already approved what you do...Enjoy life with the wife who you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun." It is not a negative. It is just that there is no other alternative to God's way. See also verses 17-18. "The words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools. Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good."

10 – This entire chapter sounds more like a continuation of the proverbs. There seems to be an equation of wisdom and wealth or position and admiration of the rich for this reason. There is also indication of perspective of a king in V17. "Happy are you, O land, when our king is the son of nobility, and your princes feast at the proper time, for strength and not for drunkenness!" Also it is very important what we think in private. It will come out in public. We need to be righteous when we are alone and not only when we are in front of others. V20 "Even in your thought, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature will tell the matter."

11 – The ESV translates V5 differently based on the fact that the Hebrew word for spirit and for wind is the same. V5 "As you do not know the way the spirit comes to the bones in the womb of a woman with child, so you do not know the work of God who makes everything." V9 "Rejoice, O young man, in your youth, and let your heart cheer you in the days of your youth. Walk in the ways of your heart and the sight of your eyes. But know that for all these things God will bring you into judgment."

12 – V13-14 "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil." The author claims integrity in his thinking and writing. V9-10 "Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find words of delight and uprightly he wrote words of truth."