



Ecclesiastes

Life Under the Sun

Session 20

LEARNING OBJECTIVES

- Describe the purpose and value of Ecclesiastes.
- Define the meaning of life according to Ecclesiastes.

INTRODUCTION

Tonight, we explore the topic of meaning in Ecclesiastes. Like the other wisdom books, Ecclesiastes offers wise counsel, but unlike them, it is uniquely puzzling. Its lack of linear logical reasoning makes it difficult to analyze. Additionally, its tone is different than the other wisdom books—it can feel hopeless and pessimistic. Typically, believers walk away from this book feeling depressed. This is understandable but unfortunate. Ecclesiastes doesn't end its pursuit of meaning in a place of depression, but in a place of joy. This book *is* joyful, though not chipper, and its joy is won through struggle, it isn't freely given. Ecclesiastes holds riches of wisdom pertaining to meaning and purpose in life. Outline:

- Introduction (1:1-11)
 - Meet Qohelet (1:1)
 - Qohelet's Theme (1:2)
 - The Great Question (1:3)
 - The Enigma of Life (1:4-11)
- Qohelet's Search for Meaning (1:12-12:7)
 - His Journey (1:12-18)
 - Testing Pleasure (2:1-11)
 - The Problem of Death and Legacy (2:12-23)
 - Enjoy Your Life! (2:24-26)
 - The Mystery of Time (3:1-15)
 - The Problem of Injustice (3:16-22)
 - The Problem of Oppression (4:1-3)
 - The Problem of Envy (4:4-6)
 - The Problem of Isolation (4:7-12)
 - The Problem of Good Government (4:13-16)
- Worship (5:1-7)
- The Problem of Profit (5:8-17)
- Enjoy Your Life! (5:18-20)
- Money Continued (6:1-11)
- Moderation in Wisdom and Folly and Reflection (7:1-29)
- Follow the King (8:1-9)
- The Problem of Delayed Justice (8:10-17)
- The Inescapability of Death (9:1-6)
- Enjoy Your Life! (9:7-10)
- Wisdom Better than Might or Folly (9:11-10:20)
- The Uncertainties of God's Providence (11:1-6)
- Remember & Rejoice (11:7-12:7)
- Conclusion (12:8-14)
 - Restatement of Theme (12:8)
 - Epilogue (12:9-12)
 - Final Conclusion (12:13-14)

QOHELET

Right off the bat, we're introduced to the two voices of Ecclesiastes. The first is this "Preacher," in Hebrew *Qohelet*. *Qohelet* means "one who gathers people" or "teacher." He is presented as the son of David, the king in Jerusalem, and the most wise king (1:12-13). While some hold to Solomonic authorship, many believe that Qohelet is a fictional persona of Solomon since the book was likely written in the postexilic period (4th cent. BC). Although Qohelet is the main character in Ecclesiastes, he is separate from the author, who remains anonymous. The author who stands behind the book as a whole introduces us to Qohelet in 1:1 and then evaluates his words at the end (12:9-14).

QOHELET'S MISSION AND METHOD

The author summarizes the Teacher's basic message in 1:2 and again at the end (12:8). In Hebrew, this statement is, "*Hevel, hevel, everything is hevel.*" **What does *hevel* mean?**

What is Qohelet's mission in this book? What about his method? Is his method right?

On one level, Ecclesiastes is about the search for meaning, but on a deeper level, it's about *how* you search for meaning. It's not just about the mission, it's about the method.

UNDER THE SUN

As Qohelet sets out on his journey, he repeatedly employs the phrase *under the sun*. He uses this phrase 29 times to refer to everything that happens in the world and he affirms that life under

the sun is utterly *hevel*. He explores various areas of life to see if they provide life's answer, from pleasure to wisdom to money to work. All of it, he says, is *hevel*. None of it provides meaning.

FACE THE FACTS

In the midst of all this *hevel*, Qohelet acknowledges three inescapable realities of life:

(1)

(2)

(3)

THE END OF THE MATTER

What is Qohelet's conclusion?

The tool that Psalms gives us for life is _____.

How can we apply the wisdom of Ecclesiastes?

(1)

(2)

(3)

CONCLUSION

Consider these thoughts this week:

- How does your definition of a “meaningful life” compare to that of Ecclesiastes?
- Are there things in your life over which you need to relinquish control to God?

HOMEWORK

- Read pp.470-482 in *Old Testament Theology* by Paul House
- Watch The Bible Project’s video on [Overview of Ecclesiastes and Ecclesiastes Wisdom Collection](#)
- Engage with Ecclesiastes

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