

Ecclesiastes I

Introduction

I. IMPORTANCE OF THE BOOK

A. Reasons for and against studying the book

i. Arguments against studying it.

1. It frustrates many Christians with its temporal, earthly view of life.
2. It seems to contradict the rest of scripture on a number of points.
3. It makes up less than 1% of the biblical text (12 chapters and 222 verses)

ii. Reasons for studying it.

1. Ecclesiastes is one of the 66 books that the Lord chose to place in His word (the Bible).
2. The Lord certainly had a reason to place it there.

B. What does the book have that you need?

i. It is unique

1. No other book in the Bible approaches the world like Ecclesiastes.
2. It teaches the reader to eat, drink, and to be merry (Ecclesiastes 8:15). However, Luke 12:19-20 teaches that these are the actions of a fool.
3. The book also warns against being overly righteous or overly wise (Ecclesiastes 7:16).
4. One should study this passage to understand the special message contained in it.

ii. It is powerful

1. The book will at times shock you.
2. You may initially want to change the reading.
3. The psalmist said that men should realize that they are “like the beasts that perish” (Psalm 49:20). But Ecclesiastes tells men that they should “see that they themselves are beasts” (Ecclesiastes 3:18).

iii. It is current

1. Ecclesiastes speaks to the philosophy and thought of the modern world.
2. It brings the assumptions of an atheist to their final conclusion.

3. You will recognize much of what we read in Ecclesiastes. Some of it you will recognize from your interaction in the world or current news. But in this book, you will also see where these beliefs lead.
 - iv. It is life changing
 1. Ecclesiastes tears God, heaven, and eternity from all that we can see and have in this world.
 2. The book reveals the utter uselessness of the temporal and the earthly without God and the eternal.
 3. Paul said that his glorification of the cross tended to crucify the world to him and him to the world (Galatians 6:14). Ecclesiastes guides you through this crucifixion process.
- II. TITLE OF THE BOOK
- A. "Ecclesiastes or, The Preacher"
 - i. The word Ecclesiastes means an assembly or a congregation and a preacher is the one who preaches to a congregation.
 - ii. The picture is of one as the Preacher. He has a sermon for the congregation (the people). They have gathered to hear the message that he has prepared for them.
 - iii. He gives them the "words of the wise" that are fastened by the "masters of assemblies" (Ecclesiastes 12:11), "Proverbs" that he had "sought out," and had "set in order" (Ecclesiastes 12:9).
 - B. Ecclesiastes is one of a few books with an alternate title in your King James Bible
 - i. Old Testament
 1. 1st Samuel – "The First Book of Samuel otherwise called, the First Book of the Kings"
 2. 2nd Samuel – "The Second Book of Samuel otherwise called, the Second Book of the Kings"
 3. 1st Kings – "The First Book of the Kings commonly called, the Third Book of the Kings"
 4. 2nd Kings – "The Second Book of the Kings commonly called, the Fourth Book of the Kings"
 - ii. New Testament – N/A
- III. ITS EARTHLY AUTHOR – (Ecclesiastes 1:1)
- A. His Name
 - i. Although the author is never named, he is clearly identified
 1. He is king over Israel (Ecclesiastes 1:12)
 2. He reigns in Jerusalem (Ecclesiastes 1:1)
 3. He is the son of David (Ecclesiastes 1:1)

4. He testifies that he had “gotten more wisdom than all they that have been before me in Jerusalem” (Ecclesiastes 1:16). Since Solomon, who reigned in Jerusalem as the son of David, is identified as “wiser than all men” (1 Kings 4:30-31), this passage must refer to him. God gave Solomon “a wise and an understanding heart;” so that there was no one else like him, before or after him. (1 Kings 3:11-12).
 5. He also acquired more wealth than all who were before him in Jerusalem (Ecclesiastes 2:8-9). This also must be Solomon because the Bible tells us that he “exceeded all the kings of the earth for riches and for wisdom.” (1 Kings 10:23).
- ii. Questioning of the validity of the Author
 1. Despite the clear teaching on identifying Solomon as the author of the book, modern Bible scholars many times reject that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes.
 2. These Bible-denying critics can be safely ignored by those of us who receive the scriptures, as it is in truth, the word of God (1 Thess. 2:13)
- B. His Writings
- i. Solomon was used of God to write three books.
 1. Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and the Song of Solomon
 2. Solomon wrote 49 chapters of the Bible: 12 chapters of Ecclesiastes, 8 chapters of the Song of Solomon, and the first 29 chapters of Proverbs (the last two chapters being attributed to different authors). The number 49 is the square root of seven (7x7), which points to a complete and perfect work.
 - ii. The Song of Solomon: Attributed to Solomon’s youth, when he had love on his mind (Song of Solomon 1:1)
 - iii. The Proverbs: Attributed to Solomon’s middle age, when he had a son who needed a training manual for life. (Proverbs 1:1, 8)
 - iv. Ecclesiastes or, the Preacher: Attributed to Solomon’s latter years, when he had done and seen it all, and found all to be vanity “under the sun.” Solomon had death on his mind at this point (Ecclesiastes 12:1-7).
- C. His Title – “The Preacher”
- i. First, Ecclesiastes is the only Old Testament book that uses this title.
 - ii. Second, the word *preacher* occurs exactly seven times in the book: three times at the beginning of the book in chapter one (1:1, 2, 12), once

approximately in the middle of the book (7:27), and three times in the last chapter of the book (12:8, 9, 10).

- iii. Third, the title of preacher is interesting because we do not think of Solomon as a preacher, but as a king, as a wealthy man, and as the wisest man that lived. Why is the title of “Preacher” used?
 1. In 1 Kings 8, Solomon stood before the assembly of the congregation, preached a message (1 Kings 8:12-21), prayed unto God (1 Kings 8:22-54), and blessed a congregation (1 Kings 8:55-66). Although he is a king, he took on the work of a preacher in order to preach a message to the congregation of Israel.
 2. In Ecclesiastes, Solomon is now in his old age and he has another sermon he needs to preach to the congregation of Israel. A preacher is one who proclaims the truth and tells it like it is. He preaches from his own practical experience. Solomon declares that the only thing that counts is God. Solomon’s sermon says, I have been through it all, I have tried everything, and I am speaking from the authority of experience. Solomon has both wealth and wisdom, however, he wants the people to know what really counts in the end. They must fear God and keep His commandments (Ecclesiastes 12:13). All else is vain.

IV. THEME OF THE BOOK - (Ecclesiastes 1:2)

A. Key Theme

- i. The second verse of the book quickly and clearly states the theme of the book: “all is vanity.”
 1. This exact phrase occurs 5 times in Ecclesiastes (Ecclesiastes 1:2, 14; 2:17; 3:19; 12:8).
 2. The word *vanity* occurs 33 times in the book. *Vanity* is simply that which is vain. It means *emptiness, worthlessness; that which has no value, no purpose, and no substance.*
- ii. The theme continues throughout the book (Ecclesiastes 2:22-23; 6:11-12; 12:8 – The book ends as it began. All is vanity.
- iii. This vanity is mentioned elsewhere in scripture (Psalm 39:5-6; 62:9).
- iv. The book of Ecclesiastes will seem rough and at times depressing.
 1. But God has a wonderful purpose for this book. He wants the reader to realize something.
 2. Ecclesiastes is a book we need to experience. And you have to experience what is learned here. It cannot be simply head knowledge. God is going to prove over and over again that

everything in this world is vain apart from Him. He wants you to lose all hope in this world so that you can fully look to Him.

B. Key Phrasing – Understanding the Book – (Ecclesiastes 1:3)

i. First Key – “Under the sun”

1. This phrase (which occurs 29 times in Ecclesiastes, yet in no other book of the Bible) shows you that the theme does not refer to heavenly or eternal things.
2. It is not saying that God is vain, or that heaven is vain, or that godly things are vain. It is talking about everything under the sun being vain.

ii. Second Key – “Profit” – Vanity refers to permanent and not temporal value.

1. Profit refers to the gain or loss at the end of time (Mark 8:36).
2. The question is, When life and time are over, what profit has been gained? (Ecclesiastes 3:9; 5:16)
3. Men have convinced themselves that they do not need God. They say they can have purpose and meaning without Him. They hold on to a sense of right and wrong, they practice ethics. But they fail to see the utter uselessness of it all without God. What good is it to live a good life, if in the end there is nothing?
4. Note: There are things on earth that have a temporal value. Everything is not all evil. But without God and examined in the light of eternity, all this is still worthless. It is all vanity of vanities. No matter how wise or moral or pleasant an individual’s life is, it is useless without God.

V. STRUCTURE OF THE BOOK

A. Sharp Division Between Earth and Heaven

i. The book has 222 verses. Notice the number two-two-two.

1. Compare this to Revelation 13:18.
2. 222 verses – three two’s. Something is being emphasized here. *Two* is the number of division. *One* is the number of unity: when you take that one and make it into a two, you have divided it.
3. On the second day of creation, God put a firmament in the midst of the waters and divided the waters from the waters (Gen. 1:6-8).
 - a. God’s heaven and earth were completely separated on the second day.

- b. The second day of creation is the only day on which God refused to say that it is good.
 - 4. There is no other book in the Bible that divides heavenly, spiritual things of God from the earthly, devilish things of man. Ecclesiastes is unique in this respect. Understanding this approach is critical to understanding the book.
 - ii. There are 12 chapters
 - 1. The number 12 is usually connected Israel, but Israel is only mentioned once in the entire book (Ecclesiastes 1:12).
 - 2. We will find a very real division between Chapters 6 and 7.
 - 3. Ecclesiastes divides between heaven and earth and often takes the viewpoint of man.
- VI. STATISTICS AND FINAL THOUGHTS
 - A. Statistics
 - i. One way to understand a change in emphasis in a book of the Bible is to determine key words or phrases and then see how they are used throughout the book.
 - 1. For instance, the phrase “*under the sun*” occurs 29 times in Ecclesiastes and then the phrase “*under heaven*”- 1 time; “*under the heaven*” – 2 times; for a total of 3 times. That means 32 times in the book, the passage is not referring to anything above the sun or anything toward heaven.
 - a. First 6 chapters these phrases occur 21 times.
 - b. The last 6 chapters these phrases occur 11 times.
 - 2. The word “*vanity*” occurs 33 times in the entire book.
 - a. 22 times in the first 6 chapters.
 - b. 11 times in the 6 chapters.
 - 3. A few other words to mention: *wise and wisdom*. You can find these two words 53 times in the entire book.
 - a. First 6 chapters these words occur 19 times.
 - b. The last 6 chapters these words occur 34 times.
 - B. Final Thoughts
 - i. Why would God give us a book that often leaves Him out?
 - 1. Isn't that the way man lives his life anyway?
 - 2. So God uses Solomon to say: I'll show you what it is like when you leave Me out of the equation.

- ii. The book is filled with under-the-sun theology and philosophy.
 - 1. Every once in a while God allows a glimpse of heavenly things and you see things from God's point of view.
 - 2. Solomon will speak of God's judgment, God's work, God's hand, or God's purpose.
 - 3. But he will pull you right back down and you will be under the sun again.
 - 4. The emphasis is man divided from anything that has to do with God or heaven. He is under the sun and under heaven.