

I OVERVIEW OF THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

- PURPOSE:** To spare future generations the bitterness of learning through its own experiences that life is meaningless apart from God.
- AUTHOR:** Although no passages mention him by name, the general consensus of Bible scholars believes that Solomon was the author.
- TIMELINE:** Late in Solomon's life around 935 BC after Solomon made many unwise choices.
- SETTING:** Solomon looks back on his life, much of which was lived apart from God.
- BLUEPRINT:**
- A. Solomon's personal experiences (1:1-2:26)
 - B. Solomon's general observations (3:1-5:20)
 - C. Solomon's practical counsel (6:1-8:15)**
 - D. Solomon's final conclusion (9:1-12:14)

MEGATHEMES

THEME	EXPLANATION	IMPORTANCE
Searching	Solomon searched for satisfaction almost as if it was a scientific experiment. He discovered that life without God was a long and fruitless search for enjoyment, meaning and fulfillment. True happiness is not in our power to accumulate or attain because we always desire more than we can have. There are also circumstances beyond our control which can snatch away our possessions or attainments.	People are still searching. Yet the more they try to get, the more they realize how little they really have. No pleasure or happiness is possible without God. Above everything we should strive to know and love God.
Emptiness	Solomon shows how empty it is to pursue this life's pleasures rather than a relationship with an eternal God. The search for pleasure, wealth, and success is ultimately disappointing. Nothing in his world can satisfy our longing, restless hearts.	The cure for emptiness is to center on God. Fear God throughout your life and fill your life with serving God and others rather than selfish pleasures.

THEME	EXPLANATION	IMPORTANCE
Work	Solomon tried to shake people's confidence in their own efforts, abilities, and wisdom, and direct them to faith in God as the only sound basis for living. Without God there is no lasting reward or benefit in hard work.	Work done with the wrong attitude leaves us empty and work accepted as an assignment from God can be seen as a gift. Examine what you expect from your efforts. God gives you abilities and opportunities to work so you can use your time well.
Death	The certainty of death makes all merely human achievements futile. God has a plan for human destiny that goes beyond life and death. The reality of aging and dying reminds us of the end to come when God will judge each person's life.	Because life is short, we need wisdom which is greater than the world can offer. We need the words of God. If we listen to Him, His wisdom spares us the bitterness of futile human experience.
Wisdom	Human wisdom doesn't contain all the answers, as knowledge and education have their limits. To understand life, we need the wisdom that can be found in God's Word to us, the Bible (Basic Instruction Before Leaving Earth).	When we realize that God will evaluate what we do, we should learn to live wisely, remembering that He is present every day, and obeying His guidelines for living. We can only have God's wisdom when we find God.

II BACKGROUND

Ecclesiastes was written by King Solomon who ruled Israel at its political zenith. Under his rule, Israel had its largest borders, its greatest political stability, and its most robust economy. Under his rule, there was peace and prosperity with all surrounding nations and Israel had its largest borders. He was also without peer in the region and its people paid heavy tribute to him (**II Chronicles 9:22; II Chronicles 10:14-29**). Unfortunately, despite the divine gift of wisdom which he received when he was 20 years old, Solomon eventually exhibited foolish behavior, as his extravagant lifestyle did not conform to the terms of God's covenant. He also made foolish decisions as king, conscripting labor for his building projects in a manner similar to the military draft. This led to internal strife that resulted in the loss of unity as a nation as the 10 nations to the north seceded from Israel. Israel was never the same after Solomon made his mistakes.

However, Solomon learned from his errors and advocated that other people should follow the path of godly wisdom. At the end of his life, Solomon, after making many mistakes, was inspired to write the book of **Ecclesiastes**. In **Ecclesiastes 1-3**, Solomon pointed out the futility of seeking fulfillment in life through human wisdom or through "the good life". In **Ecclesiastes 4-6**, Solomon moved on to discussing the wise and unwise use of wealth, of which he had plenty. Now, in **Ecclesiastes 7-8**, he focuses on life's wisdom, life's extremes and life's inequities, to teach future generations, including ourselves, how God's wisdom keeps us on course as the best guide for living in an imperfect world. It is one of 66 books that God

provided in His Basic Instruction Before Leaving Earth.

III SCRIPTURE

WHEN EXPOSED TO WISDOM (7:1-14)

Solomon provides short but succinct proverbs that are filled with wisdom about various important matters of living.

(1-2): Benefit of a good name and of death above life: Solomon notes that having the reputation for piety and honesty is more desirable than having all the wealth and pleasure in this world. He concluded that apart from the Lord, life is just emptiness and meaninglessness. Because he was seeking life apart from a walk with God, he too experienced the emptiness of life and became an old man that was bitter with life. The bitterness was so deep that he concluded that the day of death was more of a celebration than the day of life.

Dying has been the ultimate end to every life with the exceptions of Enoch (Genesis 5:21-24; Hebrews 11:5) and Elijah (II Kings 2:11); both of whom were translated. Thus we are wise to soberly reflect on the reality of death, which begins when we are about two years old with the diminishing productivity and work of our pineal gland.

(3-4): Benefit of sorrow above vain laughter: Sorrow has a positive effect on us as it makes us introspective so we can seek to refine our life. When we are laughing, the encephaloendorphins distract our brains from looking for life's solutions. The wise man thinks of death and thus, his eternity, which makes him do something about it (i.e., accept the free love gift of Jesus Christ to satisfy God's wrath), while the fool focuses on avoiding major issues in life by seeking things that provide the distractions of temporal pleasure and laughter. Adversity reminds us that life is short, it teaches us to live wisely, and it refines our character.

Christianity and Judaism see value in suffering and sorrow as a refining fire to burn the dross out of us, thus an opportunity to learn from God. Eastern religions seek to escape it, while the Greeks (e.g., Epicureanism) and Romans despise it. We learn more about God during difficult times than we do during happy times (James 1:2-4; Romans 5:3-5).

(5-6): Truth or consequences – flattery gets you nowhere: We learn in two distinct ways: (1) receipt of new information; and, (2) correction of bad information in our data base. It is better to have the issues in our life brought to the surface by the rebuke of a wise man where we can then address them, than to have them gratified by the flattery of fools. It is far better to face honest criticism than to wallow in the compliment of fools.

Compliments that are based on flattery are useless to us, yet some will accept them as it makes them feel good. However, false compliments do not change reality. Pleasant compliments are often valued above helpful information (Proverbs 27:6).

(7): Bribery: Money talks in the secular world and bribes are given to witnesses, judges, and policemen to usurp our legal system and its inherent fairness. Using monetary pressure to affect an outcome reveals the weakness of a position. Those that take a bribe are violating the "bearing false witness" commandment and violate the search for the truth. Some say that everyone has his price, but the wise man cannot be bought by any price.

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(8-10): Oppression, anger, self-discipline, and discontent: We should always complete the tasks that we embark on. To finish what we start takes hard work, wise guidance and self-discipline. Anyone with vision can start a big project, but **vision without wisdom** often results in unfinished projects and unmet goals.

Trials and difficulties are often better than we first thought, as we tend to overreact to emerging problems. Moreover, it is better to be patient (**Romans 5:3-5; Romans 8:28**) than to be proud and hasty. Paul indicated that he would gladly accept the suffering of this life in order to grasp the glory of Heaven (**Romans 8:18**).

We should also avoid being quick-tempered, and as Thomas Jefferson did, count to 10 when we are angry and count to 100 when we are very angry.

It is foolish to complain about the difficulties of our times, when we have more reason to cry out for the impurities of our own hearts. Even in these times we still enjoy many mercies.

It is also foolishness to reminisce on the “good old days” and live in the past. In reality, there weren’t any good old days, as we remember only the good things about the past, forgetting that those days also had problems.

(11-12): Advantages of wisdom over money: Money is a good resource, but it doesn’t come with instructions on how to spend it in the best way. Both money and wisdom have the power to protect us from life’s calamities, but wisdom affords us the greater protection. Wisdom enlightens us how to be good stewards of the money that God has provided us to manage for Him.

During hard times, wealth is spent to provide for one’s needs and soon vanishes. In contrast, wisdom increases as it is used.

(13): Do not fight God’s power: We’re powerless and helpless against the work of God (see **Job 38-42**). Therefore, don’t fight his natural (i.e., gravity, entropy, conservation of energy, mass, and momentum) and supernatural (i.e., use, reciprocity) laws that are designed to make you happy if you follow His precepts and miserable if you stray from these precepts.

(14): The certainty of nothing in this life: God allows both adversity and prosperity to come into our lives and blends them in such a way that we cannot predict the future or count on human wisdom and power. In prosperous times, we take the credit, while in times of despair, we blame God. Don’t lose track that God is in control of events, and we can exercise our free wills to either work with Him, or against Him. We can never be a fence sitter.

WHEN TRAPPED BY EXTREMES (7:15-29)

(15-17): Warning against extremism: Solomon was warning against some that have the view of being excessively wise or righteous in their own eyes. These people are so rigid and narrow in their views that they lose their sensitivity for the true reason for being good, **which is to honor God**. Balance in life is very important as God created us to be whole people, not extremists whose particular viewpoints become more important than the larger picture.

(18): Tackle every task with your whole heart: Do not let laziness or lack of self-confidence prevent you from performing every task that comes along. God will give you the wisdom and power through your spiritual gifts to do anything that will benefit His Kingdom.

(19-20): No one is perfect, but we have the power to be: Three Scriptures apply here: (1) "There is none righteous, no, not one" (**Romans 3:10**); (2) "All have sinned, and come short of the glory of God" (**Romans 3:23**); and, (3) "But the wisdom of man is foolishness with God" (**I Corinthians 3:19**). There is not a single man who is always good, never sins and bats 1.000. However, Christians have the power in the indwelt Holy Spirit to no longer sin and defeat the flesh (**Romans 6:3-11**). The wise recognition of our own sinfulness will prevent us from becoming arrogant and self-sufficient.

(21-22): The risks associated with eavesdropping and complaining: Solomon warns us not to eavesdrop and attain information that was not for our hearing. It is likely that we may hear things about ourselves which are not very endearing. We should be patient with what people say about us for we have said our share of mean things about other people.

(23-25): You can't will yourself to be wise: Godly wisdom, when sought in the wrong places is very difficult to find. The correct way to find wisdom is to fear God (**Proverbs 1:7; Proverbs 9:10**) and ask for it for and it will be given to you freely (**James 1:5**).

(26): Experiencing the evil of sin: Solomon looks to the consequences of seeking a relationship with a harlot. The careless sinner is no match for her (**Proverbs 5:4**). In these verses, Solomon may have discovered the evil of the great sin of which he had been guilty, which is the loving of almost 1,000 strange women (**I Kings 11:3**) before Viagra reached the market.

(27-29): Few experience sustainable Godly wisdom: Solomon notes that very few (i.e., 0.1%) are said to be wise and not one is a woman. Before you ladies take offense, there must be a different context here, because in **Proverbs 7:4**, he personified wisdom as a beautiful woman. His key point is that there are very few truly wise people that he has encountered, regardless of their gender.

WHEN FACING INEQUITIES (8:1-17)

(1-5): Commendations of wisdom: None of the rich, the powerful, the honorable, or the accomplished is as excellent, useful, or happy, as the wise man. The wise man can interpret the words of God, and teach from his truths and dispensations. Those that are not wise are just weak and dependent on what common man can give them because they have rebelled against the Almighty (**Romans 1:21-23**). The unwise live in a wake of wrong judgments, and bring misery on themselves in this life and in the life to come.

Wisdom is the ability to see life from God's perspective and then know the best course of action to take. Wisdom is only the result of knowing and trusting God.

(6-8): Preparation for sudden evils and death: God in His great wisdom has kept us away from the knowledge of future events, so that we may be always ready for changes and ever-dependent on the omniscient One for daily guidance. Note that Jeanne Dixon's correctness

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rating is 13%; slightly higher than random chance. No one has the power to stop his death. Apart from those to be raptured (**I Thessalonians 4:16**), physical death is a certainty.

No one has any power over the spirit. When the time comes for you to die, you don't have any power over your spirit to retain it, or to cause your spirit to remain. You have no power in death. The only one who really did exercise that kind of power over his spirit was Jesus Christ (John 19:30), while earlier, Jesus said, "No man takes My life from Me, I give My life" (John 10:18). In order to keep with what He said, "No man takes My life," when He was hanging on the cross after He cried, "It is finished" (John 19:30), "Father, into Thy hands I commend My Spirit" (Luke 23:46), He bowed His head "and He dismissed His Spirit." He had power over His Spirit to dismiss it. We don't and never will have that power.

(9-13): Well with the righteous/ill with the wicked: Solomon observed that prosperity hardens men in their wickedness. He sees life moving on and empty as people are soon forgotten after they die.

Because they do not understand God's forbearance, sinners deceive themselves into thinking they will not have to pay for their sins. God's vengeance comes slowly but surely (**Matthew 7:1-2; Hebrews 9:27; Revelation 20:11-15**).

A common mistake that people make in misinterpreting God's nature is His tremendous patience with rebelling man, as God is exceedingly long-suffering. God doesn't strike immediately, but often forestalls judgment for months or even years. This makes it appear that the evil man is getting away with his evil actions and evil deeds. This person now thinks that he has been clever and has hid his sin from God, or worse yet, thinks that God is condoning what he has done. People begin to misinterpret God's grace and God's long suffering as God's approbation for their actions and for their lives. This is a fatal mistake as God does know, does see, and does care. God is not willing that any should perish but that all should come into repentance (**II Peter 3:9**).

A good man's days have substance and he lives a meaningful life, while a wicked man's days are ultimately empty and worthless. It is extremely important that we view eternal things as near, real, and all-important. In the end, the best life is the life of fearing and walking with God.

Solomon shows us that life is ultimately better with God. Even if His presence does not shield us from all trouble, it guarantees us that we will have His power with which to meet all adversity. Both our eternal destiny and our present trials are in His hands.

(14-17): Mysteries of providence: Faith alone can establish the heart in this mixed scene of life, where the righteous often suffer, and the wicked too frequently prosper (**Hebrews 11:6**).

Solomon commended joy, and holy security of mind, arising from confidence in God, because a man has no better thing under the sun. Solomon did not attempt to explain the reasons for all that God does. The Lord will clear up all difficulties in His own time, and until then, we should cheerfully enjoy the comforts, and bear up under the trials of life; while peace of conscience and joy in the Holy Spirit will abide in us through all outward changes, and when our flesh and heart fail us.