

Ecclesiastes

FOR BEGINNERS

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STUDENT WORKBOOK

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Ecclesiastes for Beginners

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Ecclesiastes is the fascinating journal of a wise man's search for satisfaction and meaning without reference to God. In his life journey Solomon ultimately learns the valuable lesson that without God in one's life, that life is meaningless.



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1. Introduction to Ecclesiastes

In this first lesson, Mike reviews some of the basic information about this book. The class will review the life of the author, Solomon, and the circumstances surrounding the writing of this text.

ECCLESIASTES 1:1-18

Setting the stage for the wisest man to have ever lived outside of Jesus, and what his life experiences allowed him to conclude. Always remember that the recorded pursuit of meaning and purpose was outside of God (above the sun).

Introduction – The book of Ecclesiastes is a personal journal

a diary of one man's journey through life. It notes his loss of enthusiasm. It notes his observations searching for joy and satisfaction. It notes his conclusions from a lifetime of experiences.

This is the story of a man who “cut the cord.”

who did it all; who had every experience he could imagine then left us notes. This story is not theoreticla but from a life perspective.

I. Background

A. Author

Solomon: cf. King of Jerusalem 1:1; Wisest person to rule Jerusalem 1:16; Builder of projects 2:4-6; much wealth 2:8; large harem 2:8

B. Date

925 BC

C. Theme

Vanity a striving after the Wind. Purposelessness or meaninglessness. Without God!

The conclusion reached is that life when examined, will be found to be empty and meaningless.

Many have tried to inject meaning.

Materialism (life is about gathering and using resources); Existentialism (life is what you make it); Positivism (life is whatever works best for you); Postmodernism (life is the sum total of our history)

II. Outline

Ecclesiastes is the journal of a man who is consciously examining his own life.

A. Introducing the Journey - 1:1-11

Life is wearisome, with endless repetition.

B. Pursuing the exploring - 1:12-6:9

- 1:12-18 Knowledge and Wisdom ends in grief and increasing pain

- 2:1-11 Pursuing pleasure and acquiring possessions are futile and unprofitable

- 2:12-17 Living wisely or Foolishly are equally empty since both end in death

- 2:18-3:22 Work ethic full of grief and emptiness in the end because you cannot keep what you earn

- 4:1-6:9 accumulating power and wealth unsatisfying and lead to frustration and dissatisfaction.

C. Reflection and Summary - 6:10-12:14

- 6:10-11:6 Lasting purpose and Fulfillment only found in trusting relationship with God

- 11:7-12:8 When young remember and serve God

- 12:9-14 Fear God and keep His Commandments

III. Introduction - 1:1-16

History Solomon lived in a time of peace where state revenue was not wasted on war but on luxury and experimentation. it allowed him the pursuits of this book.

Vs. 1-3 - Solomon states the basic premise of the book.

Life lived on a purely human level will be in the end worthless.

Vs. 4-11 – He presents various examples to support this premise.

1. The passing of the *Generations* – vs. 4

People are born then they die, nothing changes.

2. The cycles of *Nature* – vs. 5-8a

The seasons continue to change in their order, nothing changes, man cannot change that.

3. The curiosity of *Man* – vs. 8b

The seeking of answers only leads to more questions.

4. The absence of *Something New* – vs. 9-11

There is nothing new under the Sun.

Solomon's conclusions are based on the idea that for every universal, innate need of man there is an available and corresponding satisfaction. (i.e., Hunger – food; Sex – sex partner)

If a need doesn't appear to have an earthly satisfaction then it's satisfaction is beyond the earth.

In verses 12-18a, he explains how he has reached the conclusions that he's just stated.

Vs. 12-13a Solomon's wisdom was beyond common sense. It was ability to study; memorize; discern; and apply.

vs. 13b His conclusion is that it led to an unhappy business.

Vs. 14-18 He describes what this exercise has taught him

A. All lifestyles and their settings are meaningless.

B. Nothing can be changed So many things wrong with the world,
it cannot be numbered.

C. Even the pursuit of knowledge Is a chasing after the wind.

D. The constant desire to increase knowledge brings grief and pain.

Summary

Ecclesiastes is a valuable book because it is not theoretical but based on a life
experience.

2. The Pursuit of Pleasure

Solomon begins his search for happiness and contentment with the exploration of sensory pleasures and reports on his findings.

ECCLESIASTES 2:1-11

We should learn from Solomon's journey and put earthly sensory pleasures in their proper priority and place.

Introduction

In his journal, Solomon details his life experience as he searches for happiness and satisfaction apart from God.

If life is not examined, one can go through life oblivious to truths about God.

He says that the examined life will be found meaningless if lived without faith and obedience to God.

cf. 2 Cor. 13:5 Examine yourselves, to see whether you are in the faith. Test yourselves...

In chapters 2 to 6 he describes 4 key pursuits that he examined:

- A. The pursuit of pleasure
- B. The pursuit of wisdom and folly
- C. The pursuit of meaningful work
- D. The pursuit of power and wealth

I. The Pursuit of Pleasure - 2:1-11

Solomon begins where most of us would begin - the examination of sensory pleasure.

Vs. 1a "come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself"

Vs. 1b We get the conclusion before the experience. Solomon says behold this also was vanity.

Vs. 2-10 He goes on to describe several areas where he gave full vent to his desires:

1. Laughter – vs. 2 Solomon calls laughter madness (temporary insanity); and calls pleasure useless
2. Consumption of wine – vs. 3 He attempts using wine to find what was good for man to do, he tried to lay hold of folly, all by using his wisdom
3. Building projects – vs. 4-6 The satisfaction of great building projects did not sustain Solomon.
4. Sensuality – vs. 7-8 cf. 1 Kg. 11:3 Solomon had a great number of the pleasures of the sons of men and they did not sustain him.
5. The good life – vs. 9-10 whatever his eyes desired, he did. Solomon became great and surpassed all who were before him. His wisdom helped achieved his standard of living it never left him. I'd like to note that wisdom alone is no guarantee of salvation by itself. If wisdom stays worldly, so does it's rewards.

Vs. 11 – In this verse, he renders a verdict on what experiencing all of these great pleasures has taught him.

After considering all that he had done, he concluded all was vanity a striving after the wind, nothing to be gained under the sun.

II. Summary

Seeking after sensual pleasure is the common man's treadmill.

This causes man to work too hard and die too young. Our society is bent on what feels good, instead of what is good.

Solomon learned that sensuality was a dead-end for several reasons:

A. Pursuit of pleasure promises much but delivers little. Pleasure can be false advertising, and short lived. If pleasure is illicit then it brings shame and guilt.

B. Pursuit of pleasure promises to improve our lives but rarely is life changed by sensual pleasures. We've all experienced great pleasures, like a concert, but those things don't change our lives. Illicit pleasures make our lives worse.

C. Pursuit of pleasure promises to satisfy our needs but in the end pleasure requires more of us and this leads to disillusion. Our sinful pleasures often become insatiable.

III. Exhortation

This is what is needed.

We need the type of satisfaction that remains with us and is accumulated throughout a lifetime.

Things to look for are those which:

Deliver what they promise

Make us better people

Satisfy our most basic needs

Solomon summarized some of these at the end of his book:

Faith and Sincere Obedience to God. This delivers in life great gifts and are a constant source of great joy that affect every part of our being.

Two others are like the first.

1. Knowledge of Jesus Christ (a relationship with Him)

2. Submission to the Holy Spirit

The race for pleasure ends in disappointment.

It ends in disillusionment, dissatisfaction if pursued is a means to an end.

The yearning for peace and joy come from the soul. Therefore spiritual things are required to deliver it. Spiritual things are eternal

3. The Pursuit of Meaning Through Work

Solomon now explores the context in which a person's life and work is carried out - the framework of time.

ECCLESIASTES 2:12-26

Review

The pursuit of meaning, satisfaction through sensual pleasure is futile since the satisfaction gained from pleasure is not cumulative.

I. Pursuit of wisdom and folly - 2:12-17

Vs. 12-14a

Vs. 14b-15

Vs. 16-17

II. The pursuit of meaning through work - 2:18-3:22

The fruit of one's labor - vs. 18-25 _____

Vs. 18 _____

Vs. 19 _____

Vs. 20-21 _____

Vs. 22-23 _____

III. Insights

A. Vs. 24-25 - The ability to experience joy is not related to what we do

B. Vs. 26 –

Those who are right with God derive benefit from all they do, not just what they succeed at.

IV. Summary

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. A Time for Everything – Part 1

Solomon now explores the context in which a person's life and work is carried out - the framework of time.

ECCLESIASTES 3:1-11

Intro – Review of “Lifestyles”

1. Pursuit of sensual pleasures.
2. Wisdom of folly.
3. Meaning through work.
 - Satisfaction is a _____
 - Righteousness is _____
 - The meaning _____

I. Meaning of Time

A. Review of concept of time _____

1. What is time? _____

2. Why is time so important? _____

3. When did time begin? End? _____

B. Text – vs. 1-8

Numerology _____

Vs. 1 _____

Pairs of opposites:

1. Life and death – vs. 2a

2. Renewal and change – vs. 2b

3. Destruction and restoration – vs. 3a

4. Demolish and rebuild – vs. 3b

5. Sorrow and joy – vs. 4a

6. Mourn and dance – vs. 4b

7. Select and reject – vs. 5a

8. Embrace and confront – vs. 5b

9. Search and abandon – vs. 6a

10. Keep and discard – vs. 6b

11. Grief and resolution – vs. 7a

12. Silence and speaking out – vs. 7b

13. Love and hate – vs. 8a

14. War and peace – vs. 8b

II. The Main Question - vs. 9

III. The Main Conclusion - vs. 10-11

Time only makes sense in eternity.

1. God made everything appropriate in its time. _____

2. God has put eternity into our hearts. _____

3. We cannot discover God's total work. _____

5. A Time for Everything – Part 2

In his journal, Solomon has described the various ways he has sought for satisfaction and joy apart from God. In the balance of this chapter he provides some final thoughts on the search for meaning in the events of one's life here on earth.

ECCLESIASTES 3:11-22

Intro – Review of Pursuits

“God has created us with a God-shaped vacuum that only God can fill.” Swindoll

I. Vertical View – vs. 11-15

God makes sense from chaos – vs. 11

God enables us to enjoy life – vs. 12-13

God provokes us to worship Him – vs. 14-15

II. Horizontal View – vs. 16-22

Cynicism – vs. 16 _____

Solutions to Cynicism – vs. 17-21

Injustice is temporary – vs. 17 _____

Injustice condemns – vs. 18-21 _____

Hope Beyond Cynicism _____

Hopeless cynicism is hopeful realism.

1. What is your disadvantage?

2. When are you going to change?

3. How can God use you?

6. A View from the Top

Solomon examines one final area of life (the pursuit of wealth and power) in order to find contentment apart from God.

ECCLESIASTES 4:1-8

Intro - Background on Solomon

In the pursuit of wealth and power, "what you see is not necessarily what you get."

I. The View from the Top

A. Oppression - vs. 1-3

Vs. 1

Vs. 2

Vs. 3

B. Envy - vs. 4-6

Vs. 4

Vs. 5 _____

Vs. 6 _____

Rules for Contentment

1. Keep your eyes on your own stuff: _____

2. Give thanks for what you have: _____

3. Ask, don't complain: _____

C. Disillusionment - vs. 7-8

Vs. 7-8 _____

II. Summary

1. Power corrupts _____

2. Success breeds envy _____

3. Life at the top is hard _____

III. Exhortation

If you make it to the top, remember:

1. Aim for contentment _____

2. Strive to be useful _____

3. Work at being faithful _____

7. One Plus One Equals Survival: *Solutions to Loneliness*

In Solomon's experiment with wealth and power, he concludes that life at the "top" is filled with grief (oppression, envy, disillusionment).

ECCLESIASTES 4:9-12

Intro - Review

Solomon has found that life at the "top" can be filled with _____

He will discuss one other difficult experience felt by those in leadership roles.

* This lesson will focus on the _____ to loneliness.

I. Loneliness

It is both a perception and a feeling. _____

Loneliness not only has a face and an image but also has _____

Loneliness is a normal part of life. _____

We know we've been on the island of loneliness to long when we say things like:

Why don't _____ ?

If only _____

Nobody _____

We cannot get off the island of loneliness by: _____

II. Solomon's solution to loneliness Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

Solomon recognized that loneliness afflicted everyone.

In chapter 4:9-12 Solomon proposes the solution to our lonely condition.

Vs. 9 _____

Vs. 10-12 – These contain three reasons why having friends is the answer.

Vs. 10-1. _____

Vs. 11-2. _____

Vs. 12a-3. _____

Summary

Solomon teaches that loneliness can strike whether you are at the top or at the bottom.

8. Worship Attitude

In chapter five there is an abrupt change as Solomon comments on the attitude necessary for proper worship and then goes on to talk about the enemy of spirituality - materialism.

ECCLESIASTES 5:1-6:12

Intro -

I. Worship Attitude - 5:1-7

Pay Attention - vs. 1

Guard Your Mind - vs. 2-3;7

Keep Your Promises - vs. 4-6

II. Folly of Riches

1. Absolute Power vs. 8-9

2. Greater Wealth vs. 10

3. More Money = _____ vs. 11-12

4. You Can't _____ vs. 13-15

5. Live High _____ vs. 16-17

Solomon describes three God-given riches:

A. _____ vs. 18

B. _____ vs. 19

C. _____ vs. 20

III. Self Portrait - vs. 6:1-12

Solomon's portrait is one of depression for several reasons.

1. _____ vs. 1-2

2. _____ vs. 3-5

3. _____ vs. 6

4. _____ vs. 7-9

In the end, his lifestyle and depression helps him understand certain basic truths about life:

A. God is _____ vs. 10a

B. Man is not _____ vs. 10b

C. Disputing with God is _____ vs. 10a-11

Summary

9. Wisdom Proverbs

In the first 6 chapters of the book we see the fruit of Solomon's rebellion. By chapter six he has exhausted his search, sees that his results are empty, and comments on this discovery using several parables.

ECCLESIASTES 7:1-29

**Intro - Chapter 6 ends Solomon's search for happiness away from God.
Chapter 7 begins his return to God.**

Styles of writing _____

Contrasting - Proverbs 13:1 _____

Completive - Proverbs 14:10 _____

Comparative - Proverbs 25:24 _____

I. 7 Wisdom Proverbs

1. _____ - vs. 1

2. _____ - vs. 1b

3. _____ - vs. 2a

4. _____ - vs. 3-4

5. _____ - vs. 5-7

6. _____ - vs. 8

7. _____ - vs. 8b-10

In the last 4 verses, Solomon explains the advantages of wisdom:

A. _____ vs. 11-12

B. _____ vs. 13-14

Two lessons for today _____

II. Wisdom at Work - vs. 15-29

A. Wisdom provides _____ vs. 15-18

B. Wisdom provides _____ vs. 19-22

1. _____
2. _____
3. _____

C. Wisdom provides _____ vs. 23-28

1. _____
 2. _____
 3. _____
-
-
-

10. Qualities of a Wise Leader

Solomon is no longer exploring and writing about the various experiences and pursuits of worldly living, which have left him unfulfilled and depressed. He now turns his attention to leadership and the qualities that leaders need to possess.

ECCLESIASTES 8:1-9:10

Intro – Solomon begins to discuss some of the blessings that come from living under the authority of God.

I. Qualities of a Wise Leader – 8:1-9

Various kinds of leadership include:

Godly leaders have certain qualities:

1. _____ vs. 1a
 2. _____ vs. 1b
 3. _____ vs. 2-4
 4. _____ vs. 5-7
 5. _____ vs. 8-9
-
-
-

II. Mysteries of Life – 8:10-17

Mysteries that are beyond Solomon’s understanding.

1. Mystery of _____ vs. 10-13

2. Mystery of _____ vs. 14

3. Mystery of _____ vs. 15

III. Developing a Life Philosophy – 9:1-10

Solomon’s new life philosophy has 4 key truths and applications.

Truth #1: _____ vs. 1b

Truth #2: _____ vs. 2-3a

Truth #3: _____ vs. 3b

Truth #4: _____ vs. 4-6

Application #1: _____ vs. 7

Application #2: _____ vs. 8

Application #3: _____ vs. 9

Application #4: _____ vs. 10

11. Comments on the Rat Race

Solomon has been sharing the fruit of his hard-won wisdom. After living apart from God he returns and notes some of the things he has learned concerning wisdom itself.

ECCLESIASTES 9:11-10:20

Intro – Solomon provides more insights about wisdom and its uses in life.

I. Comments on the Rat Race

Our culture did not invent the “rat race” mentality. _____

Solomon comments on the Rat Race of his day.

Vs. 11 _____

Vs. 12 _____

Vs. 14-15 _____

Based on these observations, Solomon develops some core ideas about life in the fast lane.

1. Human activity _____ vs. 11

2. Strength is more impressive but _____ vs. 15-16a

3. Wise counsel is _____ vs. 16b

4. Human rulers will always _____ vs. 17

5. Wisdom is better than _____ vs. 18

II. Wisdom and Folly - Chapter 10:1-11

Solomon builds a case for living wisely.

He contrasts Wisdom vs. Folly

1. _____ vs. 1

_____ vs. 2

_____ vs. 3

2. _____ vs. 4

_____ vs. 5-7

3. _____ vs. 8-10

III. A Fool's Portrait – vs. 12-20

What does a fool look like?

1. Character of a fool. _____

2. Actions of a fool. _____

IV. How to Deal with a Fool

1. _____ Proverbs 14; 23:9

2. _____ Psalms 107:10-12; 39-40

3. _____ Psalms 107:21-22

12. Positive Thinking

In his return journey to God, Solomon has found that wisdom and wise living are the surest way to find contentment and avoid wasting one's short lifespan.

ECCLESIASTES 11:1-12:14

Intro - In the last chapters, Solomon's journal turns much more optimistic.

I. Think _____ 11:1-6

Instead of Defense _____ vs.1

Instead of Hording _____ vs. 2

Instead of Watching _____ vs. 3-4

Instead of Doubting _____ vs. 5-6

II. Don't _____ 11:7-12:1

Different kinds of procrastinators.

Solomon says that joy and satisfaction are linked to _____ not _____.

1. God permits _____ vs. 7-8a

2. Take advantage _____ vs. 9a

3. There are no _____ vs. 8b-9b-10

4. The essential ingredient for happiness is _____ vs. 12:1

III. Grow old _____ vs. 12:2-8

There is no avoiding getting old.

1. Accept _____ vs. 2-5

2. Prepare _____ vs. 6-7

3. Acknowledge _____ vs. 8-14

Summary

In the end, Solomon says that life is _____ and _____ is _____.

However, for the one who _____ God and _____ Him, there are 3 promises:

1. _____

2. _____

3. _____

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