

The Book of Ecclesiastes ("The Preacher")

January/February Quarter - Embury Hills church High School Boys - Ross Statham, teacher

Outline of the Book:

Verse:	Description:
1:1-11	Illustrations of the general vanity of life
1:12-18	The Vanity of Striving After Wisdom
2:1-3	The Vanity of Striving After Pleasure
2:4-17	The Vanity of Great Accomplishments
2:18-23	The Vanity of Hard Labor
2:24-26	First Conclusion: God Gives Contentment From These Strivings
3:1-22	God Controls It All: <i>Time, Conditions & Judgment of Our Lives</i>
4:1-3	The Wonder of Evil Oppression
4:4-12	The Vanity of Skillful Work and Work Without Companions
4:13-16	The Vanity of Popularity
5:1-7	Second Conclusion: Don't Anger God- Fear Him
5:8-17	The Vanity of Wealth
5:18-20	Third Conclusion: God Gives Wealth
6:1-12	No Satisfaction In Wealth, Children or Labor
7:1-29	Wisdom & Folly
8:1-9	Submit to Authority
8:10-17	Our Inability to Understand the Workings of God
9:1-6	Judgment Eventually Comes to All Men
9:7-12	Enjoy Your Short Life
9:13 - 10:15	The Value of Wisdom & Its Characteristics
10:16-20	Wisdom Related to the Government
11:1-6	Wisdom Related to Business
11:7 - 12:7	Fourth Conclusion: Remember God In Your Youth
12:8	Fifth Conclusion: All is Futility (Without God)
12:9-14	Final Conclusion: Fear God & Keep His Commandments. This is the whole duty of Man. This is "The Meaning of Life."

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Key Lessons learned from the Entire Study of Ecclesiastes

(Keep this worksheet and refer to it as you complete each lesson)

Introduction	
Chapter 1:	
Chapter 2:	
Chapter 3:	
Chapter 4:	
Chapter 5:	
Chapter 6:	
Chapter 7:	
Chapter 8:	
Chapter 9:	
Chapter 10:	
Chapter 11:	
Chapter 12:	

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Lesson 1: Introduction

Used 37 times, the key word in Ecclesiastes is *vanity*, the futile emptiness of trying to be happy apart from God. the author (almost universally taken to be Solomon [see 1:1,12], the wisest, most powerful and most influential king in Israel’s history) looks at life “under the sun” (1:9) and, from the human perspective, declares it all as empty. Power, popularity, prestige, pleasure- nothing can fill the void in man’s life but the creator of man! Once we’re focused on God, our lives take on meaning and purpose. Solomon concluded “fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man” (12:13).

This book has more meaning today than ever before in history. The despair and disbelief, the constant seeking of “What’s the meaning of life?” are first asked, then answered by God in this book. The early emptiness and despair as to “What’s the meaning of life?” melt away when service to God is made the purpose of life.

I Kings 11 reports how Solomon married foreign wives and died in idolatry, a sad ending to a man who had insured that Israel as a nation followed God. All of Solomon’s great prayers and great deeds were for nothing- Solomon died not following his own inspired teachings!

It is generally thought by scholars that Solomon wrote Song of Solomon in his youth, Proverbs in his middle years and Ecclesiastes in his old age. Probably written about 935 BC, the book certainly has the flavor of a man who is closer to the end of his life than that of a young man who sees everything ahead of him.

The first Greek translation of the Old Testament, the *Septuagint* (“Seventy”) used the Greek word *Ekklesiastes* as its title for this book. Derived from the word *ekklesia*, which would have been translated as “assembly”, “congregation” or today as “church”, the term *ekklesiastes* meant “preacher.” The Latin word *Ecclesiastes*, which we use today as the title, means “speaker before an assembly.” Some translations of the Bible call this book “The Preacher.”

As we study Ecclesiastes together, remember the lessons of “the preacher” and where they came from, not the later sins of the preacher. God teaches that wisdom involves seeing life from a divine perspective, not a human perspective, and that a full trust and service to God will give us a full and meaningful life. He teaches that life is a *daily* gift from God and should be enjoyed as much as possible while serving God fully

Questions:

1. What’s the key word used in Ecclesiastes, and what does it mean?
2. What does the title mean, and who is it’s author?
3. What makes the book so powerful for us to study today?
4. **Research:** List as many facts as you can find about the author from the Bible.

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Lesson 2: Chapter 1

Memory Verse: Ecclesiastes 1:12-14: *I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem, And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this grievous task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all is vanity and grasping for the wind.*

- 1..What do you think is meant in his question in verse 1?
2. What about the question in verse 3?
3. What does he contrast in verse 4?
4. What does he describe in verses 5-7?
5. What does he mean by verse 8?
6. What does he describe in verses 9-11? Give some modern examples of why he's right.
7. According to 12-15, what does he say he set about to do and found out?
8. What did he seek after in 16-18, and what did he conclude?
9. Now, let's draw some conclusions. Why do you think about the perspective he's putting on this book?
10. What do you think about his use of the term "vanity"?
11. How else can we use the word "vanity"- and how would these usages apply?

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Lesson 3: Chapter 2

Memory Verse: Ecclesiastes 2:26: *For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.*

1. What does the preacher next try as "the meaning of life"?
2. Using what 3 things does he try to accomplish this in verse 3?
3. List the great accomplishments that Solomon made as King of Israel (2:4-9).
4. What was the problem that Solomon faced in 2:10-11?
5. What did Solomon consider- and conclude- in 2:12-14?
6. What did Solomon realize and conclude in 2:15-17?
7. What problem did Solomon describe in 2:18-23? How does one work around this?
8. Solomon reaches his first major conclusion in 2:24-26. Discuss what he concludes.

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Lesson 4: Chapter 3

Memory Verse: Ecclesiastes 3:14-15 *I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him. That which is has already been, and what is to be has already been; and God requires an account of what is past.*

1. What is God teaching us in 3:1-9?
2. What lessons can we learn from these verses?
3. Discuss at least four lessons we can glean from 3:10-15:
4. Contrast the hearts of men with the hearts of those who serve God (3:16-17):
5. What are the two groups that Solomon contrasts in 3:18-22?
6. Discuss at least four lessons we can glean from 3:18-22.

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Lesson 5: Chapter 4

Memory Verse: Ecclesiastes 4:8 *There is one alone, without compassion; he has neither son nor brother, yet there is no end to all his labors, nor is his eye satisfied with riches. But he never asks, "For whom do I toil and deprive myself of good?" This also is vanity and a grave misfortune.*

1. Verses 4:1-3 teach about the unfairness of the ungodly oppressed. Describe it.
2. Discuss at least five lessons to be gleaned from 4:4-8.
3. There are some powerful lessons taught in 4:9-12. Name at least three.
4. What does 4:13-16 teach about popularity and power?
5. Are the unoppressed dead better off?
6. What does verse 8 teach about being satisfied with our labors?
7. What kind of governmental rulers do we want, according to this chapter? Why?

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Lesson 6: Chapter 5

Memory Verse: Ecclesiastes 5:1-2 *Walk prudently when you go to the house of God; and draw near to hear rather than to give the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know that they do evil. Do not be rash with your mouth, and let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; therefore let your words be few.*

1. Verses 4-6 warn about making vows & promises to God. What kind of promises and vows do people sometimes make? What does God expect them to do about them?

2. Explain the contrast given in verse 7. Think!

3. What do verses 8&9 teach us about our government?

4. Many important lessons in verses 10-12. Discuss at least three key points from these verses, making modern application (example) from each point you discuss.
 - a.

 - b.

 - c.

5. Verses 13-17 carry these lessons further. Discuss at least four key points from these verses, making modern application (example) from each point you discuss.
 - a.

 - b.

 - c.

 - d.

6. In the previous verses we're shown the worry of gathering and keeping of riches. God next gives what He knows we need in verses 18-20, the opposite of the "vanity" already discussed. What is it? Make application, using at least two examples.

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Lesson 7: Chapter 6

Memory Verse: Ecclesiastes 6:3-5 *If a man begets a hundred children and lives many years, so that the days of his years are many, but his soul is not satisfied with goodness, or indeed he has no burial, I say that a stillborn child is better than he- for it comes in vanity and departs in darkness, and its name is covered in darkness. Though it has not seen the sun or known anything, this has more rest than that man.*

1. What is there about 6:2 that is "vanity" (futility)? Explain in modern terms.
2. What does Solomon contrast in 6:3-6?
3. What two problems does he outline in verse 3, and explain them.
4. What's the final resting place for the stillborn and the wealthy?
5. Explain verse 7 in modern terms.
6. Explain verses 8 & 9 in modern terms.
7. Verses 10-11 explain partly the relationship between man and God. How do men contend with God as is described here?
8. Answer the question given by Solomon in 6:12.

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Lesson 8: Chapter 7

Memory Verse: Ecclesiastes 7:1-2 *A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death than the day of one's birth. Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men.*

1. Why do you think that it is better to go to the house of mourning?
2. How is a heart made better by a sad countenance?
3. Why does Solomon condemn mirth? Give a modern example of what he means.
4. Explain 7:5-6.
5. Explain how, according to verse 8, the end of something is better than it's beginning.
6. There's a great lesson for us in verses 9-10. If you were to use two-word commands in place of these verses, what would they be? (Give at least three two-word commands.)
7. Verses 11& 12 explain the interaction between "wisdom" and "knowledge." Explain.
8. According to 7:13-14, God makes two things. What are they, and what is the warning?
9. Does what Solomon describes in 7:15 occur today? Explain why God allows it.
10. What important lesson are we taught in 7:16-18?
11. What does 7:20 teach us about Godly men and women? Why does God allow it?
12. 7:23-26 shows the frustration that Solomon had with his many wives and concubines. Describe what he describes here, and give a modern explanation.
13. Explain the frustration that Solomon experienced and described in 7:27-29.

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Lesson 9: Chapter 8

Memory Verse: Ecclesiastes 8:4-5 *Where the word of a king is, there is power; and who may say to him, "What are you doing?" He who keeps his command will experience nothing harmful; and a wise man's heart discerns both time and judgment.*

1. Why would the teachings of our relationship to the king still have relevance to us today?
2. Explain the four lessons taught in 8:2-3.
3. Explain the memory verse.
4. Verses 6-8 explain that while we may be miserable, we cannot control whether God allows us to live or die. Verse 8 says that "wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it." What does that mean, and what is this passage telling us about our daily lives?
5. Had Solomon done what was described in 8:9?
6. Verses 10-13 contrast beautifully those who fear God with those who do evil. According to these verses, why do some continue to do evil, even though they see evil doers die? According to these verses, how will God ultimately treat the wicked- and those that fear Him?
7. What is the problem outlined in 8:14? Explain why God allows it.
8. With verse 14 in mind, what does Solomon recommend we do in verse 15? Give practical application that still ties in with what he's already taught in this book.
9. Solomon was a wise man- but a frustrated man, according to 8:16-17. What was his frustration? What did he ultimately learn?

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Lesson 10: Chapter 9

Memory Verse: Ecclesiastes 9:9-10 *Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that is your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.*

1. What critical lesson do we learn from 9:1?
2. What is meant by verse 2?
3. What two groups are contrasted in 9:3-6, and what do we learn?
4. What does 9:7-8 teach us, after having read the first 6 verses?
5. Explain what is meant by 9:9.
6. Explain 9:10-12. Why does God allow this to happen?
7. What great lesson did Solomon describe in 9:13-15?
8. What great truth is taught in 9:16?
9. What great truth is taught in 9:17?
10. What great truth is taught in 9:18?

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Lesson 11: Chapter 10

Memory Verse: Ecclesiastes 10:9-10 *He who quarries stones may be hurt by them, and he who splits wood may be endangered by it. If the ax is dull, and one does not sharpen the edge, then he must use more strength; but wisdom brings success.*

1. What lesson is taught about sin in verse 1?
2. How does one show others that he (or she) is a fool?
3. What does verse 4 teach us about our relationship with our earthly bosses or governors?
4. Explain what is meant by 10:8.
5. Explain the memory verse.
6. Verses 11-16 talk about the "babblings of a fool." Give at least three examples of the "babblings of a fool" we can see about us today.
7. According to verse 17, we can feast "...for strength and not for drunkenness." Explain!
8. This verse is further explained in 18-19. How?
9. Verse 20 shows us that even our thoughts will be known to those in authority over us. Not merely kings, but any in authority over us. How is it that they will find out words? Our very thoughts?

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Lesson 12: Chapter 11 (A Chapter On "Diligence")

Memory Verse: Ecclesiastes 12:1 *Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth, before the difficult days come, and the years draw near when you say, "I have no pleasure in them." While the sun and the light, the moon and the stars are not darkened, and the clouds do not return after the rain.*

(Note: Each number goes with the corresponding verse.)

1. Explain how soggy bread could possibly do you *any* good as is described here.
2. What kind of serving is being talked about here? What's being commanded?
3. This verse sounds obvious- and it is- but what is being taught here?
4. Read verse 4. This seems backward! Shouldn't the farmer look at the weather? Explain what is meant here.
5. Here we are, three thousand years later. Do we yet understand the things described here? What great lessons are there in this?
6. To summarize 3-6, what then are we to do with our lives and in our work?
7. Why do we enjoy the sun?
8. Ah! A contrast with verse seven. Explain it. Why does this sound so gloomy?
9. A very important lesson in this verse. First a command to "walk in the ways of your heart and in the sight of your eyes" (have pleasure), but it's followed by the admonition to "know that for all of these God will bring you into judgment." What, then, is being commanded? Is this verse at odds with itself?
10. The key to verse 9 is verse 10. Here he tells how. Describe it, and explain again what this "vanity" is he uses again.

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Lesson 13: Chapter 12 Conclusion: Seek God Early and Life; Serve Him Always

Memory Verse: Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 *Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.*

1. When are the "difficult days" described in verse 1?
2. What is he talking about in verse 2, rather than the sun, moon and stars?
3. Verse 3 describes impending old age. Describe it.
4. Old age is also vividly described in verses 4-5. Describe it.
5. He commands that we remember our creator before we grow old. Describe the analogies.
6. What will happen to the body and the spirit, according to verse 7?
7. What did Solomon also say he had done in verses 9-10?
8. Yet, according to verses 11-12, he says something different. Explain it.
9. The strong command, the conclusion of the book, is given in 12:13. What is it?
10. The "why" of the book is explained fully. What will God ultimately do in return?