



Ecclesiastes



THRU**the**BIBLE

NOTES & OUTLINES WITH

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POETRY



Ecclesiastes

WRITER: Solomon. The book is the “dramatic autobiography of his life when he got away from God.”

TITLE: *Ecclesiastes* means “preacher” or “philosopher.”

PURPOSE: The purpose of any book of the Bible is important to the correct understanding of it; this is no more evident than here. Human philosophy, apart from God, must inevitably reach the conclusions in this book; therefore, there are many statements which seem to contradict the remainder of Scripture. It almost frightens us to know that this book has been the favorite of atheists, and they (e.g., Volney and Voltaire) have quoted from it profusely. Man has tried to be happy without God, and this book shows the absurdity of the attempt. Solomon, the wisest of men, tried every field of endeavor and pleasure known to man; his conclusion was, “All is vanity.”

God showed Job, a righteous man, that he was a sinner in God’s sight. In Ecclesiastes God showed Solomon, the wisest man, that he was a fool in God’s sight.

ESTIMATIONS: In Ecclesiastes, we learn that without Christ we cannot be satisfied, even if we possess the whole world—the heart is too large for the object. In the Song of Solomon, we learn that if we turn from the world and set our affections on Christ, we cannot fathom the infinite preciousness of His love—the Object is too large for the heart.

Dr. A. T. Pierson said, “There is a danger in pressing the words in the Bible into a positive announcement of scientific fact, so marvelous are some of these correspondencies. But it is certainly a curious fact that Solomon should use language entirely consistent with discoveries such as evaporation and storm currents (1:6, 7). Some have boldly said that Redfield’s theory of storms is here explicitly stated. Without taking such ground, we ask, who taught Solomon to use terms that readily accommodate facts? Who taught him that the movement of the winds, which seem to be so lawless and uncertain, is ruled by laws as positive as those which rule the growth of the plant; and that by evaporation, the waters that fall on the earth are continually rising again, so that the sea never overflows? Ecclesiastes 12:6 is a poetic description of death. The ‘silver cord’ describes the spinal marrow, the ‘golden bowl’ the basin which holds the brain, the ‘pitcher’ the lungs, and the ‘wheel’ the heart. Without claiming that Solomon was inspired to foretell the circulation of the blood, 26 centuries before Harvey announced it, is it not remarkable that the language he uses exactly suits the facts—a wheel pumping up through one pipe to discharge through another?”

KEY WORD: “Vanity” occurs 37 times. Most Bible teachers would give the phrase “under the sun,” which occurs 29 times.

OUTLINE:

I. Problem stated: “All is vanity,” Chapter 1:1-3

II. Experiment made, Chapters 1:4–12:12

Seeking satisfaction in the following:

A. Science (the laws of nature), Chapter 1:4-11

B. Wisdom and philosophy, Chapter 1:12-18

C. Pleasure, Chapter 2:1-11

D. Materialism (living for the “now”), Chapter 2:12-26

E. Fatalism, Chapter 3:1-15

F. Egoism, Chapters 3:16–4:16

G. Religion, Chapter 5:1-8

H. Wealth, Chapters 5:9–6:12

I. Morality (the “good life”), Chapters 7:1–12:12

III. Result of experiment, Chapter 12:13, 14

All things under the sun are vanity.

A right relationship with God, in any age, through the way He has made, brings the only abiding satisfaction. *What a difference between the man “under the sun” and the man “in Christ” seated in the heavenlies far above all suns!*

COMMENT:

I. Problem stated: “All is vanity,” Chapter 1:1-3

Solomon pursued in this book every avenue, experience, and interest of man in this life to find satisfaction and fulfillment. Solomon as king had full freedom to carry on this experiment, and he was not hindered by financial or power limitations. He could go the limit in every direction. The result is “vanity”—emptiness. Frustration and dissatisfaction met him in every experiment. The conclusions are human, apart from the divine, made by the man *under* the sun. This is the ultimate end of man’s efforts apart from God.

Do not misunderstand what is meant by “inspiration” when we say that the Bible is inspired by God. Inspiration guarantees the accuracy of the words of Scripture, not always the thought that is expressed. The context should be considered and attention paid to the person who made the statement, and under what circumstances (e.g., in the betrayal of Christ by Judas, the *record* of the event is inspired, but the *act* of Judas was not God-inspired, but was satanic).

Keep in mind that the conclusions in each experiment are human, not God’s truth. This is man *under* the sun, entirely separated from the “Sun of righteousness” who is the Son of God.

II. Experiment made, Chapters 1:4–12:12

Seeking satisfaction in the following:

A. Science (the laws of nature), Chapter 1:4-11

V. 4—Earth is permanent; man is temporary. Continuity of mankind is maintained through births.

W. 5-7—The laws of nature are as fixed as the material universe itself. Some remarkable scientific statements are made here.

V. 8—This is a good verse to hang on the TV set. Man cannot exhaust the exploration of the universe. The more he learns reveals that there is still more to learn. This is frustrating. The physical universe is too big for little man.

W. 9-11—The statement that there is no new thing under the sun seems to be untrue in this age of “gadgetry,” but it is true. It is said that the atom bomb is new, but the atom has been around a long time. Actually, the atom is older than man, although man did

not know it existed for a long time. All man has accomplished is to make the little atom a very difficult neighbor. The nosy human should have let sleeping dogs lie.

A computer brain and electronic nervous system can bring to man no deep and abiding satisfactions.

B. Wisdom and philosophy, Chapter 1:12-18

V. 13—The experiment.

V. 14—All systems of philosophy lead up a blind alley.

V. 15—Philosophy and psychology cannot change human nature, nor can they correct the old nature of man. As the twig is bent, so the tree grows.

V. 18—Joy and satisfaction do not increase in ratio to the increase of knowledge.

C. Pleasure, Chapter 2:1-11

W. 1-3—This is the philosophy of hedonism, teaching that pleasure is the chief goal of life and that the gratification of all the appetites of the body is the fulfillment of moral obligation. Notice that he tries comedy—anything for a laugh.

W. 4-7—He builds around himself all the comforts of this life.

V. 8—He has plenty of spending money and goes in for entertainment.

V. 10—Solomon tries everything a man can try for pleasure.

V. 11—When he adds it all up, it equals zero. The man under the sun finds no satisfaction permanently—only “the pleasures of sin for a season” (Hebrews 11:25).

D. Materialism (living for the “now”), Chapter 2:12-26

W. 12-16—He sees that actually there is no permanent difference between the man with the high IQ and low IQ, educated and uneducated. They both come to the same end.

W. 17-20—If he accumulates great wealth, he will leave it to an offspring who will be either wise or a fool.

W. 21-23—Even the wise man cannot avoid sorrow, sickness, and death.

W. 24-26—The best thing to do is to eat and drink, concentrate on the here and now, and get all he can out of this life. Live for the now and forget tomorrow. However, even this does not satisfy, although it is better than LSD.

E. Fatalism, Chapter 3:1-15

V. 1-8—Too often men attempt to draw some Christian truth from these verses. However, this is the rawest kind of pagan fatalism. If this were true, man would be no better than a robot, zombie, computer, machine or any other push-button gadget. This type of thinking allows no room for the free will of man and the operation of the grace and mercy of God. Even the time of death can be changed (see Exodus 32:10 and Isaiah 38).

V. 11—God has let man put the world in his heart so that he might see that the world does not satisfy—his heart is still empty.

V. 14—Although God's will is primary, fatalism leaves no place for His mercy and grace. God answers prayer.

F. Egoism, Chapters 3:16–4:16

(Excessive love of self. Individual self-interest is the *summum bonum* of life.)

CHAPTER 3

V. 16—All men are wicked. You can't trust anyone. This is a cynical view of the human race, but it is reasonably accurate.

V. 18, 19—This view does not accept the optimist's conclusions. Evolution says that man *was* a beast. Egoism says that man *is* a beast. This view causes the individual to despise others. It has produced the caste and class systems in all the countries of the world.

V. 20—He is speaking only of the body. Even Jehovah's Witnesses believe that the soul *sleeps*, not that it turns to dust.

V. 21—Man is different from the beast.

V. 22—The only thing worthwhile is for man to identify himself with his own works. This is the ancient version of the hippy and yippy philosophy.

CHAPTER 4

V. 1—The egoist rebels against the establishment.

V. 6—This man wants to do his own thing.

V. 9-11—This is the only reason for teaming up with another.

V. 16—This philosophy leads to a meaningless existence.

G. Religion, Chapter 5:1-8

Religion has damned the world more than any other thing. Look what the pagan religions did for peoples in the past. Look at India, China, and the Muslim world. Look at the Roman Catholic world. Look at liberal Protestantism. Multitudes have joined churches since World War II to get away from God and from establishing a personal relationship to Christ.

V. 1—Be religious and go to church, but have as little to do with it as possible.

V. 2—Do not make any decision under stress of emotion. Cry at the movies, but not in church. Don't sign a pledge; don't agree to accept an office.

W. 4-6—God has a great deal to say about the importance He attaches to vows.

V. 7—Dreams and words are no substitute for a personal relationship with God.

V. 8—A Christian should be involved in a poverty program.

H. Wealth, Chapters 5:9–6:12

CHAPTER 5

V. 10—Wealth is not wrong in itself. It is the *love* of money that is the root of all evil (1 Timothy 6:10). To accumulate wealth for wealth's sake is wrong. The miser thinks dollars are flat so they can be stacked; the spendthrift thinks they are round so they can be rolled.

V. 12—The poor man is often happier than the rich man.

CHAPTER 6

W. 1-12—The rich man can eat only three meals a day, sleep on one bed at a time, and cannot live longer than the poor man. The rich man's life is but a shadow. There is no pocket in a shroud. Job, a rich man, said that he came here with nothing and he was leaving the same way. It is rather empty to give one's life to the pursuit of that which does not bring happiness here and has no value hereafter.

I. Morality (the “good life”), Chapters 7:1–12:12

The do-gooder, going down the middle of the road on the freeway of life. Babbit on Main Street in the Big City, doing business under a neon sign, but living in suburbia in a sedate, secluded, and exclusive neighborhood, taking it easy.

CHAPTER 7

V. 1—A good reputation and a long eulogy at the funeral is the *sum-mum bonum* of life.

V. 2—From the knife and fork club to the funeral service, all is done in a dignified manner.

V. 3—Laughing all the way to the cemetery.

V. 4—Living in the presence of death.

W. 5-29—Take it easy; walk softly; don’t be extreme; avoid the left and the right; go down the middle; compromise; don’t fight—switch.

CHAPTER 8—Neither hot nor cold, but lukewarm. He observes that there does not seem to be too much difference between the wicked and the righteous (v. 14, 15).

W. 2-5—Obey the law. Keep out of trouble. Do not become involved.

V. 8—All men are equal at death. Although they may not be born equal, they die equal.

V. 9—Notice “under the sun.” This is man’s view apart and contrary to the viewpoint of God.

V. 11—You can’t get by with it. Men are deceived when they sin because of the fact that God does not judge immediately.

CHAPTER 9—Man’s wrong conclusions and pseudo-philosophy due to his ignorance, prejudice, and false premises. “Under the sun” occurs four times in this chapter.

W. 1, 2—All will arrive at the same place. All will eventually be saved.

V. 3—Death brings about total integration. All are equal.

V. 4—While there is life, there is hope.

V. 5—This does not teach soul sleep. He is speaking only of the body (see v. 10).

V. 9—They lived happily ever after.

V. 10—This is a clear reference to the body. “Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do,” do it now, for it cannot be done in the grave. The hand belongs to the body, not to the soul. It is the body that is

put to sleep in the grave; it is the body that is raised (see notes on 1 Thessalonians 4:13-18). The spirit or soul goes to God (see Ecclesiastes 12:7).

W. 11, 12—Life is a matter of luck or a game of chance.

CHAPTER 10—The injustice of life suggests the adoption of a moderate course.

V. 1—One night on the town means a lifetime in the darkness of disease or death. A mother spends 21 years teaching a son to be wise, and some girl comes along and makes a fool out of him in five minutes.

V. 7—To work hard, save your money, and study late does not always mean that you will become a success. The fool next door may inherit a million.

W. 8, 9—Don't try to get even.

V. 11—See Romans 3:13, 14.

V. 19—The one who pays the fiddler calls the tunes.

V. 20—Little brother is watching.

CHAPTER 11—This is the best course to follow for the moral man.

V. 1—Don't be afraid of doing good, although the reward may be late in arriving.

V. 3—Rain is predicted. Carry an umbrella. It is hard to move a redwood after it falls. It is always best to have a clear understanding in the beginning.

V. 6—Take a chance, provided you know what you are doing.

V. 8—Life for a senior citizen is not all that the brochures say it is.

V. 9—Youth is the time of opportunity, joy, and decision. Youth turns to Christ more easily than old age. The time to make a decision for Christ is in one's youth.

CHAPTER 12

W. 2-7—A poetic picture of old age, but not a pretty picture.

V. 2—Failing eyesight makes it appear that the sun, moon and stars are getting dimmer. Time flies and one sad experience follows another—clouds return after rain.

V. 3—"Keepers of the house shall tremble" refers to the legs. The old person begins to totter.

"Strong men" are the shoulders that are no longer erect.

"Grinders" are the teeth.

"Those that look out of the windows" refers to failing eyesight.

V. 4—"Doors ... shut in the streets" refers to being hard of hearing.

"Sound of the grinding is low" refers to the tongue. The voice of old age gets thin.

"Shall rise up at the voice of the bird"—it took an alarm clock to wake him before, now the cheep of a bird disturbs his sleep.

"Daughters of music shall be brought low" indicates that he can no longer sing in the choir, cannot carry a tune.

V. 5—"Afraid of that which is high"—things that formerly did not frighten him.

"Fears shall be in the way"—he no longer enjoys traveling.

"Almond tree shall flourish"—our senior citizen is getting grey-haired, if his hair has not fallen out.

"Grasshopper shall be a burden"—little things annoy him.

"Desire shall fail"—romance is gone.

"Man goeth to his long home"—death comes.

V. 6—"Silver cord" is the spinal cord,

"Golden bowl" is the head,

"Pitcher" is the lungs,

"Wheel" is the heart.

V. 7—There is no soul sleep here. The body sleeps, but the spirit or soul goes to God.

V. 12—Writing and study are not an end in themselves.

III. Result of experiment, Chapter 12:13, 14

All things under the sun are vanity.

*When as a child, I laughed and wept,
Time crept;
When as a youth, I dreamed and talked,
Time walked;
When I became a full-grown man,
Time ran;
When older still I daily grew,
Time flew;
Soon I shall find in traveling on
Time gone.*

“So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom” (Psalm 90:12).

V. 13—“Fear God” is the message of Proverbs also. In view of the experiment made “under the sun,” the wise thing is to fear God, which means to reverence, worship, and obey Him.

To “keep his commandments” would mean to meet God’s conditions for salvation—in any age—grounded on faith in God.

For Cain it meant bringing a lamb

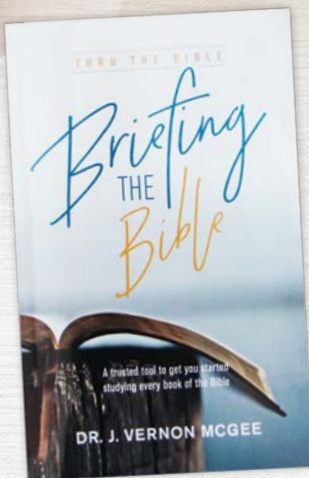
For Abraham it meant believing God’s promises

For the people of Israel it meant approaching God through sacrifice in the tabernacle and temple

For us it is to “believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved” (Acts 16:31)

V. 14—God will judge every man, for every man is a sinner who is guilty before God. Christ bore a judgment death. Our sins are either on Christ by faith in Him, or else we must come before the Great White Throne for judgment.

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