



Summary of Ecclesiastes

Introduction

The title 'Ecclesiastes' comes from a Greek word indicating a person who calls an assembly, so it makes sense that the author identified himself in Ecclesiastes 1:1 by the Hebrew word *qoheleth*, translated as 'Teacher' or 'Preacher.' Despite leaving only this rather mysterious name to indicate his identity, evidence in the book, along with most Jewish and Christian tradition, suggests that King Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes.

The Teacher went on to call himself <<*the son of David, king in Jerusalem*>> (Ecclesiastes 1:1), one who has <<*acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me*>> (Ecclesiastes 1:16), and: one who <<*also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs*>> (Ecclesiastes 12:9). Solomon succeeded David on the throne in Jerusalem as the only Davidic son to rule over all Israel from that city (Ecclesiastes 1:12). He was the wisest man in the world during his time (1 Kings 4:29-30) and wrote most of the Book of Proverbs (Proverbs 1:1, 10:1 and 25:1). Therefore, Solomon can safely be identified as the *qoheleth* of the opening verse.

Ecclesiastes presents a naturalistic vision of life – one that sees life through distinctively human eyes – but ultimately recognises the rule and reign of God in the world. This more humanistic quality has made the book especially popular among younger audiences today, men and women who have seen more than their fair share of pain and instability in life but who still cling to their hope in God.

Ecclesiastes, like much of life, represents a journey from one point to another. Solomon articulated his starting point early in the book: <<*Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity*>> (Ecclesiastes 1:2), indicating the utter futility and meaninglessness of life as he saw it. Nothing

made sense to him because he had already tried any number of remedies – pleasure, work, and intellect – to alleviate his sense of feeling lost in the world.

However, even in the writer's desperate search for meaning and significance in life, God remained present. For instance, God provides food, drink, and work (Ecclesiastes 2:24); both the sinner and the righteous person live in God's sight (Ecclesiastes 2:26); God's deeds are eternal (Ecclesiastes 3:14); and God empowers people to enjoy his provision (Ecclesiastes 5:19). Ultimately, the great truth of Ecclesiastes lies in the acknowledgment of God's ever-present hand on the lives of people. Even when injustice and uncertainty threaten to overwhelm people, they can trust him and follow after him (Ecclesiastes 12:13-14).

Chapter One

Solomon looked back over all the wealth he had acquired, his life's accomplishments and all his possessions. And to him it all seemed meaningless. Even though he had everything, he was still unfulfilled and dissatisfied. He believed that serving God was the most important option. In this chapter, he separates wisdom into two categories:

1. Human knowledge, reasoning, or philosophy.
2. The wisdom that can only come from God.

Chapter Two

Solomon conducted his search for life's meaning as an experiment. The first thing he tried to satisfy himself with was pleasure. He bought more slaves, herds, and flocks. He surrounded himself with jesters, singers, and many beautiful women. This still did not satisfy him. He referred to it as 'chasing after wind'. A person can feel it when it passes but they cannot grasp it or keep hold of it. Solomon believed that he and everyone else must not base themselves on the pursuit of happiness, but on the solid foundation of God. He said this because human accomplishments, wealth, and materials mean nothing after death.

Chapter Three

Solomon believed that there is a time and place for everything, whether it be good or bad. He believes that everyone must seek guidance from God to truly know what their path in life is.

Chapter Four

Solomon believed that going to the extremes of being lazy or a workaholic is foolish and irresponsible. The answer is to work hard but with moderation. He

believed that a person should take time to enjoy God's other gifts and realise that he gives everyone their assignments and rewards; they do not come from human sources. Solomon believed that a person should seek God's approval above all and not recognition from man, which is in accord with the teachings of Jesus the Messiah: *<<How can you believe when you accept glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the one who alone is God?>>* (John 5:44).

Chapter Five

People should be open to God. They should be ready to listen and not be so hasty to dictate what they want him to do. Solomon believed that it was not wise to make a vow to God and not keep it. It is better to not make a vow than to make one to God and not keep it. Again, Jesus teaches this very principle: *<<But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King>>* (Matthew 5:34-35).

Solomon says that riches are meaningless. People who are obsessed with wealth never find the true happiness that it promises. Loving money leads to sin: *<<For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, and in their eagerness to be rich some have wandered away from the faith and pierced themselves with many pains>>* (1 Timothy 6:10). A person should not depend on money to make them happy. Instead, they should use what they have for the Lord's work and glory.

Chapter Six

Even though a person has lived a long and prosperous life, it is ultimately meaningless. Solomon says this because everything that a person has accumulated is left behind at death. Many people strive to prolong life and keep in good physical health, but people do not spend nearly enough time improving their spiritual health. Solomon also believes that human beings cannot take charge of their own destiny.

Chapter Seven

Everyone should enjoy what they have while they can, but realise that adversity and hard times can strike at any moment, especially for those who believe: *<<Indeed, all who want to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted>>* (2 Timothy 3:12). Because of this, life is short. Death is inevitable. No one should ignore it because it makes sense to plan ahead to experience God's mercy rather than his justice. People who are too righteous and too wise are blind to their own faults. There will always be things that they do not understand. Thinking that they have attained enough wisdom is a sure sign that they have not.

Chapter Eight

True wisdom comes from knowing and trusting God, not merely the way to find him. Knowing God will lead to understanding and then to sharing that knowledge with others. Even if a woman or man could have all of the world's wisdom, they would still know very little. No one can fully comprehend God.

Chapter Nine

Solomon believed in enjoying life as God's gift. The world is finite, and sin has twisted life, making it something other than what God intended. Society honours many things above wisdom such as attractiveness, wealth, popularity, and success. Solomon believed that wisdom is the greatest asset even though it often goes unrecognised.

Chapter Ten

By describing circumstances that are unfair or do not make sense, Solomon is saying that wisdom alone cannot bring justice. Everything people may have is nothing without God. However, when he uses what little people do have, it becomes all they could ever want or need. If a person lacks skills, they should sharpen them through training and practice. This will make them more effective for God's work.

Chapter Eleven

Because life holds no guarantees, people should seize available opportunities and not play it safe. Even though life is uncertain, it does not mean that a person should let it pass them by. Do not wait for conditions that many never exist. People should enjoy every day but should also know and remember that the afterlife is eternal for everyone - a glorious life with the Lord for those who believe in him and a very different one for those who do not.

Chapter Twelve

Solomon concludes the book by giving his antidotes for the two main ailments that he talked about. People who lack purpose and direction in life should fear God and keep his commandments above all else. The people who think that life is unfair should remember that God will go back and look at everyone's life and make his judgement accordingly.