

## 21 - Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes

Key Verse:

### INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES

Ecclesiastes comes from a Hebrew word meaning "Preacher" or "one who addresses the assembly." It is translated "Teacher" in the NIV. Traditionally, King Solomon is the author. Solomon was a man whom God blessed with great wisdom, as well as with honor and wealth. The Queen of Sheba once traveled from the ends of the earth to hear his wisdom and see his wealth, and she left satisfied. He built the glorious temple. He had a thousand wives. He acquired everything for which most men strive. Now, with most of his life behind him, he realizes that without God, material things and human success have no meaning or purpose. Nothing--not even great learning and wisdom, not even human love can satisfy a man's inner thirst.

His climax and conclusion is found in 12:13: "Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man." If we keep this conclusion in mind as we read, we can hear the unspoken message of every chapter: The worldly life, with no spiritual side, and no hope in heaven is meaningless. Only life in God is eternal. The world cannot satisfy; but God abundantly satisfies our souls when we seek and trust him.

### MEANINGLESS! MEANINGLESS!

Ecclesiastes 1:1-18

Key Verse: 1:1,2

#### 1. Meaningless! (1-11)

When one looks at the world from a human point of view, he sees how man toils to stay alive--only to return to dust. Nothing is ever satisfied. The sea is never full, though all streams flow to it. The eye never sees enough. Nothing seems to have meaning. There is nothing new under the sun. How boring it is to live without meaning! But God created this world and he is still working in it. He began human history and he will end it. God's people live in God's history; they have meaning and purpose.

#### 2. Chasing after the wind (12-18)

Some people think that much study will fill the emptiness of their lives. The writer studied hard, but found that the wisdom and knowledge he acquired only gave him a heavier burden. He decided that all things done under the sun were like chasing the wind--meaningless. God made us for himself; we can only find meaning in him.

Prayer: Lord, teach me to walk with you and see the world from your perspective.

One Word: Meaningless without God

## GOD GIVES WISDOM AND HAPPINESS

Ecclesiastes 2:1-26

Key Verse: 2:26

### 1. I sought pleasure (1-3)

Solomon wanted to find the most worthwhile way to spend his one short life. He was powerful and wealthy, and he tried every way of pleasure-seeking. He sought meaning by indulging his flesh. He denied himself nothing. He had everything he desired and did everything he wanted to do (10a). But he found no meaning and no joy.

### 2. I undertook great projects (4-11)

Solomon built the temple; he built his own palace; he built houses and planted orchards and made an elaborate irrigation system. He amassed a fortune. But he would finally leave everything to the one who came after him (17-23).

### 3. Wisdom seemed good (12-26)

It seems better to be wise than to be a fool, but like the fool, the wise man too must die. Solomon finally realized that God gives happiness to the one who pleases him (26).

Prayer: Lord, help me to please you and not waste my life trying to please myself.

One Word: Seek to please God

## GOD PUTS ETERNITY IN OUR HEARTS

Ecclesiastes 3:1-22

Key Verse: 3:11

### 1. Everything is beautiful in its time (1-13)

God made everything beautiful in its time. There is a time for everything. When we live with eternity in our hearts, we can live according to God's plan and God's timing. And we can see beauty and meaning even in the simple activities of life. But if God is not in our hearts, we become like animals; we have no hope in heaven, and everything is meaningless.

### 2. Everything God does will endure forever (14-22)

We are dust and will return to dust. But this is not the end. The eternal God will judge the righteous and the wicked. He will call every person to account for the way he has used the one precious life God loaned him. The work we do in this life is just a preparation for eternity. If this world is all there is, life has no meaning. We must revere God, do his work, accept his gift of happiness, and put our hope in his kingdom.

Prayer: Lord, I am dust, but you have put eternity in my heart. Let me live and die by your time schedule.

One Word: Eternity in our hearts

## OPPRESSION, TOIL, FRIENDLESSNESS

Ecclesiastes 4:1-16

Key Verse: 4:9,10

### 1. Oppression and toil (1-8)

The Teacher looks at the tears of the oppressed and concludes that it is better to be dead than alive; and better yet not to have been born. Indeed, suffering without Jesus produces bitterness; suffering with Jesus produces endurance and Christ-like character (Romans 5:3-5). When man's hard work and his desire to achieve something come from envy of his neighbor, it is meaningless. Man was created to live and work for the glory of God. How meaningless it is for a man without God and without an heir to toil for wealth!

### 2. Loneliness (9-16)

God made people to live in community. When a person lives and works alone, he becomes selfish. When he falls down, there is no one to help him up. Only fellowship based on God's love can really solve the problem of loneliness (Jn 15:15; 16:32).

Prayer: Lord, help me to live for your glory and serve the body of Christ of which I am a part.

One Word: Suffer with Jesus

## TRUST GOD, NOT MONEY

Ecclesiastes 5:1-20

Key Verse: 5:15,19

### 1. Stand in awe of God (1-7)

God is our Almighty Creator. We must come into his presence to listen to his word so that we may obey him. He keeps his promises to us; when we make a promise to him, we should keep it.

Because we are selfish and tainted by pragmatism, we are sometimes tempted to forget the vows we have made to God. But we must stand in awe of God and fulfill all the vows we have made. Otherwise, God will be angry.

## 2. A gift of God (8-20)

Whoever loves money never has enough. Material wealth does not make a man happy, nor does it solve his life problems. We came into this world naked and empty-handed, and so we will depart. When we strive for wealth and acquire it, it becomes a burden. But when God gives us material and/or spiritual wealth, he enables us to enjoy what he gives. So we must seek first God's kingdom and his glory (Mt 6:33).

Prayer: Lord, teach me to seek you first and to joyfully accept and use for your glory what you give.

One Word: Don't love money; love God

## WHO KNOWS WHAT IS GOOD FOR A MAN?

Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

Key Verse: 6:12

### 1. God gives wealth, possessions and honor (1-7)

Solomon bemoans the tragedy of having wealth, possessions and honor, but never being able to enjoy them. God can give a man everything his heart desires, and God can enable him to enjoy it. A man without God in his life spends his efforts for his mouth (7), but he is never satisfied.

### 2. Who knows what is good for a man? (8-12)

People think they know what will make them happy and they try to get it. But they do not realize that their short time on this earth is but a preparation for eternity. Both the rich man and the poor man must die and stand before God's judgment seat. Only the eternal God knows what is good for a man in life. Knowing God the Giver is more important than enjoying his gifts. When we know him and try to please him, he satisfies our hearts and helps us prepare for eternity.

Prayer: Lord, thank you for saving me from a meaningless existence. Please help me to prepare for eternity with you.

One Word: God knows what is good

## CONSIDER WHAT GOD HAS DONE

Ecclesiastes 7:1-29

Key Verse 7:13a

1. What the living should take to heart (1-12)

Human expectations are almost always a disappointment. So pain, mourning, sadness and the rebuke of a wise man are all more valuable in strengthening one's inner life than are fleeting pleasures and empty praise. Money can corrupt the heart. Patience is better than pride and/or anger. It builds wisdom in the inner man. Wisdom is better security than money, for it preserves the life of its possessor (11,12).

2. Consider what God has done (13-29)

There are no accidents with God. He has led our lives until now. Our future is in his hand. Both the good times and the bad have a purpose in his plan. Life without God is meaningless. One who seeks to please God can escape the snare (26). Solomon needed to meet a prayerful woman (28). God made mankind good, but mankind turned from God. Only when we consider what God has done and is doing, can we find meaning in life.

Prayer: Lord, teach me your ways and give me spiritual wisdom that comes from you.

One Word: Consider what God has done

WISDOM BRIGHTENS A MAN'S FACE

Ecclesiastes 8:1-17

Key Verse: 8:1

1. Who knows the explanation of things? (1-8)

The Preacher observed "things under the sun." He saw the wisdom of doing what must be done in a timely and proper way, regardless of one's personal feelings. Kings must be respected and obeyed. Wise men know their limits. Wickedness makes men who practice it like prisoners of war.

2. It will go better for a God-fearing man (9-17)

The author looked for a way out of the chains of sin. He looked for justice under the sun. He saw the wicked go unpunished and prosper, the righteous suffer. He tried to know everything under the sun, but he could not understand what he learned, for he only discovered the injustice of life. So he applied his mind to know wisdom (16). "Then I saw all that God has done" (17). There is no justice "under the sun" but there is justice in God. When we do not see life from God's eternal perspective, we can find no meaning in life. So true wisdom comes from God.

Prayer: Lord, teach me your way, and let me see what you have done.

One Word: Fear God and seek his wisdom

LIFE "UNDER THE SUN"

Ecclesiastes 9:1-18

Key Verse: 9:11

1. A live dog is better than a dead lion (1-10)

"Under the sun" is repeated many times in this book. This means that the writer is looking at the world from a human point of view. When one sees death as the final end, he can have no eternal perspective. Death is the common destiny of all. So life "under the sun" is meaningless. However, there are three truths about life under the sun: (i) It is better to be alive than dead--a live dog is better than a dead lion; (ii) do what you do with a joyful heart; (iii) do whatever you do with all your might.

2. The race is not to the swift (11-18)

But there is something else. Success and happiness do not necessarily come to the man who has human advantages. God is in control of life, and he rules the world. God's wisdom is better than human strength, even if the wise man is not recognized. God gives wisdom to those who fear him and look at the world from his point of view.

Prayer: Lord, give me wisdom; help me to do with all my might what my hand finds to do.

One Word: The race is not to the swift

GOD IS THE MAKER OF ALL THINGS

Ecclesiastes 10:1-11:6

Key Verse: 11:5

1. No one knows what is coming (10:1-20)

As dead flies give perfume a bad odor, so a small mistake can ruin an otherwise honorable man's life. Honest, hard work can come to nothing because of one small accident. Even a good king can fail if he gives high positions to the wrong people. No matter how hard we work or how sincere we are, we can fail because of some small, unforeseen thing. So we need God's help and blessing, and God's forgiveness.

2. Cast your bread upon the waters (11:1-6)

The life of faith is a giving life. So we should learn to give freely, not expecting a reward. God blesses a giving life. Nothing done for God is lost. If we stop and calculate everything, then we

will do nothing. If we wait to understand everything before we make a commitment to God our Maker, then we will waste our lives. By God's grace, children are born and crops grow into a bountiful harvest.

Prayer: Lord, help me to live by your grace, and not by my calculations.

One Word: God is the Maker of all things

REMEMBER YOUR CREATOR

Ecclesiastes 11:7-12:14

Key Verse: 12:1,13b

1. In the days of youth (11:7-12:8)

Some young people want to wait a while before making a commitment to God. They want to "follow the ways of their hearts" and enjoy life. It is far better for a man to remember his Creator in the days of his youth and spend his best strength serving God. The man who squanders his youth on meaningless things will find no pleasure in his later years. And someday the silver cord will break and his spirit will return to God who gave it. Each person must stand before the judgment seat of God and give an account for what he has done while in the body, whether good or bad (2Co 5:10).

2. The conclusion of the matter (12:9-14)

Solomon was a wise and learned man. He had a lot of human wisdom. He found no meaning in life "under the sun" without God. So he concludes that the whole duty of man is to fear God and keep his commandments. This gives meaning to life.

Prayer: Lord, give me the true wisdom to fear you and keep your commandments.

One Word: Remember your Creator