



IN
OUT

English Standard Version

Ecclesiastes

LIFE UNDER THE SUN

IN AND OUT[®]
English Standard Version
ECCLESIASTES
LIFE UNDER THE SUN

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BEFORE YOU BEGIN WE WANT YOU TO KNOW . . .

We are thrilled that you have chosen to study *Ecclesiastes* with us. It will be such a blessing to your life because it is part of God's Word. The Bible is a progressive revelation—all sixty-six parts are essential to understanding the whole counsel of God. The content of each book of the Bible is critical to our lives; otherwise, God would not have included it in His eternal Word.

Ecclesiastes holds a unique place in the Bible. It's usually categorized as one of the wisdom or poetry books of the Bible. But it has in it several kinds of biblical literature which makes it some times difficult to interpret.

It has narrative like Job, dialogue like Song of Solomon, short statements of truth on various topics like Proverbs, and as in Psalms a variety of statements of truth, cries for help, and praises to God. *Ecclesiastes* is closer to a proverbial style, with many short statements of truth, but is almost its own category of wisdom literature.

It is full of truth that guides us in life. So as you dig into this sometimes perplexing book, remember that God wants us to learn principles for wise living. Search out those principles, those truths, and thank God for His gift of *Ecclesiastes*.

In this study we're going to approach interpreting *Ecclesiastes* from its own internal context. Therefore, only a few cross-references are in this study, which might be different from other Precept Upon Precept courses you have studied. That means prayerful, careful, and time-consuming observation of the text is the foundation for interpreting this book—even more so than with others

It's our prayer that you will see how critically relevant *Ecclesiastes* is to our times and to your life.



Nothing New Under the Sun

“A generation goes, and a generation comes . . . the sun rises, and the sun goes down . . . around and around goes the wind . . . streams run to the sea . . . and there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:4-9).

What is life all about? How are people to view their lives?

TAKING IT IN

If you haven't, please read “Before You Begin We Want You to Know. . .” on page 1. Ecclesiastes is going to be a most interesting study! Like each of the 66 books that comprise the Bible, Ecclesiastes has its own unique purpose. You'll want to remember this when you get into *this* book! There are truths and insights that you need to know and understand that will perfect you as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Before you begin any study of God's Word, it's always good to go to the Author and ask Him for His help as you study HIS book—to give you wisdom and understanding by the help of the Holy Spirit who is our teacher.

1. Read Ecclesiastes 1.
 - a. Mark or color-code references to the author. You might color each mention of him blue, including pronouns.
 - b. Now summarize what the author tells you about himself.



- c. As you observed, the author is the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Keeping in mind your observations from chapter 1 on the author, let's look at some cross-references that give us valuable information. Read the references and answer the questions. Compare the answers with what you observed in Ecclesiastes 1.

Which of David's sons became king in Jerusalem after him? And what was he like?

1) 2 Chronicles 1:1, 7-12

2) Proverbs 1:1

2. Now let's go back to Ecclesiastes and compare 1:1-2 with 12:8.
- a. What does this book seem to be about?



- b. The Hebrew word translated “vanity” is “*vapor, breath*”¹; “emptiness, futility, uselessness.”² It “means something meaningless and purposeless.”³
3. Now let’s observe Ecclesiastes 1 more closely.
 - a. Using your Observation Worksheets, read chapter 1 and mark *vanity*.
 - b. Look at the places you marked *vanity* and list what chapter 1 tells you about this key idea in Ecclesiastes in the space following.

- c. On the back cover of this workbook is a **Key Word Bookmark** suggesting ways to mark some words often used in the Bible.

Cut out this bookmark and on the blank side write *vanity*, as well as the words listed below, then mark them the way you will throughout Ecclesiastes.

- 1) *under the sun, under heaven* (Mark these phrases the same way.)
- 2) *wisdom*
- 3) *striving after wind*
- 4) *folly*
- 5) *God**

An asterisk [*] indicates a suggested mark on the Key Word Bookmark.

¹ Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries: Updated Edition* (Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998), H1892.

² James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

³ W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr., *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 25.



- d. Now read the chapter once again and mark the key repeated words and phrases each in a distinctive way—colors help.

Read the chapter more than once, marking only two or three words each time. By the way, if you read it aloud repeatedly, you'll find yourself memorizing it—and recalling it to mind!

- e. Next, let's dissect this chapter paragraph by paragraph. What did the Preacher want his readers to understand from this first chapter?

Note the main point of each paragraph in the margin of your Observation Worksheet or in the following space. The first verse of each paragraph is indicated with a bold verse number.

To see the main points in each paragraph, look at the key words you marked. Be sure to take time to think about the teaching in each of these paragraphs.

1) Verses 1-2

2) Verses 3-11

3) Verses 12-15

4) Verses 16-18

- f. Now you are ready to summarize what the whole chapter is about. Considering the paragraph content and using words from the text, write a possible theme for chapter 1 on your "Ecclesiastes at a Glance" chart in the Appendix. You might use a pencil to do this, especially if you're new to this kind of Bible study.



4. Let's move on in chapter 1.
 - a. First, let's focus on Ecclesiastes 1:3-11. Read these verses on your Observation Worksheet and answer the questions below.
 - 1) What's the question in verse 3?
 - 2) How do verses 4-9 relate to or answer the question?
 - 3) What's the question in verse 10?
 - 4) How do verses 10-11 relate?
 - b. We want to understand the flow of thought in this chapter. So, moving on to verses 12-15, how does what the Preacher says in verses 12-15 relate to the questions and answers in verses 3-11?
 - c. Based on your study so far, what do you think, "under the sun" and "under heaven" refer to?



- d. How does this chapter end—verses 16-18? What is the connection with what is before in the chapter?

 - e. The Preacher realized what he had set his mind to was “striving after wind.”
 - 1) What does verse 6 say about the wind?

 - 2) So what does “striving after wind” mean?

 - f. Did you notice that Solomon spoke of applying his heart? You might mark *heart* in verses 13, 16, and 17 with a red heart and add *heart* to your Key Word Bookmark.
5. Now let’s go to Ecclesiastes 2.
- a. After prayer, read chapter 2 using your Observation Worksheets and mark the words and phrases on your Key Word Bookmark.
 - b. Read the chapter again and mark the following. Add them to your Key Word Bookmark:
 - 1) time references*
 - 2) *joy, enjoy, pleasure, delight*
 - 3) *work, toil, labors*
 - 4) *wise* (like *wisdom*)
 - 5) *fool* (like *folly*)



- 6) *die*
- 7) *evil, sinner* (see *sin**)

Remember, an asterisk [*] indicates a suggested marking on the Key Word Bookmark.

- c. Summarize the main points of the paragraphs in this chapter either in the margin of your Observation Worksheets or below.
 - 1) 1-8
 - 2) 9-11
 - 3) 12-17
 - 4) 18-23
 - 5) 24-26
- d. Carefully look at the paragraph themes and note the progression of thought in this chapter.



- e. Summarize a theme for this chapter and note it on the At a Glance chart. Then record who you think the author is.
6. What do Ecclesiastes 1 and 2 say about God? Look at where you marked God and record what the text says on the page in the Appendix, “What Ecclesiastes Teaches about God.”
7. Now, prayerfully think through the first two chapters of Ecclesiastes. If the Preacher spoke about man trying to understand life from a purely human perspective, how do you see that leading to despair?
8. How does Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 relate to labor under the sun, folly, pleasure, and God?



LIVING
IT OUT

Finally, it's take-away time.

1. What have you learned from Ecclesiastes 1 and 2 for your life? For example: do you feel like your life is vanity? Does it seem like you're striving after wind? Do you want to avoid the vexation that comes with much wisdom and the sorrow that comes with increasing knowledge?

You might want to write what the Lord shows you for your life. Ask Him to give you understanding of why He has you studying these words of His at this time in your life.

2. Look at where you marked "heart." What have you applied your heart to?

3. What have you learned from this lesson that you can share with others?



There is nothing new under the sun—man is born, lives, and dies. What gives meaning to a person’s life? Think on Ecclesiastes 2:24-26.



ECCLESIASTES 1

Observation Worksheet

Chapter Theme _____

THE words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

- 2 Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher,
vanity of vanities! All is vanity.
- 3 What does man gain by all the toil
at which he toils under the sun?
- 4 A generation goes, and a generation comes,
but the earth remains forever.
- 5 The sun rises, and the sun goes down,
and hastens to the place where it rises.
- 6 The wind blows to the south
and goes around to the north;
around and around goes the wind,
and on its circuits the wind returns.
- 7 All streams run to the sea,
but the sea is not full;
to the place where the streams flow,
there they flow again.
- 8 All things are full of weariness;
a man cannot utter it;
the eye is not satisfied with seeing,
nor the ear filled with hearing.
- 9 What has been is what will be,
and what has been done is what will be done,
and there is nothing new under the sun.



- 10 Is there a thing of which it is said,
 “See, this is new”?
 It has been already
 in the ages before us.
- 11 There is no remembrance of former things,
 nor will there be any remembrance
 of later things yet to be
 among those who come after.
- 12 I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.
- 13 And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done
 under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children
 of man to be busy with.
- 14 I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity
 and a striving after wind.
- 15 What is crooked cannot be made straight,
 and what is lacking cannot be counted.
- 16 I said in my heart, “I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were
 over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom
 and knowledge.”
- 17 And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I
 perceived that this also is but a striving after wind.
- 18 For in much wisdom is much vexation,
 and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.



ECCLESIASTES 2

Observation Worksheet

Chapter Theme _____

I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.”

But behold, this also was vanity.

2 I said of laughter, “It is mad,” and of pleasure, “What use is it?”

3 I searched with my heart how to cheer my body with wine—my heart still guiding me with wisdom—and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the children of man to do under heaven during the few days of their life.

4 I made great works. I built houses and planted vineyards for myself.

5 I made myself gardens and parks, and planted in them all kinds of fruit trees.

6 I made myself pools from which to water the forest of growing trees.

7 I bought male and female slaves, and had slaves who were born in my house. I had also great possessions of herds and flocks, more than any who had been before me in Jerusalem.

8 I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man.

9 So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.

10 And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil.

11 Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.

12 So I turned to consider wisdom and madness and folly. For what can the man do who comes after the king? Only what has already been done.



- 13 Then I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness.
- 14 The wise person has his eyes in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I perceived that the same event happens to all of them.
- 15 Then I said in my heart, “What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?” And I said in my heart that this also is vanity.
- 16 For of the wise as of the fool there is no enduring remembrance, seeing that in the days to come all will have been long forgotten. How the wise dies just like the fool!
- 17 So I hated life, because what is done under the sun was grievous to me, for all is vanity and a striving after wind.
- 18 I hated all my toil in which I toil under the sun, seeing that I must leave it to the man who will come after me,
- 19 and who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all for which I toiled and used my wisdom under the sun. This also is vanity.
- 20 So I turned about and gave my heart up to despair over all the toil of my labors under the sun,
- 21 because sometimes a person who has toiled with wisdom and knowledge and skill must leave everything to be enjoyed by someone who did not toil for it. This also is vanity and a great evil.
- 22 What has a man from all the toil and striving of heart with which he toils beneath the sun?
- 23 For all his days are full of sorrow, and his work is a vexation. Even in the night his heart does not rest. This also is vanity.
- 24 There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God,
- 25 for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment?
- 26 For to the one who pleases him God has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, but to the sinner he has given the business of gathering and collecting, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a striving after wind.



ECCLESIASTES AT A GLANCE

Book Theme:

		Segment Divisions
Author:		Chapter Themes
Date: Purpose: Key Words:		1
		2
		3
		4
		5
		6
		7
		8
		9
		10
		11
		12



WHAT ECCLESIASTES TEACHES ABOUT GOD



IN
OUT

Ecclesiastes

What Ecclesiastes Teaches about God