

# Ecclesiastes

In the Hebrew Bible, the book is called “Qoheleth” which means “teacher of the assembly” (Ecc. 1:1). The translators of the Septuagint (Greek Old Testament) called it “Ekklesiastes,” which also means “teacher.”

## Authorship

Jewish and early Christian tradition attributes the book to Solomon. The author identifies himself as “the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (Ecc. 1:1). He also refers to himself as “the teacher” (Ecc. 1:1, 2, 12; 7:27; 12:8, 9, 10). The internal evidence also points to Solomon.

- His wisdom (Ecc. 1:16; cf. 1Ki. 3:12)
- His building activities (Ecc.2:4-6; cf. 1Ki. 7:1-12)
- His wealth (Ecc.2:7-9; cf. 2Ch. 9:13-28)
- His activities after writing this book (Ecc. 12:9-10; cf. 1Ki. 4:30-34)

## Outline

- I. The Introductory Affirmation (1:1-11)
  - A. Title and Theme (1:1-2)
  - B. The Futility of all Human Endeavor (1:3-11)
- II. The Futility of Work (1:12-6:9)
  - A. Personal Observations (1:12-2:17)
  - B. General Observations (2:18-6:9)
- III. The Limitations of Wisdom (6:10-11:6)
  - A. God's Sovereign Foreordination of all Things 6:10-12
  - B. God's Inscrutable Plan (7:1-8:17)
  - C. Man's Ignorance of the Future (9:1-11:6)
- IV. The Way of Wisdom (11:7-12:14)
  - A. Joyous and Responsible Living (11:7-12:7)
  - B. The Concluding Summary (12:8-14)

## Purpose

The teacher asks the question: “What profit has a man from all his labor in which he toils under the sun?” (Ecc. 1:3) In other words what is the purpose or meaning of life? Having been blessed with great material resources and wisdom, the teacher was able to explore and experience all things in life. Ecclesiastes is the result of his search for meaning in life.

## Message

There are two messages in the book of Ecclesiastes. The first is developed throughout the entirety of the book and the second is at the conclusion to the book

### ***First Message:***

“I have seen all things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.” (Ecc. 1:14)

This message is emphasized by two repeating themes throughout the book.

1. The first repeating theme is “everything is meaningless” (Ecc. 1:2). This phrase is used 35 times in 29 verses. It means “futility, uselessness, or nothingness.”

It is mentioned:

- Prior to describing his search for meaning (1:2, 14)
- Throughout the course of his search:
  - The vanity of pleasure (2:1)
  - The vanity of industry (labor) (2:11, 22-23; 4:4)
  - The vanity of human wisdom (2:15)
  - The vanity of all life (2:17)
  - The vanity of leaving an inheritance (2:18-21)
- Throughout his words of counsel and wisdom:
  - The vanity of earthly existence (3:19-21)
  - The vanity of acquiring riches over family (4:7-8)
  - The vanity of political popularity (4:16)
  - The vanity of many dreams and many words (5:7)
  - The vanity of loving abundance (5:10)
  - The vanity of wealth without the gift of God to enjoy it (6:2)
  - The vanity of wandering desire (6:9)
  - The vanity of foolish laughter (7:6)
  - The vanity of injustice in this life (8:14)
  - The vanity of the days of darkness (11:8)
  - The vanity of childhood and youth (11:10)
- At the conclusion of the book (12:8)

2. The second repeating theme is “under the sun.” This phrase is used 29 times in 27 verses. In the ancient world everything under the sun was the entirety of creation. The only thing that was above the sun was God. Therefore the teacher writes that when God is left out of the picture there can be no meaning in life.

### ***Second Message:***

“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” (Ecc. 12:13)

After a life of indulgence and lacking no item or experience, the teachers conclusion is that a respect for and obedience to God is the only purpose for humankind and the only thing that will bring meaning to ones life. This is the message that he would leave with those that come after him so that they do not have to experience the meaninglessness of life that he experienced (Ecc. 11:9-12:1). This message is also emphasized in Proverbs to which Solomon also wrote a majority of the book.

“Fearing the Lord is the beginning of moral knowledge, but41 fools despise wisdom and instruction.” (Prov. 1:7)

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart, and do not rely on your own understanding. Acknowledge him in all your ways, and he will make your paths straight.” (Prov. 3:16-18)