

ECCLESIASTES

Study Guide

AUTHOR

Traditionally King Solomon has been considered the author of this book, however recent scholarship challenges this. There is great evidence within the text for Solomon to be its author, especially Eccl. 1:12 which says, "I, the Teacher, was king of Israel, and I lived in Jerusalem." Additionally, the text refers to the author's wisdom (1:16), pleasures (2:3), servants (2:7), building projects (2:4-6), and wealth (2:8).

That said, numerous scholars think Solomon could not have written the book, for he would have named himself within the book. They also believe that because the book is not designed to be historical, but poetic, a someone who idealized Solomon and his teachings wrote under the inspiration of the Spirit to teach the lessons Solomon would have taught. This thought comes about due to words and phrases within the text which point toward a later time in Israel's history. However, these objections really are not strong enough to rule out Solomon as the author of Ecclesiastes.

What we know for certain is that the book was written by the "Teacher" or "Preacher" (1:1, 12). Now...for a quick Hebrew and Greek lesson. In Hebrew, the word *qopheleth* is used and means "one who convenes an assembly." In Greek, *ekklēsiastēs* is used, meaning "preacher." You might notice the title of the book reflects this Greek word: Ecclesiastes. The root of this word is *ekklēsia*, the same Greek word used in the New Testament to describe the church, or assembly of believers. Therefore, in both Hebrew and Greek, the author is described as one speaking to an assembly – preacher or teacher. Could Solomon still be "the Teacher" in this book? Possibly.

"The use of the name "the Teacher" indicates that the author is distancing himself from his role as absolute monarch and taking on the mantle of the sage. Both the name "the Teacher" and the use of third person allow him to do this...What emerges from Ecclesiastes is not a royal pronouncement but the reflection of a wise man who "has been" king. As we read the book, we are more and more absorbed in the words not of "King Solomon" but of "Solomon-become-'the Teacher.'"

-- Duane A. Garrett, The New American Commentary, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*

DATE

Assuming Solomon is the author, then the book was most likely written in Solomon's old age, somewhere between 971 – 931 B.C. The tone of the book reflects Solomon's spiritual state toward the end of his life (1 Kings 11). However, because of objections to spiritually-lapsed Solomon writing

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Scripture, and the use of words and phrases more common to later history, many believe the book was written after the exile, so around the time of Ezra (450 B.C.).

LITERARY STRUCTURE

There are quite a few variations of how Ecclesiastes is structured. Here are a few which portray the book quite well:

BASIC <i>By Dean Niforatos</i>	MORE DETAILED <i>Reasons for Hope*Jesus</i>
I. "All is Vanity" (1:1-11)	I. Author & Thesis (1:1-3)
II. Proof that "All is Vanity" (1:12-6:12)	II. Thesis Demonstrated (1:4-2:26)
III. Counsel for Living with Vanity (7:1-12:14)	III. God's Design for Life (3:1-22)
	IV. Futility of Various Circumstances of Life (4:1-5:20)
	V. Futility of Riches (6:1-12)
	VI. Counsel for Living (7:1-12:8)
	VII. Conclusion (12:9-14)

HELPFUL DEFINITIONS

Before we get into the observation words, it may be helpful to grasp some of the Hebrew understanding of frequently used words in the book.

- **Vanity / Meaningless** (*hebhel*) – means primarily “a breath” or “vapor,” such as an exhaled breath; used here to represent all that is “fleeting, perishable, transitory, frail and unsatisfying.” (James E. Smith, *The Wisdom Literature and Psalms*)
- **Profit / get / gain** (*yithron*) – not used anywhere in the Old Testament except for this book (used 10 times); means “that which remains”; an accounting term to describe the surplus on ledger after all assets and liabilities are considered
- **Under the sun** (*tachat ha shemesh*) – used in the sense of life here and now on earth without any thought toward spiritual things; the Teacher is challenging readers/listeners to consider, “If one leaves out any thought of heavenly (spiritual) things, what does he have left in life?” (James E. Smith, *The Wisdom Literature and Psalms*)
- **Wisdom** (*hokmah*) – usually refers to “piety, godliness, and virtue” in biblical literature; in Ecclesiastes, it is also used in the sense of human knowledge and human intellect; take care in looking at the context to determine whether human wisdom/intellect or Godly wisdom is referred to

OBSERVATION WORDS

I encourage you to first read the WHOLE book of Ecclesiastes without answering any of the summary questions. Look for and mark the following observation words.

- **Vanity / Meaningless**
- **Under the sun**
- **Chasing (after) the wind / striving after wind**
- **Wisdom / wise**
- **Folly / foolish / foolishness**

Also be aware of how the Trinity might be represented.

- **God**
- **Holy Spirit**
- **Jesus**

SUMMARY QUESTIONS

Now, read through the questions for each chapter/section and re-read the sections to answer the questions. To help you better understand the book, I've broken it down into smaller chunks to help you evaluate what you're reading as you go. There will also be some questions to help you summarize the book as a whole.

Chapter 1

- Summarize the point of this passage in your own words.
- What does it mean to "chase after the wind?"
- How is life described in vs. 4-11? Why is this important?
- In vs. 16-18, Solomon is specifically talking about human wisdom/intellect. What does he conclude about this?
- What verse in this section (1:1-18) is most meaningful to you & why?

Chapter 2

- Summarize the point of this passage in your own words.
- What various things Solomon test and accomplish (vs. 1-10), and what conclusion did he come to?
- What is the end that the wise and foolish both experience?
- Why does Solomon come to hate life and all things (vs. 17-23)?
- How does God fit into this picture (vs. 24-26)?
- What verse in this section (2:1-16) is most meaningful to you & why?

Chapter 3

- Summarize the main point of this passage in your own words.
- Name the various seasons. What do these seasons teach you?
- How does God fit into this picture (vs. 11, 14-17)?
- What gift of God does Solomon recognize (vs. 12-13), and what does this mean?
- What connections can you make to Christ in chapter 3?
- What verse in chapter 3 is most meaningful to you & why?

Chapter 4

- Summarize the point of this passage in your own words.
- What insights does Solomon have in vs. 1-7? What can you learn from this?
- What do you learn about life and companionship in vs. 8-12?
- What is being described in vs. 13-16? What does this teach you?
- What connections to Christ and the Holy Spirit can you find in chapter 4?
- What is the most meaningful verse to you in chapter 4, and why?

Chapter 5-6

- Summarize in your own words the main point(s) of chapter 5-6.
- What warnings and conclusion are given in 5:1-7? (*Note: If using the NLT, translate "keep your mouth shut" as "rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools."*)
- What do you learn about oppression and wealth in 5:8-17 and 6:1-9? How does this compare to 1 Tim. 6:6-17?
- How does God fit into this scenario of wealth (5:19-20) and what does this mean for you?
- How does 6:10-12 further support 5:1-7?
- What verse is most meaningful to you in chapter 5-6? Why?
- How do you see God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit represented in these chapters?

Chapter 7-8

- Put into your own words the main thoughts of chapter 7-8.
- Why is it better to “go to the house of mourning” rather than the “house of feasting?” What does this mean? (7:2, 4)
- What is the point of 7:10? Why is this important?
- What is 7:15-18 speaking about and what does it mean?
- What do you learn about human wisdom and foolishness in 7:15-29?
- What do you learn about wickedness and righteousness in 8:1-14?
- What is Solomon’s conclusion in 8:15-17?
- How is God, Christ, and the Holy Spirit represented in these chapters?
- What verse is most meaningful to you and why (ch. 7-8)?

Chapters 9-10

- Summarize in your own words the main thoughts of this passage.
- What is Solomon’s conclusion in 9:1-3?
- What are the instructions are given in 9:7-10? What does this mean for you & your life?
- What lessons do you learn about wisdom in 9:13-18?
- What do you learn about folly / the fool in chapter 10?
- What warning is given in 10:20?

- How do you see God, Christ, and the Spirit represented in this section?
- What verse was most meaningful to you and why? (ch. 9-10)

Chapter 11-12

- Summarize in your own words the main point of this section (ch. 11-12).
- What does 11:1-6 speak about and what practical advice can you apply to your life and faith?
- What advice does Solomon give to the young in 11:9-12:7? How is the old in age described? What piece of advice do you need to apply to your life right now?
- Put into your own words Solomon's overall thoughts in 12:8-12. What does he view as the most important of all?
- How do you see God, Jesus, and the Spirit represented in this section (ch. 11-12)
- What verse is most meaningful to you and why (ch. 11-12)

OVERALL SUMMARY QUESTIONS

- What did the **Lord teach YOU** through what you read & how will you apply it in your life?
- **Key Word** (condense the book into a word or short phrase):
- **Key Verse** (a main thought or something that spoke to you):
- **Key Chapter** (significant points, turning point, etc.):
- How was **God** represented in the book? **Jesus? Holy Spirit?**