



Title

Ecclesiastes gets its title from the editor or compiler of this work who is called “the Preacher” (other translations refer to him as the “assembler”). In Hebrew, this individual is referred to as the Qoheleth which is translated in Greek as Ekklesiastes.¹

Author

Strictly speaking, this book is anonymous since no personal name is attached to it. However, arguments have been made in scholarship to suggest that Solomon is the author given that the book describes the Preacher (Qoheleth) as the “son of David, king of Jerusalem” (1:1) and as someone who has acquired great and surpassing wisdom (1:16), and whose reign was prosperous (2:1-9).² Others have suggested that Solomon is not the author, and that perhaps a redactor, such as Ezra, compiled the works. Generally, most scholars agree that the content of Ecclesiastes is attributed to the reflections of Solomon.

Date

As with the authorship, the date of this work is disputed. One’s conclusion on the date of the work is largely connected to whom they believe the author to be. Those who conclude that Solomon is the author will land on an earlier date for its composition, while those who believe that it was written by someone other than Solomon will land on a later date. However, most will conclude that Solomon made these reflections while reigning as king over a unified Israel.

Genre

Ecclesiastes falls under the genre of Wisdom Literature and Poetry. Like other books of wisdom in the Bible, the aim of Ecclesiastes is to impart wisdom and teach its readers to fear the Lord. Ecclesiastes is unique in its approach in that the author accomplishes this along a reflective path, as compared to Proverbs which does this through proverbial nuggets of practical wisdom.³

Keep in mind that much of wisdom literature and poetry is filled with imagery, and figures of speech that are designed to make the reader think and reflect. A key to unlocking the meaning of Ecclesiastes is to identify these figures of speech (i.e. emotional language, hyperbole, parallelism, contrast etc.) and examine them more intently. It may be helpful to ask the following questions:⁴

- Who composed this material?
- Can you determine why?
- What is the central theme of the poem?
- What emotions does the verse convey, and what response does it produce?
- What questions does it ask?
- Which ones does it answer, and which does it leave unanswered?
- What does the poem say about God? About people?
- What images does the poet use to spark the imagination?

Specific Advice for Reading Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes is known to be a difficult book to read and interpret for a variety of reasons. The book as a whole lacks a clear structure, outline, and unified thought. In addition, there are statements within the book that appear to contradict other statements that are made. When reading this book it is important to understand that the author is providing a realistic account of the human experience within a fallen world. He speaks realistically about the brevity of human life as well as our search for meaning within it. This will lead some interpreters to fall into the pitfalls of Hedonism (pursuing pleasure) or a fatalistic pessimistic view of the world (why care if life is meaningless and we all die?) It is also important to recognize that the perspective of the author is different than ours given that we have received the fuller revelation of God through the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, as well as the writings of the apostles. We live in light of the realities of the cross, and the future hope of resurrection that Jesus promises to all who are united to him. With this in mind, the author of Ecclesiastes proposed 4 realities that should help you put handles on understanding this book⁵:

1. God is the single indisputable reality. He is the Creator of all and one through whom all life comes as a gift (3:12-14)
2. God's ways are not always understandable (3:11; 8:17)
3. On the human side, what is "done under the sun" (2:17) doesn't always add up and make sense. The way things should be is not in fact the way things are
4. The great equalizer is death, which neither the rich, poor, wise, or foolish can escape.

In short, attempt to read the book from the author's perspective - a teacher of wisdom who, living before the resurrection, recognizes that life in the present world doesn't always add up.

The Message of Ecclesiastes

The message of Ecclesiastes is driven by its use of the word "hebel" (used 38 times) which literally means "vapor", to describe life. This word is also translated as "vanity" which communicates a temporary nature of life that is ultimately meaningless. What spoils life, according to Ecclesiastes, is the attempt to get more out of life - work, pleasure, money, food, and knowledge - than life is able to provide.⁶ Pursuing meaning on earth, through earthly means, is like eating sugar air. It's sweet in the moment, but ultimately leave you empty. The author of Ecclesiastes goes to great lengths to communicate that no matter how wise, or rich, or successful one may be, one cannot find meaning in life apart from God.

This belief that all of life is hebel (vanity) should lead believers to fear the Lord, whose work has no end and will endure forever. True wisdom, according to the author, is to fear God even when we cannot see or understand all that God is doing.⁷

Gospel Themes in Ecclesiastes

When one reads Ecclesiastes they are immediately reminded of the Romans 8:20 reality that all of creation, as a result of the Fall in Genesis 3, is subjected to futility awaiting redemption. We all live life with the realization that this is not how the world should be. And this is an appropriate impulse, because we know that God created all of creation to be good as a reflection of his goodness and holiness. But

as a result of sin, the good creation that God made is now cursed. This curse has made life meaningless, frustrating, and violent. The book of Ecclesiastes captures the fallen reality of our world as we know it and puts words to it. As you read Ecclesiastes you will be reminded time and time again that the pursuit of happiness, success, pleasure, and security, apart from God, will always leave you wanting.

And this is where the good news of the gospel comes in. The good news of the gospel says that those who are united to Jesus, can find meaning, joy, security, forgiveness, and hope because Jesus Christ came to rescue his people and creation from the curse of the Fall. God's plan is to redeem, renew, restore, and ultimately recreate all that have been touched by the curse of the Fall. And he does this by subjecting himself to the same futility that we experience on a day to day basis. He humbled himself and took on human flesh and all the frustrations that come with it in order to become a curse for us, so that the world might be rescued and redeemed from the effects of the curse. So as you read and study this book, do not lose sight of the truth that Jesus' life, death, resurrection, and ascension changes everything! ■

○ how to use this study ○

This study is divided into 14 weeks. Each week will include a personal study and a group discussion. This study can be completed individually, but we believe that it is best completed within the context of a gospel-centered community.

Our recommendation for you is to read the assigned biblical text each week and work through it slowly and prayerfully. The time and effort that you put into the personal study will enhance and strengthen your group discussion. We also urge you to not view this study as a task to be completed. Rather, view it as an opportunity to engage with the living God through his revealed word. Our hope is that your heart will be drawn to worship and cherish Christ more deeply because of the truths that you encounter in this study.

After completing the personal study, come prepare each week to discuss what God is teaching you and how he is ministering to you through his word.

Group Leader Instructions

Before the Group Meeting

1. Spend time slowly working through the personal study.
2. In preparation for the group discussion, read over the questions and think how you would answer them personally.
3. Write down a few ideas on how you can help your group apply the truths in the passage.
4. Spend time praying for each member of your group and that the truth would intersect their hearts in profound way.

At the Group Meeting

1. Begin with a word of prayer and read the passage aloud.
2. Attempt to summarize the week's lesson with a few quick thoughts. Spend some time asking your group about the personal study and what they found interesting, convicting, or encouraging.
3. Walk your group through the discussion questions. Don't feel the need to go through every question. At times, there will be healthy discussion. At other times, you may need to help keep the group on track.
4. End your time in prayer.

Observation: *What do I see?*

When we read the Bible we need to ask the following 6 questions:

1. WHO?

- a. Who is the author?
- b. Who is the audience?
- c. Who is speaking?
- d. Who are the characters in the book?

2. WHAT?

- a. What is the tone of the book/passage?
- b. What is the context?
- c. What are the key words and what do they mean?

3. WHEN?

- a. When was the book written?
- b. When did this event happen in relation to other events?
- c. When was this prophecy fulfilled or has it been?

4. WHERE?

- a. Where was the book written?
- b. Where are the recipients of the book living?
- c. Where else does this topic appear in scripture?

5. WHY?

- a. Why was this book written?
- b. Why does the author include this material and not other things?
- c. Why does the author give so much space to that topic and so little to another?

6. HOW?

- a. How many times does the author use the same word in this book, chapter, passage, and/or verse?
- b. How does this relate to the verses before and after?

Interpretation: *What does it mean?*

Guidelines for Interpretation:¹

- 1. Work from the assumption that the Bible is authoritative
- 2. Approach the Bible in prayer
- 3. Read the Bible in community
- 4. Interpret difficult passages in light of clear passages
- 5. Interpret personal experience in light of Scripture and not Scripture in light of personal experience
- 6. Remember that Scripture has one meaning but many applications
- 7. Interpret words and passages in harmony with their meaning in the time of the author
- 8. You must understand the bible grammatically before you can understand it theologically
- 9. Check your conclusions using reliable sources

5 C's of Interpretation:²

1. Content - the raw material of the passage and the observations made during the observation step
2. Context - refers to what comes before and after
 - a. Literary Context - Where does this passage fit within the chapter, the book, and the bible as a whole?
 - b. Historical - What were some of the social and political influences on the writer and those whom he was writing?
 - c. Geographic - What was the terrain like? What makes this region unique? What is the location known for? What size city is it?
 - d. Theological - What did this author know about God? What was the relationship of his readers to God? What other worldviews were competing for influence?
3. Comparison - compare scripture with other scripture. Look at the cross references and let scripture interpret itself.
4. Culture - you have to pay attention to the cultural and historical context - to the factors that led to the writing of the passage, the influences they had on the text, and what happened as a result of the message
5. Consultation - involves the use of secondary resources such as bible commentaries, study bibles, concordances, etc.

5 Crucial Questions to Ask:

1. What does the text teach about God and his character?
2. What does the text teach about fallen humanity?
3. How does the text point to Christ?
4. What does God want His people to know?
5. What does God want His people to do?

Application: How does it work?

Be SPECIFIC:

- S - Is there a Sin to avoid or repent of?
- P - Is there a Promise from God to claim and act on?
- E - Is there an Example for you to follow?
- C - Is there a Command to obey?
- I - What Information can strengthen your faith?
- F - Did you Find a verse to memorize?
- I - What Ideas are there for prayer?
- C - What Challenge did you face

personal study: ecclesiastes 1:1-18

Before you read Ecclesiastes, write down in a few sentences what you expect to encounter in this book based on what you have heard.

Observation | Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-18 and answer the following questions:

1. The author is described as “the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (v.1). Many interpreters conclude that this individual is Solomon. What do you know about Solomon and what makes him suited to write this book?
2. The author concludes that “All is vanity” (v.2) The word used for vanity here is hebel which is translated literally as “vapor or mist”. What does the author mean that all is “vapor or mist”? What does this teach us about life?
3. The phrase “under the sun” in verse 3 will occur repeatedly throughout this book. What do you think it means? How do you think the author would answer his own question in verse 3?
4. In verses 4-11 the author observes the cycles of nature and human experience. What conclusions does he make? Can you identify any themes or repeated ideas within these verses? *Hint: look for words that communicate activity and net effect of that activity.*

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5. Starting in verse 12 the author moves from what he has observed in nature to what he has learned from his observations. One of his conclusions can be seen in verse 14. What is his conclusion? What does the imagery in this verse communicate about activity done “under the sun”?
6. How does the author describe himself in verse 16? How does this give him a unique perspective on life? What is his ultimate conclusion in verse 18? Why do you think he arrived at this conclusion?
7. Summarize what you just read:
- What words would you use to describe the tone of this passage?
 - Do your best to explain this passage in 1-2 sentences.
8. Write down any questions that you have about this passage

Answer the following questions as a group:

1. What stood out to you during your study of this passage? Did you have any questions about the text?

2. The author concludes that life under the sun is vanity (or meaningless). Is this something that you can relate to? Why or why not?
 - a. Why do you think this is the way life is?

3. In verses 4-11 provides examples from nature and personal experience of how a lot of activity does not produce any meaningful change. It paints a picture of a cycle of monotony where we all just go through the motions and nothing happens. What are things that you engage in that seem monotonous or unending?

4. How do you cope with the monotony of life?
 - a. What are some harmful ways that people cope with this reality?

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- b. How has the way that you cope with this reality changed since becoming a Christian?
5. How does Christ bring significance and meaning to all of our actions, including the ones that seem mundane?
6. What are some ways that we as a group can practically remind each other of these truths (i.e. the answers given in question 5) throughout the week?

Before you read Ecclesiastes 2:1-26, write down your major takeaway from the previous section.

Observation | Read Ecclesiastes 2:1-26 and answer the following questions:

1. In 2:1-2, the teacher changes his pursuits. What pursuits does he recap in this section? Are pleasure, joy, amusement, and laughter to be viewed as good, bad, or something in between? Why?
2. The teacher reminds the reader why he is doing this in 2:3. What is the reason for his pursuits and teaching? Why is the *purpose of life* something worth investigating?
3. The teacher summarizes his findings from pursuing accomplishments and possessions in 2:4-11. What does he conclude? What reward did he gain from his work?
4. The next section, 2:12-17 is very similar to 1:12-18. Wisdom is the pursuit. So, is wisdom actually better than folly? Why or why not?
5. What is the one thing both the wise and the fool cannot escape? How does death put the accumulation of wisdom into proper perspective?

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6. Physical (pleasure, toil, possessions) pursuits. Intellectual (wisdom) pursuits. Now back to physical pursuits in 2:18-23. What is the teacher's conclusion when any of the following become the **ultimate** pursuit: pleasure, alcohol, art, nature, work, money, possessions, sex, approval, or wisdom?
7. What changes in the final paragraph of the chapter (2:24-26) when the teacher introduces the idea of "the hand of God"?
- a. There seems to be a thread of hope from the teacher in seeing simple things like food, drink, and joy as gifts from God. Comment on the contrast between the one who pleases God and the sinner (2:26). How do the spiritual gifts of wisdom, knowledge, and joy compare to amassing that which cannot be kept?¹
8. Summarize what you just read:
- a. What words would you use to describe the tone of this passage?
- b. Do your best to explain this passage in 1-2 sentences.
9. Write down any questions that you have about this passage.

Answer the following questions as a group:


1. What stood out to you during your study of this passage? Did you have any questions about the text?
2. What are some things you have pursued in life that have made life enjoyable (other than God)? How about some things that have made life difficult?
3. Are you more apt to desire physical pursuits (possessions, work, pleasure outside of yourself) or intellectual pursuits (wisdom, knowledge, how others see you)? Why?
4. The teacher in Ecclesiastes shares lessons from his experiences throughout the book. How does God use lessons from our own experiences for the good of others? Do you have an example of a valuable lesson you have shared with someone and how God used it in their spiritual formation?
5. In 2:25, the teacher says that God is the source of provision and enjoyment. Why do we pursue avenues other than God to fulfill us?

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6. In Philippians 1:18, Paul finds joy in Christ despite being imprisoned, afflicted, and facing death. How can he do so? How does having a Christ-centered purpose for his life (Romans 15:20) allow Paul to rejoice even in this situation?
7. How do God's grace and God's sovereignty shape the Christian view of the purpose of life and the perspective on death?
8. How can we as a group encourage one another to enjoy God's gifts of grace to us this week?

Before you read Ecclesiastes 3:1-15, write down your major takeaway from the previous section.

Observation | *Read Ecclesiastes 3:1-15 and answer the following questions:*

1. In the passage, what repeated words and themes do you see? What contrasting words and themes do you see?
2. In verses 1-8, the author lists twenty-eight different seasons of life. We could categorize these into two groups: Delight and Disquiet.¹ Identify which belong to each category and look for any common themes between stanzas (every two lines).
3. In verse 9, the author uses the word “toil”. Where else have you seen this term in the book so far, and what has he said concerning it?
4. Beginning in verse 10, God is mentioned nine times in the final six verses. What does the author say about Him?
5. The author wrote in verse 11, “He [God] has made everything beautiful in its time.” How does this change the way we interpret the beginning of this passage?

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6. Also in verse 11, we read, “he [God] has put eternity into man’s heart.” What do you think the author means by this?

 7. What did the author perceive concerning humanity in verses 12 and 13? How is this consistent with his previous conclusions in the book so far? How is it different?

 8. What did the author perceive concerning God in verses 14 and 15? How do you think He came to this conclusion?

 9. Summarize what you just read:
 - a. What words would you use to describe the tone of this passage?

 - b. Do your best to explain this passage in 1-2 sentences.

 10. Write down any questions that you have about this passage.

Answer the following questions as a group:

1. What stood out to you during your study of this passage?
2. Do any of the “times” in verses 1-8 describe your current season? Try to pick 1 or 2.
3. In verse 1, the author wrote, “For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven,” and in verse 11, he wrote, “[God] has made everything beautiful in its time.” Do you find yourself either wishing that your current season would never end or that it would end sooner so you can get to the next one? As best you can, try to explain why that is.
4. When you look back at your life, do you tend to emphasize the seasons of Delight or Disquiet?² Why is that?
5. If God “has made everything beautiful in its time,” then what does this tell us about eternity? How should this change the way I live in my current season?



6. Ecclesiastes was written before the coming of Christ. But Jesus said that all of scripture is fulfilled in Him (Matt. 5:17-18; Lk. 24:27; John 5:39). So, how does this passage point us to Jesus? For help, consider these questions:
 - a. Does this passage show us a reason why we need Him?

 - b. Does this passage point to His salvation?

 - c. How does Jesus' incarnation impact the message of this passage?


7. How should the realities in this passage change the way you think about your current season of life? What about the way you think about eternity?

○ personal study: ecclesiastes 3:16-4:16 ○

Before you read Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:16, write down your major takeaway from the previous section.

Observation | *Read Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:16 and answer the following questions:*

1. In verses 3:16-17 the author of Ecclesiastes observes the wickedness and injustice in the world. Who is the ultimate judge and why should that be a comfort to us?
2. In verses 3:18-22 we see a comparison between men and animals (beasts). What do you think is the purpose for this comparison?
3. This passage draws our attention back to the fall of man. Go back and read Genesis 3. What are some similar words and phrases that you see in these two passages?
4. In Ecc. 4:1, what was the disturbing reality that was being observed? Why is it disturbing to see the weak overpowered by their oppressors?

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5. What three types of people are described in Ecc. 4:2-3? Who does the author of Ecclesiastes conclude is better off? Why do you think he makes this conclusion?

 6. From verse 4:4, how and why is it that our work, labor and achievement can be wrapped up in the envy of our neighbor?

 7. Verses 4:7-12 give us a beautiful picture of the importance of Christian community. From this passage, what characterizes someone who is alone? What characterizes someone who is living in community? Why is this an important comparison?

 8. The conclusion of Chapter 4 (verses 13-16) gives us a picture to understand the difference between wisdom and foolishness. What was it that made the old king foolish?

 9. Summarize what you have read in this section (3:16-4:16) in 1-2 sentences.

 10. Write down any questions that you have about this passage.

Answer the following questions as a group:

1. What stood out to you during your study of this passage? Did you have any questions about the text?
2. What are some unjust things you see in the world? How does the promise of God's righteous judgment comfort us when we see this wickedness and injustice?
3. If we are honest, we often want mercy for ourselves but justice for others. (Ex. Mercy for us if we get pulled over for speeding, but justice for the one who breaks into our house.) Why is that the case?
4. What happens to us at death? How should we live in light of the fact that our life on this planet is relatively short?
5. What would it be like to live in this world surrounded by wickedness and oppression but have 'no one to comfort us'? Why does this lead to despair and hopelessness? How can we, as believers, offer hope to those in this position?

6. What are the principles of Christian community that we see in Ecc. 4:9-12? What are some specific ways we can apply these principles in our community group?

7. One problem of the foolish king in 4:13 was that he did not know how to take advice. How can we avoid the trap of becoming unteachable?

personal study: ecclesiastes 5:1-7

Before you read Ecclesiastes 5:1-7, write down your major takeaway from the previous section.

Observation | *Read Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 and answer the following questions:*

1. This passage begins by illustrating a posture of worship. What does this passage communicate about God's character and what he desires of his people? (Consider Exodus 3:5 and 1 Samuel 15:22.)
2. Look at Matthew 5:33-37 and Proverbs 10:19. How do they correlate with this passage? How do these verses challenge the way in which we speak?
3. The author mentions 3 religious rituals in this passage. What are they? What conclusions does he make?
4. This passage ends in v. 7 with a reminder that our dreams and plans are ultimately a mist. How does this reality lead you to find hope and security in God?

5. Are there areas of your life where you are not trusting God with the hopes and dreams that you have?

6. Summarize what you just read in 1-2 sentences.

group discussion: ecclesiastes 5:1-7

Answer the following questions as a group:

1. What stood out to you during your study of this passage? What are some questions that came to mind about this text?
2. In light of v. 1-2, how does God's holiness and righteousness lead you in obedience to Him?
3. How does this passage and Matthew 5:33-37 lead you to be more thoughtful in what you say towards God and others? How does the busyness and noncommittal nature of our culture influence this?
4. What are some dreams that you have? How does this passage impact the way we should view our dreams and find freedom in trusting God in the midst of those dreams?

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5. This passage mentions several religious rituals that the author has participated in (i.e. offerings, prayer, and vows), and he concludes that they are all vanity.
- a. How can rituals become meaningless?

 - b. How does Jesus add meaning to our religious rituals?
6. Is there someone you can share this hope with this week? Take some time as a group to pray for these people.

Before you read Ecclesiastes 5:8-20, write down your major takeaway from the previous section.

Observation | Read Ecclesiastes 5:8-20 and answer the following questions:

1. Read through the passage two or three times. What themes do you see emerge? Make note of which themes are new and which are continued from the previous chapters.
2. Verses 8 and 9 speak of those in high positions (officials and kings). Contrast the difference in the rulers in verses 8 and 9. Why are the officials in verse 8 different than the king in verse 9?
3. In verse 10, the love of money is referred to as “vanity.” Other translations use the word “futile.” Why is this the case?
4. Read verse 15, then compare to Job 1:21 and 1 Timothy 6:7. How does this clarify the point the author is making about the futility of wealth?
5. In verses 13-17, what is the author trying to communicate about the nature of work?

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6. Read verses 18-19. Is the author advocating a hedonistic lifestyle? Why or why not? What is the author saying that the secret to contentment is? (verse 20).

 7. Summarize what you just read: do you best to explain this passage in 1-2 sentences.

 8. Write down any questions that you have about this passage.

Answer the following questions as a group:

1. What stood out to you during your study of this passage? Did you have any questions about the text?

2. Are you ever tempted to feel despair in your work (this can be your job as well as the work of everyday life)? Why?
 - a. What do you wish was different?

3. What is your relationship with money and wealth?
 - a. Do you see it as something to steward and share or do you live as if you are going to take it with you?

 - b. Is there anything you need to change?

4. How can we help each other enjoy God and be content in our circumstances?

5. How does the gospel of Jesus inform our work and our contentment with our station in life?



Before you read Ecclesiastes 6:1-12, write down your major takeaway from the previous section.

Observation | Read Ecclesiastes 6:1-12 and answer the following questions:

1. Read verse 1. Without reading ahead, what would you think this “evil” is?

2. Read verses 2-12. What does the author actually say this “evil” is that “lies heavy on mankind”?

3. In verse 3, the author refers to a man whose “soul is not satisfied with life’s good things.”
 - a. What things do you think would qualify as “life’s good things”? What is the author referring to?

 - b. What are some of “life’s good things” with which you try to satisfy your soul but cannot?

4. Explain the contrast of the stillborn child and the father of 100 children in verses 3-6. What is the author’s message in contrasting these two people?

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5. In verse 9, the author says that “the wandering of the appetite” is “vanity and striving after wind.”
- a. Does your “appetite” wander? How does it wander, and to where does it wander?

 - b. What has the Lord placed in front of you, in “the sight of your eyes,” that you need to stare at instead of letting your gaze drift?
6. Verses 8, 11, and 12 ask five questions. Ponder each question.
- a. What does the author want you to learn by considering and answering each question?

 - b. What are some other Scripture references that provide the answers to these questions?
7. Summarize what you just read in chapter 6:
- a. What words would you use to describe the tone of this passage?

 - b. Do your best to explain this passage in 1-2 sentences.
8. Write down any questions that you have about this passage

○ group discussion: ecclesiastes 6:1-12 ○

Answer the following questions as a group:

1. What stood out to you during your study of this passage? Did you have any questions about the text?
2. What does Jesus say about satisfaction and appetite? List specific examples in Scripture where He spoke on this.
3. Read verse 7 and discuss its meaning and interpretation. (See Proverbs 16:25-27)
 - a. Is this true of us? If so, how does this scenario play out in our lives?
 - b. What are some examples of Biblical examples who were never satisfied?
 - c. What are some examples of Biblical examples who were satisfied in the Lord?

4. How is the Gospel foreseen in verse 10?

5. How does this chapter convict and change you? Can anyone share an example of a changed life in the context of this chapter?

6. What are some ways that we as a group can practically remind each other of these truths (i.e. the answers given in question 5) throughout the week?

Before you read Ecclesiastes 7:1-29, write down your major takeaway from the previous section.

Observation | Read Ecclesiastes 7:1-29 and answer the following questions:

1. Think back over the last several chapters of Ecclesiastes and note one or two of the biggest takeaways from this book.
2. In much of chapter 7, the Preacher writes about how the death of others can cause people to live in a different way. Has there been a time in your life when sorrow pushed you further into the knowledge and love of God? What are some specific things that you learn about God during these times?
3. The preacher warns about the danger of surrounding yourself with fools and the benefits of being around wisdom. Do you have people in your life that can lovingly, and gently rebuke you? If so, how have you seen God use these people to mature you?
4. Verses 21 and 22 warn against being easily offended by others' words because you have most likely used offensive words yourself. Do you find yourself being easily offended or the offensive person?

5. The Preacher finishes chapter 7 by noting that there are righteous people in the world, but none are without sin. How does the gospel give us hope given this reality?

6. Summarize what you just read: Do your best to explain this passage in 1-2 sentences.

7. Write down any questions that you have about this passage.

Answer the following questions as a group:

1. What stood out to you during your study of this passage?
 - a. Did you have any questions about the text?

2. Ecclesiastes warns against the trap of nostalgia in a few places, specifically in verse 10. What is the real danger of thinking of “...the former days better than these?” and is this a trap you fall into?

3. Verses 15 through 18 is a condemnation of both self-righteousness and of licentiousness.
 - a. Which of these do you lean toward?

 - b. How can this group help correct you?

4. How do you keep from letting anger lodge in your chest, like the warning in verse 9?

5. What is the one thing you will take from this chapter to help you grow in your life as a Christian?

Before you read this chapter, think about what you have read so far in Ecclesiastes. Do you think wisdom is actually attainable? If so, to what extent?

Observation | Read Ecclesiastes 8:1-17 and answer the following questions:

1. The theme of life under the sun runs throughout this chapter, specifically viewing the quest for wisdom as meaningless. How does the author's pursuit of wisdom in v. 1 impact your view of wisdom? How does the author anticipate feeling if he is able to find the wisdom he is seeking?
2. In verses 2-5, the author explains why we should be obedient to the king's commands. Although our country does not have a king, how does this passage affect how we interact with authority of the government? Why are we called to submit to this authority? When should this submission end?
3. Verses 5-9 outline reasoning for living from wisdom. What are some of the reasons mentioned in this passage? Do these reasons encourage you and increase your hope?
4. Verse 7-8 highlights the limitations of those who are in control. What are they? And how should this affect the way we view them and respond to them?

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5. What do verses 10-13 teach us about sin and mankind? What role does fear of God play into our battle with sin?

 6. In verses 1-14, does the author have an eternal perspective on wise living? If he does, what encouragement would you offer to help him work through his struggles? If he does not, what would help to correct this perspective?

 7. What is the author's big conclusion in verse 14? How does the gospel help us make sense of the reality that the wicked may prosper in this life, while the righteous may not?

 8. How does the attitude of the author change in verses 15-17? What is his ultimate conclusion about the quest for wisdom? What roles does humility play in our pursuit of wisdom?

 9. Summarize what you just read: Do your best to explain this passage in 1-2 sentences.

 10. Write down any questions that you have about this passage.

Answer the following questions as a group:

1. What stood out to you during your study of this passage? Did you have any questions about the text?

2. The author displays the importance of submitting to the authority of the land. What are our responsibilities laid out here and other places in scripture pertaining to government? At what point is it permissible to no longer submit to authority?

3. Verses 10-13 highlight that individuals continue to sin because they see no immediate judgment for their sin. How do you make sense of this? Has this been true of your life?

4. In verses 10-14, Solomon questions “why bad things happen to good people”, and “why blessings come to the wicked?”
 - a. How do you reconcile these questions with a merciful and just God?

 - b. What issues in reasoning could be present?

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5. The author comes to the conclusion that the wicked prosper despite their wickedness, and the righteous suffer despite their good deeds. As a result, he concludes that all is vanity. Do you agree? How does following Jesus provide hope and meaning to your life when you experience this reality?
6. Verses 16-17 highlight our inability to understand fully what God is doing at any given moment. What role does humility play in our pursuit of wisdom and of God?
7. What parts of this passage point to the gospel? How does Christ fulfill this scripture?

Before you read Ecclesiastes 9:1-10, write down your major takeaway from the previous section.

Observation | Read Ecclesiastes 9:1-10 and answer the following questions:

1. What do you think it means to be “in the hand of God”? Based on this verse, who is in the hand of God? In the second half of the verse, the Teacher says, “Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him.” What is the Teacher uncertain about?
2. Read Eccl. 8:12-13. What is the key distinction between the Teacher’s confidence in chapter 8 versus his uncertainty in this chapter?
3. Two groups of people are being described in verse 2. List out all the differences you can find. Do you see any repeating words or phrases throughout the passage? Or any repeating phrases or ideas from previous chapters?
4. What event(s) is the Teacher alluding to in verses 2-4? Based on the comparisons made in verse 2, is it possible for someone to determine their standing before God based on life circumstances?

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5. Looking at verses 5 and 6, what three things does the Teacher claim people lose when they die?

 6. What is the Teacher's conclusion based on verses 7-10? Does this surprise you? How does the death and resurrection of Christ change this conclusion?

 7. Summarize what you just read: Do your best to explain this passage in 1-2 sentences.

 8. What questions do you have about this passage?

Answer the following questions as a group:

1. What questions did you have about this passage?

2. In this life, does God treat everyone more or less the same with both good and evil things happening to the righteous and the unrighteous?
 - a. How does that make you feel?

 - b. Does that make God unjust or unfair?

3. At some point in every person's life, they must come to terms with the fact that they are going to die. When was the first time you remember being faced with this reality?
 - a. How do you feel about it now?

4. Do you agree with the Teacher's conclusion in verses 7-10? Why is it good that we spend time contemplating death?

5. Read 1 Cor. 15:12-22. How does your personal experience with the Gospel change the way you view death and how you live now?

○ personal study: ecclesiastes 9:11-18 ○

Before you read Ecclesiastes 9:11-18, write down your major takeaway from the previous section.

Observation | *Read Ecclesiastes 9:11-18 and answer the following questions:*

1. In 9:11-12, the Preacher talks about the fact that despite our best efforts in life, it seems like “time and chance happen to them all.” What point do you think he is trying to make?
2. Verses 11-12 seem tinged with a sense of the arbitrary nature of life. Where do you think God fits in this picture?
3. At first glance Ecclesiastes 9:11-12 seems to say you don’t gain anything from wisdom, strength, or intelligence, but 9:13-16 seems to say wisdom is actually worthwhile. How do you square those two seemingly opposed ideas? How does the grander narrative of Scripture help?
4. Verses 13-16 tell the story of a wise but poor man who saves his city. What is the Preacher’s point in this passage?
5. Why does the Preacher say “wisdom is better than might” (v. 16-18)? Why is this true even if the poor man’s wisdom is despised by the mighty?

6. Summarize what you just read:

a. What words would you use to describe the tone of this passage?

b. Do your best to explain this passage in 1-2 sentences.

7. Write down any questions that you have about this passage.

Answer the following questions as a group:


1. What stood out to you during your study of this passage? Did you have any questions about the text?

2. Have you ever felt like your efforts were meaningless as someone “less worthy” received the award, the promotion, the prize, or the recognition (9:11-12)?
 - a. How were you tempted to respond in that situation?

 - b. How would Christ respond?

3. Verse 12 starts with, “For man does not know his time.” What does the Preacher mean by that? How does that idea change the way we live?

4. In our culture, being “remembered” or becoming famous is highly valued. How do verses 15-16 challenge this notion?
 - a. How are we tempted to value fame more than quiet wisdom?

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5. Verse 17 states that “the words of the wise heard in quiet are better than the shouting of a ruler among fools.” Where do you observe this truth play out in our culture, our national conversations, and our personal lives?

 6. In verse 18, the Preacher says that “Wisdom is better than weapons of war, but one sinner destroys much good.”
 - a. Why does he juxtapose wisdom with “one sinner”?

 - b. Share ways you have seen this truth play out in your life.

 7. How can we as a group encourage one another to value quiet, reasoned wisdom over the noise we experience in the news and on social media?

○ personal study: ecclesiastes 10:1-20 ○

Before you read Ecclesiastes 10:1-20, write down your major takeaway from the previous section.

Observation | *Read Ecclesiastes 10:1-20 and answer the following questions:*

1. In verse 1 something as small as a dead fly ruins the scent of a perfume. What principle does this teach us? How does this connect to the relationship between wisdom and folly?
2. Verses 2-3 communicate some truths about fools. What are they? What directs the fool and the wise man? Why is this significant?
3. What instructions does the author give in verse 4? Does his instruction surprise you?
4. The author concludes in verses 5-7 that it is folly for a foolish person to hold a position of high authority. Why do you think that foolish people often hold positions of authority, as compared to wise people?

5. There once was a man who took his axe to cut trees in the forest. He started strong, his axe sharp. After some time he became tired, his axe wasn't working like at the beginning - but, he had so many trees to cut he did not stop for fear of not getting the work done. "I can't stop, there's too many trees," he'd say. He worked much harder, eventually tiring out, falling way short of what he set out to do. He wouldn't stop to sharpen the axe.

a. Relate this illustration of verse 10 to your own life.

b. Are you "swinging a dull axe"? How?

6. Verses 8-20 consists of proverbs about wisdom and folly. Which ones stick out to you the most and why? Do you see any themes repeated in the sayings?

7. Summarize what you just read: Do your best to explain this passage in 1-2 sentences.

8. Write down any questions that you have about this passage

5. Read Matthew 11:28-30 & John 10:10-11.

a. Compare these verses with chapter 10 of Ecclesiastes.

b. How do these words from Jesus bring greater context to this passage?

personal study: ecclesiastes 11:1-10

Before you read Ecclesiastes 11:1-10, write down your major takeaway from the previous section.

Observation | Read Ecclesiastes 11:1-10 and answer the following questions:

1. Despite the reality that life often turns our plans upside down, the author in verses 1-2 provides instructions on how to plan financially for the future. What principles do you see here?

2. In verse 3 the author brings to our attention two examples of things that we cannot control (when a cloud releases its rain and where a tree will fall). He then rebukes the person who “observes the winds” in verse 4.
 - a. What do these verses teach us?

 - b. What do you think it means to “observe the winds”, and what does this look like today?

 - c. How have you seen yourself get caught up in the “may-be’s and might-haves” of life and get distracted from the task at hand?

3. What do verses 5-6 teach us about mankind? What does it teach us about God? Do these verses teach a form of fatalism? Why or why not?

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4. What do you think “light” and “darkness” refer to in verses 7-8?
- a. What do these verses teach us about life?
 - b. How do we hold in balance the goodness of life and its fleeting nature?
5. In verse 9 the author encourages the reader to enjoy life while he is young, but to remember that God will bring judgment. How does the coming judgment of God change the way we enjoy life now?
6. Summarize what you just read:
- a. What words would you use to describe the tone of this passage?
 - b. Do your best to explain this passage in 1-2 sentences.
7. Write down any questions that you have about this passage

Answer the following questions as a group:

1. What stood out to you during your study of this passage? Did you have any questions about the text?

2. How can we be wise in planning for the future while also approaching our plans with humility knowing that God is ultimately in control?

3. Are you prone to wait until everything is “just right” before you go through with a decision?
 - a. How might this be unwise and unhelpful?

4. What are some ways that you and I waste the gift of youth?

5. How does the coming judgment of God help us to enjoy the gift of our youth more wisely?

a. How does God intend for us to steward this time in our lives?

b. What advice would you give to your younger self?

Before you read Ecclesiastes 12:1-14, write down your major takeaway from the previous section.

Observation | Read Ecclesiastes 12:1-14 and answer the following questions:

1. What do you think the author means when he instructs his readers to “Remember also your Creator” in verse 1? Why do you think he uses the title Creator?

2. In the poem the author uses 3 “before” statements that depict an inescapable reality for humanity. “before the evil days come” (v.1); “before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened...” (v.2); and “before the silver cord is snapped” (v.6). What event are these verses referring to? How does this event help us interpret the rest of the passage?

3. This poem uses highly metaphorical language. What do you think the following phrases refer to? (Hint: they communicate the effects of aging on the human body. A good study Bible will also be a good resource here).
 - a. “The sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened” (v.2)

 - b. “The clouds return after the rain” (v.2)

 - c. “Keepers of the house tremble” (v.3)

 - d. “The strong men are bent” (v.3)

 - e. “The grinders cease because they are few” (v.3)

f. "The windows are dimmed" (v.3)

g. "Doors are shut... sound of the grinding is low." (v.4)

h. "Afraid also of what is high," (v.5)

i. "The almond tree blossoms" (v.5)

j. "The grasshopper drags itself along" (v.5)

k. "Desire fails" (v.5)

4. Now read verse 6-8. What is the tone of the author and what is his conclusion?

5. How are the words of Ecclesiastes described in verses 9-10? Why is this significant?

6. In verse 11 the author describes his words as "goats". What is a goat and what does this teach us about how we ought to read and receive the message of Ecclesiastes?

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7. Verses 12-14 provide us with the author's purpose in writing Ecclesiastes. What is his purpose? What is his conclusion?
8. Why do you think that the author ends his work reminding the reader of the frightening reality that even the secret things will be brought into the light of judgment?
9. Summarize what you just read:
- a. What words would you use to describe the tone of this passage?

 - b. Do your best to explain this passage in 1-2 sentences.
10. Write down any questions that you have about this passage

○ group discussion: ecclesiastes 12:1-14 ○

Answer the following questions as a group:

1. What stood out to you during your study of this passage? Did you have any questions about the text?

2. Why do you think that the author gives us a sobering picture of the curse of death?
 - a. How should we respond to this reality?

3. What are some ways that you have seen yourself, or the culture around you, attempt to avoid the reality of aging and death?

4. What are some fears that a person might have as he or she ages?
 - a. How does the gospel provide hope for those who fear the effects of aging and death?

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5. The end of Ecclesiastes ends with the author pleading with his son to not attempt his own investigation as if the son could find meaning somewhere that the author failed to. Why is it our nature to want to reject the wisdom of others that go before us?
6. Why did the Spirit inspire such a “depressing” book to be written? Why do we need this book and what would we lack if we didn’t have it in our Bibles?

Introduction

1. Gordon Fee, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour*
2. *ESV Study Bible*
3. Holcomb, Justin, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/why-study-the-book-of-ecclesiastes/>
4. Howard Hendricks, *Living by the Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible*
5. Gordon Fee, *How to Read the Bible Book by Book: A Guided Tour*
6. Holcomb, Justin, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/why-study-the-book-of-ecclesiastes/>
7. Holcomb, Justin, <https://www.crossway.org/articles/why-study-the-book-of-ecclesiastes/>

Bible Reading Tips

1. Danny Akin, *Interpreting the Bible Class Notes* (SEBTS)
2. Howard Hendricks, *Living by the Book: The Art and Science of Reading the Bible*

Personal Study: Ecclesiastes 2:1-26

1. Derek Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes, The Bible Speaks Today* (Downers Grove, IL: IVP Academic), 36.

Personal Study/Group Discussion: Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

1. Eswine, Zach. *Recovering Eden: The Gospel According to Ecclesiastes.*
2. Eswine, Zach. *Recovering Eden: The Gospel According to Ecclesiastes.*

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven

ECCLESIASTES 3:1



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