

Searching for Life's True Meaning

Lesson 1 Ecclesiastes

Introduction to Ecclesiastes

What are people searching for? Are they looking for pleasure, riches, wisdom, fame, good health, or just a quiet place to think life over? From the halls of antiquity to the 21st century, "people are searching for meaning and fulfillment in their lives."¹ Most are looking for answers that are profound enough, wide enough, deep enough and consuming enough to shape their worldview and provide a reason for living that will sustain them in spite of life's circumstances. While their search, many times, will take them on long winding roads, up-and-down dark paths, and may be filled with uncertainty and calamity people are still looking for answers, to the questions, that gauge the depths of their experience and offers they true meaning.

- What is the purpose of life?
- How can I live a meaningful life in an upside world?
- Is life worth living?

I believe our study of the Book of Ecclesiastes will help us answer the questions that many are asking, and few find the answers to. Questions that are as elusive as they are central to our search for and apprehension of life's meaning. The questions that humble us as we consider their significance and consequences, that led many to responses that range from extremely complex to ridiculous, from hopeful to hopeless, and sometimes from despair to suicide.² If you like so many are struggling with the questions of life's meaning. Come with us as we crack open the pages of this ancient archive and learn from Solomon, the wisest man on earth, what his experience taught him about life "**under the sun.**"

Solomon

Who was Solomon? The third king of Israel and the son of King David and Bathsheba, Solomon wrote the books of Proverb, Song of Solomon, and Ecclesiastes. During Solomon's lifetime, he amassed great wealth, power, fame, and enjoyed many pleasures. He was consisted to be the wisest man on earth. Solomon reigned as king for 40 year, continuing the great times of his father King David. Solomon's era was a golden age of Israel, a time of peace and prosperity in the land. Solomon's diplomacy, fame, and political alliances together made Israel great but they also contributed to its decline.

1. Solomon Anointed King

- In **1 Kings 1:28-34**, as David was nearing the end of his life and to thwart a plot to take the kingdom from him, he appointed Solomon king of Israel and passed the kingdom on to him in a public coronation ceremony.

2. Solomon's Charge

- In **1 Kings 2:1-4**, David instructs Solomon to keep God's "statutes, commands, judgments and testimonies" and if he would follow God faithfully all would be well with him.

3. Solomon's Wisdom

- After Solomon became king of Israel, God came to him in a dream and told him to ask for whatever he wanted and God would give it to Him. Solomon ask for an "understanding heart" to rule well. In **1 Kings 3:5-14**, because what Solomon asks for pleased God, God granted him the wisdom to rule and gave him what he did not ask for riches, honor and greatness among kings.

4. Solomon's Accomplishments

- In **1 Kings 4:20-34**, Solomon wrote 3,000 proverbs and 1,005 songs, and he was an acknowledged expert in botany and biology. He had a fleet of ships, thousands of servants, and a tremendous amounts of land. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines. He held seminars attended by kings and important people from throughout the region. The Queen of Sheba traveled thousands of miles to visit Solomon.
- In **1 Kings 8:62-64**, Solomon's greatest accomplishment was the completion and dedication of the God's Temple.

Solomon had it all! However, sometimes having it all does not ensure faithfulness even in the midst of apparent success. In his book "31 Days to Happiness," David Jeremiah said, "*Wealth, power and pleasure can be dangerous even in the hands of the wise.*" God had given Solomon wisdom to know better and all the riches that any man could want. God visited Solomon twice; both times, He told him what he required. Unfortunately, Solomon allowed his wealth, power, and earthly pleasures to pull him away from God. Eventually, Solomon slipped into a lifestyle that drove him to look for the meaning of life in the things he could accomplish on his own. Searching for what God taught him in his youth, the Holy Spirit led Solomon to pen his observations in Ecclesiastes for you and me to learn and to apply.

Ecclesiastes

Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes, in 935 BC, in the twilight of his life. It is a book of optimistic realism, which chronicles the observations of a life, spent searching for meaning in all the wrong places. He writes this book in an attempt to warn and to offer hope to anyone seeking satisfaction, fulfillment, and happiness in a world that was never meant to validate life. If you close your eyes, it reads like a reality TV script, a modern day soap opera, or an interview with a hopeless victim. It is as up-to-date as any contemporary magazine or news article. Solomon does not trivialize or disregard the difficulties of this life. He confront life, wrestles with life's questions, and ultimately concludes that life just for what it offers, under the sun, has no real purpose, is not fulfilling and cannot satisfy apart from God. In his quest for meaning, Solomon comes full circle now he is ready to accept the truth and acknowledge what God had already blessed him to know in his youth.

1. Title

- **Ecclesiastes** is the English title derived from the Greek Septuagint's translation of the original Hebrew, "Koheleth," or "Qoheleth." The word Qoheleth suggests one who has a function as teacher or preacher in the assembly. The one who assembles or ministers to a congregation.³
 - 1:1
 - 7:27
 - 12:8

2. Audience

- Because everyone struggles with the question of the meaning of life, Solomon's audience is universally the "sons of men."
 - 1:13
 - 3:10-11

3. Scope

- Ecclesiastes records the vast search that Solomon pursued to find life's meaning "under the sun." He turned to everything he had the ability and resources to do. By using his wealth, power and fame, he chased intellectualism, hedonism and materialism, taken by extravagant and reckless living he placed no limits on his effort.

4. Purpose

- Ecclesiastes, teaches us through the investigation and observation of Solomon that apart from God we will not find real meaning and happiness in the life we live on earth.

5. Reoccurring Themes

- Defining the below reoccurring themes will help focus our study of the book of Ecclesiastes.⁴
 - Vanity of Vanities _____
 - Under the sun _____
 - Profit _____
 - Labor _____
 - Man _____
 - Evil _____
 - Joy _____
 - Wisdom _____
 - God _____

¹ Article: [The Key to Fulfillment](#) – John W. (Jack) Carter

² Sermon: *"Futility Under the Sun"* – Pastor David Fairchild

³ Holman Bible Dictionary

⁴ Book: *"Be Satisfied"* – Warren Wiersbe