

Ecclesiastes:

THE LIFE WORTH LIVING

Outline of Ecclesiastes

- I. INTRODUCTION (1:1-11) – CIRCLES**
- II. FIRST CYCLE (1:12-3:15)**
 - A. 1:12-2:23 – UNANSWERED
 - i. 1:12-18 – The answer is not in wisdom
 - ii. 2:1-11 – The answer is not in pleasure
 - iii. 2:12-17 – The answer is not in pre-eminence
 - iv. 2:18-23 – The answer is not in toil
 - B. 2:24-3:15 – DISCOVERY
 - i. 2:24-26 – Simple pleasures with God bring joy
 - ii. 3:1-8 – Every choice with God has purpose
 - iii. 3:9-15 – Toil and life with God is a gift
- III. SECOND CYCLE (3:16-5:7)**
 - A. 3:16-4:16 – ABSENT
 - i. 3:16-22 – No dominion
 - ii. 4:1-3 – No comforter
 - iii. 4:4-6 – No rest
 - iv. 4:7-12 – No companion
 - v. 4:13-16 – No wisdom/following
 - B. 5:1-7 - HOME
 - i. 5:1-3 – The house of God
 - ii. 5:4-7 – A vow to God
- IV. THIRD CYCLE (5:8-5:20)**
 - A. 5:8-17 – FAILURE
 - i. 5:8-9 – Oppression is expected
 - ii. 5:10-12 – The oppressor's sleep
 - iii. 5:13-17 – The oppressor is oppressed
 - B. 5:18-20 - STEWARD
 - i. 5:18-20 – Life is a gift from God to be enjoyed
- V. FOURTH CYCLE (6:1-8:13)**
 - A. 6:1-12 – HELPLESS
 - i. 6:1-6 – No power
 - ii. 6:7-9 – No satisfaction
 - iii. 6:10-12 – No answers
 - B. 7:1-8:13 – BETTER
 - i. 7:1-10 – Wisdom is better
 - ii. 7:11-14 – Wisdom gives life
 - iii. 7:15-18 – Wisdom is fearing God

- iv. 7:19-22 – Wisdom gives strength
- v. 7:23-29 – Wisdom is pleasing God
- vi. 8:1-9 – Wisdom is discerning
- vii. 8:10-13 – Wisdom is fearing God

VI. FIFTH CYCLE (8:14-12:7)

A. 8:14-9:18 – TROUBLED

- i. 8:14-15 – Injustice
- ii. 8:16-17 – Sleepless nights
- iii. 9:1-3 – Shared fate
- iv. 9:4-10 – Temporary life
- v. 9:11-12 – Time and chance
- vi. 9:13-18 – Ingratitude

B. 10:1-12:7 – REMEMBER

- i. 10:1-3 – Two men and their end
- ii. 10:4-7 – Two men and their frustration
- iii. 10:8-11 – Common sense
- iv. 10:12-15 – Two men and their speech
- v. 10:16-20 – Two men and their influence
- vi. 11:1-6 – Be diligent
- vii. 11:7-10 – Rejoice
- viii. 12:1-7 – Remember God

VII. CONCLUSION (12:8-14)

A. 12:8-14 – FEAR

- i. 12:8 – The problem restated
- ii. 12:9-12 – The source of the solution
- iii. 12:13-14 – The solution

CIRCLES

Study Questions:

1. Who does the Preacher tell you he is (v. 1)?
2. How is he qualified to investigate life's meaning (1:1, 16; 2:4-6, 8; 12:9)?
3. What is the scope of his search (v. 3)?
4. What conclusion does he reach (v. 2)? What does he mean by the use of this word?
5. What illustrations does he use in verses 4-7? From where does he get these illustrations, and how do they make his point that "all is vanity"?
6. Why is the creation seen this way (see Gen. 3:9-19; Rom. 8:20)?
7. In vs. 8-11, from where else does the Preacher find evidence of vanity under the sun?

Application Questions:

1. If someone with Solomon's limitless resources was unable to find the meaning to life in a diligent search under the sun, what should we learn from that?
2. If Solomon was the writer of Ecclesiastes, at what time of his life would it have been written? What would this tell us about him?
3. What word would you use to describe the picture Solomon paints of the world in vs. 1-11?
4. To one whose view is bounded by the horizons of the world, the cycles of nature can seem empty and monotonous. But what do the same cycles indicate for those whose gaze is heavenward (Lam. 3:22-24)?
5. To those looking above the sun, is history truly a meaningless cycle of events (see 2 Pet. 3:3-7)?

UNANSWERED

Study Questions:

1. As Solomon recounts his search for meaning in life “under heaven” he shares four areas that failed to provide the answer. In verses 12-18, what is the first area of life that failed the test?
2. Why did Solomon commence his search? Who gave it to him (see v. 13)?
3. How is the wisdom that Solomon pursued in 1:13 different from the wisdom of Proverbs (Pro. 9:10)?
4. What was the result of this search (v. 17)?
5. In 2:1-11, what was the second area of life he searched (see vs. 1 & 10)? Who is mentioned the most in this section, and who was it all for?
6. In 2:12-17, what was the third area (see v. 12)?
7. In 2:18-23, what was the fourth (see v. 18)?
8. Who is glaringly absent in all of this searching?

Application Questions:

1. Is the life worth living found in any of the four areas exposed by Solomon’s search?
2. Why was Solomon unable to find the answer in these areas? Was it because he didn’t invest enough effort (see 2:10)?
3. What kind of life is there for people who look for meaning in these places (see 2:23 and also Psalm 49)?
4. Are we tempted to find meaning in these areas today? If so, how?

DISCOVERY

Study Questions:

1. Whose name is clustered within 2:24-26?
2. How is he pictured in these verses? What verb is associated with him (see v. 26)? What Hebrew name is used for him?
3. What two lives are contrasted in vs. 24-26? Which one does Solomon summarize with the phrase “this also is vanity and chasing after the wind”?
4. What words would you use to describe the poem in 3:1-8?
5. Keeping in mind Solomon’s background as a believer and follower in the Creator, and knowing that we live in a creation that has been cursed, what two points do you think he is making in this poem?
6. How many times do we find his name clustered in 3:9-15?
7. What initial contrast is made in 3:9-10?
8. Make a list of all the things he does from 3:9-15.

Application Questions:

1. Eccl. 2:25 is one of the best verses that could be used to summarize the book. What does it mean?
2. Ecclesiastes was the book read by Jews at the Feast of Tabernacles, which was a joyous celebration. Why do you think it was read?
3. What does the jarring poem of 3:1-8 teach us about the life worth living?
4. In Eccl. 1:12-2:23, Solomon pursues a life worth living in wisdom, pleasure, pre-eminence and fails. In 3:12, he finds it. What had he left out?

ABSENT

Study Questions:

1. From what perspective is Solomon making his observations in 3:16-22 (see v. 16)?
2. With this perspective what might someone conclude (see v. 19)?
3. What word is used multiple times in vs. 4:1-3?
4. Who is sought, but not found in these verses?
5. With the perspective of 4:1, what might someone conclude (4:3)? What does Job have to say about this (Job 3:16)?
6. What condition is witnessed in 4:4, and what conclusion is reached in 4:6?
7. What truth from Gen. 2:18 is observed in Eccl. 4:7-8?
8. What solution is presented in 4:9-11?
9. Summarize the story told in 4:12-16.
10. What was the deciding factor in the rise and fall of the young man (see vs. 15 & 16)?

Application Questions:

1. How often is God named in 3:16-4:16? When we pursue without God, with our focus on this earth, what ends up being absent from our lives?
2. What current theories sound like some of the ideas expressed in this section (see 3:19; 4:2-3)? Just like the points made by Solomon, what are these theories missing?
3. What important lesson is taught in the story told in 4:13-16?

HOME

Study Questions:

1. Where does Solomon describe someone going in vs. 1-3?
2. What four body-parts does Solomon mention/imply here? Explain in your own words the instruction he gives in regard to each.
3. What is he making when he uses the word “better” in v. 1? What is better? Why is it better (see v. 2)?
4. Read v. 3 in a paraphrase Bible. What is he saying here, and how does it relate to the first two verses?
5. In vs. 4-7 the use of vows is addressed. What is a vow? Can you think of any Biblical people who used them?
6. What doesn't God have pleasure in (see v. 4)? Within the context, what is foolish (see v. 5)?
7. What is the outcome of this fool in v. 6?
8. To avoid this kind of outcome, what should you do (see v. 4)?
9. Verse 7 is the second time dreams are mentioned in this lesson. Where else were they mentioned? What is Solomon saying in verse 7?

Application Questions:

1. What truths about worship should you learn from 5:1-3?
2. Based on vs. 1-3, how important is our heart when it comes to worship? What other passages speak to this? What is the state of your heart when you worship?
3. Reckless and insincere speech is repeatedly warned against here. What does the book of Proverbs have to say about speech or the tongue? What NT writers address the tongue? After looking at these passages, what are some of the dangers we face with our tongue?
4. Re-read 5:1-7. What is an important part of the life worth living (see also John 4:23-24)?

FAILURE/STEWARD

Study Questions:

1. What are we not to be surprised about in v. 8?
2. Why not?! (Remember where he is looking during this “futility” part of the cycle 5:13).
3. Who are these men oppressing?
4. What is the motive behind the oppression (see v. 10)?
5. What is the irony of those who make money their God (see v. 10)?
6. What happens when this man’s wealth increases (see v. 11)?
7. How does the love of money affect the oppressor physically (see v. 12)?
8. Ultimately, what truths does this man face in the end (read vs. 13-17)? When all is said and done, what have the really gained from their toil (see v. 16)?
9. What word is used three times to describe God’s activity in vs. 18-20? Where have we seen this thought before in Ecclesiastes?
10. In contrast to the man who trusted in riches, what does Solomon find possible in 18-20, and how is it possible (see v. 19)?

Application Questions:

1. In vs. 8-17, what fails to make life worth living? What did Paul say about this in 1 Tim. 6:9-10? What did Jesus say about this in Matt. 6:24?
2. In what ways could you be tempted to live life like the first man in this lesson? What excuses might you make for putting your trust in money?
3. In contrast, look at vs. 18-20 and make a list of the things you need to do and understand that will enable you to enjoy a life worth living.

HELPLESS

Study Questions:

1. How is the man of verses 1-6 helpless (see vs. 2 and 3)?
2. Does he seem to lack anything he might need to enjoy life (see v. 2)? Make a list of the things he has.
3. Who does Solomon say is better off than this man (see v. 3)? Where else has Solomon made this point in Ecclesiastes?
4. Why is this person better off (see v. 5)?
5. How is the man of verses 7-9 helpless?
6. To this man stuck on a never-ending treadmill, what does he decide is better in v. 9?
7. How is the man of verses 10-12 helpless? Focus on v. 12.
8. Why is this man helpless? Notice the phrase that is used in vs. 1 and 12. If you mark in your Bible, you will want to mark v. 12, because these are the primary questions Solomon will answer in the next section of 7:1-8:13.

Application Questions:

1. Read the short blog post about the New England Patriot's quarterback Tom Brady and his quote. How does it relate to this chapter?
2. What does Solomon want you to learn from these three helpless men about a life worth living?
3. Can you think of anyone in the Bible (real or fictional) that helps illustrate Solomon's point? List the passages you think of. Start with Mark 4:18-19.
4. What would the world say about these three men?
5. Why is this so important to remember as you leave for school?

BETTER

In the second half of the fourth cycle, Solomon provides an answer the question of 6:12. “*Who knows what is good...?*” The answer is repeatedly found in this section of Proverbs. The answer is: the wise man knows. “Wisdom” is the answer. This section is divided into 7 paragraphs, each describing either what wisdom is or what wisdom does.

Study Questions:

1. What word is repeatedly used in vs. 1-10 to describe wisdom (see vs. 1, 2, 3, 5 and 8)?
2. Why is this so?
3. What does wisdom provide in vs. 11-14 (see v. 12)?
4. Who has provided wisdom, and under what circumstances is it imparted (see v. 14)?
5. What is wisdom in vs. 15-18 (see v. 18)?
6. What does Solomon mean “do not be too righteous/wicked” in vs. 16 and 17?
7. What does wisdom provide in vs. 19-22?
8. What is wisdom in vs. 23-29 (see v. 26)? What does wisdom help you avoid?
9. What is wisdom, what does it help one do, in vs. 1-9 (see verse 5)? How does v. 5 relate to 6:12?
10. What is wisdom according to vs. 10-13 (see v. 12)?

Application Questions:

1. After reviewing these seven paragraphs with their descriptions of wisdom, how would you describe it? How does true wisdom relate to God?
2. How does this wisdom compare to the wisdom you will encounter in the world (read 1 Cor. 1:18-25)? How does this prepare you to lead a life worth living?
3. Share some of the instances in your life when you have personally witnessed God’s wisdom work.

TROUBLED