

Ecclesiastes – searching for meaning. You could also try <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VeUiuSK81-0> Or <https://thebibleproject.com/videos/ecclesiastes>

Ecclesiastes has two authors:-

The main voice is Quohalet – which is a description rather than a name, it means “the one talking to the assembly.” He is probably not Solomon but is using Solomon as an example. The other voice is The Editor, he has compiled the book and makes the final comment.

Theme of the book – life on Earth generally sucks but God is in control so:--

“Fear God and keep his commandments,
for this is the duty of all mankind.” (Ecclesiastes 12:13)

There are repetitive phrases

- 1) **Hebel** – translated as “vanity” in the King James, “meaningless” in the NIV and “smoke” in The Message. It does not mean meaningless, it literally means breath or breeze and refers to something ephemeral, frail, unreliable, futile.
- 2) **Under the sun** – there are two realms, heaven and earth. Ecclesiastes is about life on the earth.
- 3) **Chasing after the wind** – trying to obtain the unobtainable.
- 4) **Gain** – a word used in ancient commerce which means substantial achievement. Quohalet sees people chasing after gain but ultimately not achieving it.
- 5) **Wisdom and foolishness** –wisdom is better than foolishness but cannot solve the deep problems of those living on Earth

Ecclesiastes is a reality check. It shows life as it really is, no illusions, and reality is depressing!

Some illusion busters:

- 1) Time
-each human life is just a blink in terms of the vastness of time. 1: 4-9
-God controls time not us 3:1-11
- 2) Death
Everyone is going to die, good and bad, rich and poor, animal and human. We can't take any **gain** from our earthly lives with us. This is what defines our life. 3:19-20, 5:15, 7:2. Quohalet did not know what happened after death except that justice would be done.
- 3) Life is full of bad things because we strive for **gain** and hurt other people in the process.
As a result we see:
Oppression. 4:1,2.
Envy. 4:4
Organisation injustice 5:8-9
Aiming for gain and finding loneliness, isolation, increasing dissatisfaction with what we have. 5:10-13, 4:8, 8:9
- 4) Life is unpredictable, uncontrollable and unfair.
Bad things happen to good people, good things happen to bad people. (8:14)

There is some good news

God is big, God is good, God is ultimately in control and God will make everything okay in the end.

Quohalet sees two ways of doing life under the sun:-

- 1) Striving for gain, trying to get control, power wealth, to become like God, often at the expense of other people, a way that often leads to loneliness and dissatisfaction and the gain is lost in death
- 2) Following God, living for him in a cooperative community. (4:9-12) Work becomes fulfilling when done for Him. (1:24) Rather than striving to gain more we enjoy what God has given us, food, drink, family, friends etc. 2:24-25, 3:11-13.

Questions

- 1) Quohalet sees a messed up broken world and an all-powerful, good God and tries to make sense of this paradox. Do we ever think about these things? What answers have we found?
- 2) Quohalet sees striving for gain in this world as futile. What do we think about this? The human mind seems programmed to work to gain, is this wrong?
- 3) Do we see life as fragile, fleeting and often futile?
- 4) How do we move to living for God as suggested in Ecclesiastes? How do we enjoy the good things that God has given us without becoming hedonists? Can work be a joy because it is done for God and not for gain?
- 5) Quohalet was trying to find a satisfying way to live in a broken world and felt that he had found the answer. We have so much more, we have Jesus, salvation, life after death and the Holy Spirit. How does this affect how we live?