



THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

CHASING THE WIND

WELCOME

- PRAYER
- GROUND RULES
 - THIS STUDY IS INTENDED TO BE PARTICIPATORY, SO PLEASE FEEL FREE TO ENGAGE WITH ONE ANOTHER AND ANSWER QUESTIONS OPENLY AND HONESTLY
- INTRODUCTIONS
 - PLEASE SHARE YOUR NAME & WHAT YOU HOPE TO GAIN FROM THIS STUDY

BACKGROUND ON ECCLESIASTES

- **Author:** Thought to be King Solomon
- **Written:** 940-931 BC
- "Ecclesiastes" comes from the Greek ἐκκλησία, meaning "assembly." So Ecclesiastes means "Speaker before the Assembly"
- One of the "Wisdom" books in the Old Testament, along with Job, Proverbs, Psalms and Song of Solomon
- One of the few books of the Bible written in the first person from the perspective of "Qoheleth", which means "Preacher" or "Teacher"
- Explores themes of existentialism, grief, worldly pleasure, and ultimate purpose
- Jewish tradition asserts that Solomon wrote Song of Solomon in his youth, Proverbs in his middle years and Ecclesiastes in his later years



A SUMMARY OF THE BOOK OF
ECCLESIASTES

ECCLESIASTES 1:1-11

- Read Ecclesiastes 1:1-11. What sticks out to you in this section?
- Have you ever felt that life is meaningless? If so, in what situations (studies, work, life in general)? Share if you are comfortable.
- What is the author's thesis? How does verse 4 set up the backdrop for the author's thesis?
- Define wisdom. Define knowledge. Define folly.

ECCLESIASTES 1:1-11

- Some Bible translations render the word "vanity" (v. 2) as "meaningless". The Hebrew word is הֶבֶל (hebel), meaning "vapor" or "breath." The author is wrestling with the meaning of life by emphasizing that everything seems "meaningless!" Like a vapor or a breath, life has no real weight and can easily be blown away.
- Do you agree with the author that "all is vanity" (v.2)? Why or why not?

TOO CYNICAL FOR THE BIBLE?

- “Medieval Old Testament scholars called Ecclesiastes one of the Bible’s ‘most dangerous books.’ ... Its paragraphs brim over with cynicism and even despair that seem out of place in the Bible’s grand narrative” - Robert K. Johnston, *Useless Beauty: Ecclesiastes through the Lens of Contemporary Film*
- Would you consider yourself more of a pessimist, optimist or realist? Why? What reason can you give for your outlook on life?

NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN

- “Every generation looks for some satisfying novelty, but each novelty can be analyzed as only a variant on the past (v. 9). Obviously, there have been many inventions; but in the context the Teacher probably has in mind any invention that enables man to break out of nature and the succession of history into [real] meaning, which transcends the sense of futility” - J. Stafford Wright, *Ecclesiastes*

NOTHING NEW UNDER THE SUN

- Have you ever seen a trend come back in popularity? What were they?
- Was Qoheleth right when he said, “There is nothing new under the sun” (v. 9)?
- What about more serious things? Can new sins be invented? New sorrows or suffering?

AN EARLY SADDUCEE?

- The Old Testament actually says very little about the afterlife – so much so that there was a group in Jesus' day who adamantly denied that there was an afterlife. This group was called the Sadducees.
- The author of Ecclesiastes seems to be of the same persuasion as the Sadducees; if there is no afterlife, then what we do in this life has no permanence. Where, then, is the meaning in all of it?

WRESTLING WITH EXISTENTIALISM

- Existentialism is a philosophical movement concerned with concepts like life's meaning and purpose, human freedom, paradox, and what it means to exist. "This is the view that humanity exists in an ultimately irrational universe without meaning that leads to despair (angst). The way of redemption is through the acceptance of responsibility for creating ourselves through personal choice and commitment" - Brian Godawa, *Hollywood Worldview*

WRESTLING WITH EXISTENTIALISM

- Ecclesiastes deals with existential problems in life. “The Teacher has confronted us with a situation that today might be called ‘existential.’ Man exists in series of experiences and cannot discover any onward meaning in them. All he can do is exist and make the best of what comes—or drop out altogether” - N.T. Wright, “Ecclesiastes”
- Have you ever had existential questions, like questions of meaning, purpose, or what life is about? Why are those questions important?

ECCLESIASTES 1:12-18

- What does the author mean in verse 15? What is he despairing over?
- Do you think the author is correct in asserting a correlation between increased wisdom and increased sorrow? (v. 18) Why do you think he makes this connection?
- Have you ever grown in wisdom about something only to be disenchanted by it?

GRIEVING THE WAY THINGS ARE

- “I’m growing more and more convinced that the only truly mentally healthy reaction to living in this world is regular and profound periods of grief. And last year delivered so many opportunities. Whether you lost someone to COVID, or to another tragedy, or you didn’t lose anyone, we all felt the bleakness of a year lived in lockdown...

GRIEVING THE WAY THINGS ARE

- Personally, the period of lockdown and after, with all of its still and quiet moments, brought to the surface some difficult subjects for me to face, and there was no way to escape this pain: no social engagements or sporting events or kids' birthday parties to distract me, no way to 'busy' myself into a safe illusion of everything being fine. All that came to the surface had to be dealt with, and more often than not, the way of dealing was to allow myself to feel devastating sadness. To grieve" - Stephanie Phillips, *Till Kingdom Come: How Grieving is an Essential Part of Living*



GRIEVING THE WAY THINGS ARE

- Do you agree with Stephanie that profound periods of grief are appropriate responses to the realities of life?
- What do you make of Vision's statement that "it can't all be sorrow, can it?"..."what is grief but love persevering?"
- How do you persevere when life seems overwhelming?

GOD GIVES US MEANING

- "To reject God out of hand is one thing, but to acknowledge Him and then to live as if He is neither Lord nor God is a horrible existence. Then all we have left is sand." - Roger Palms, *Enjoying the Closeness of God*.
- "Learn to live your life so that every detail pleases God. Mow the lawn, clean up your house, or enjoy a hobby in order to please God." - Max Lucado