

ECCLESIASTES - A STUDY GUIDE

THE CENTRAL QUESTION:

What does this book/story say to us about God?

This question may be broken down further as follows:

- a. Why did God do it/allow it?
 - b. Why did He record it for our study?
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1. Ecclesiastes means "The Preacher." Why do you think this book would have a name like that? Does this book, as a whole, contribute anything of significance to our understanding of God? If it doesn't help us much, do you think it may have helped the on-looking universe? What would the universe learn? Why would the Holy Spirit inspire the recording of the feelings of this tired old king? Do you think Abraham, Moses, or Daniel would have written a book like this? Wouldn't it take courage and inspiration for Solomon to tell the truth without hiding or glossing it over? How different would Solomon's testimony have been if he had been faithful all his life? Is there any "good news" in Ecclesiastes?
2. Are all the statements in Ecclesiastes true? **Could something that is not true be "inspired?"** Is it true that "The sun still rises, and it still goes down, going wearily back to where it must start all over again"? (Ecclesiastes 1:5) Considering all that people are inventing and discovering now, was Solomon right in saying "there is nothing new under the sun?" (Ecclesiastes 1:9,10; compare 3:15) Is it true that "God has laid a miserable fate upon us?" (Ecclesiastes 1:13, *GNB*) Is it true that "all is vanity and a striving after wind?" (Ecclesiastes 1:14) Is it true that "what is crooked cannot be made straight?" (Ecclesiastes 1:15) Is it true that "the more knowledge, the more grief?" (Ecclesiastes 1:18) Is it true that the wise and the foolish end up in the same place—and in days to come we will all be forgotten? (Ecclesiastes 2:14-17) How could the dead who have already died be happier than those who are still living? (Ecclesiastes 4:2) Is it true that, "Everything that happens was already determined long ago?" (Ecclesiastes 6:10) Would you agree that "A man might have a hundred children and live to be very old. But if he finds no satisfaction in life and in the end does not even get a decent burial, I say he would have been better off born dead?" (Ecclesiastes 6:3)
3. In Ecclesiastes 2:1-17, he says that he would make a test of certain pleasures and things, but found them all to be vanity. He tried wine, sensual pleasure, great works of architecture, pools and parks. He bought many slaves, great possessions, He gathered silver and gold, He got many concubines. Solomon says, "My wisdom remained with me and I kept my heart from no pleasure. Behold all was vanity!" Was everything that Solomon tried to pursue in this record inherently evil? To really enjoy something, do you have to be the very first human to try it? (Ecclesiastes 2:12) How does one use material like this? In what sense is it inspired? And after it was all over he laments that it was all a useless endeavor because he would have to leave everything to his successor who might even be a fool! (2:18,19)
4. What is the meaning of Ecclesiastes 7:16,17— "So don't be too good or too wise—why kill you yourself? But don't be too wicked or too foolish, either—why die before you have to?" (*GNB*) Is it safe to go through the Bible and make selections of what we like or what is "right" and what we think is "not right?" Doesn't this book show us the dangers of plucking texts from here and there?
5. Would you agree with these conclusions from Solomon?

Ecclesiastes 2:24-25: ²⁴The best thing anyone can do is to eat and drink and enjoy what he has earned. And yet, I realized that even this comes from God. ²⁵How else could you have anything to eat or enjoy yourself at all?" (*GNB*)

3:12-13: ¹²So I realized that all we can do is to be happy and do the best we can while we are still alive. ¹³All of us should eat and drink and enjoy what we have worked for. It is God's gift." (*GNB*)

3:22: ²² So I realized then that the best thing we can do is to enjoy what we have worked for. There is nothing else we can do. There is no way for us to know what will happen after we die.” (GNB)

5:18: ¹⁸ This is what I have found out: the best thing anyone can do is to eat and drink and enjoy what he has worked for during the short life that God has given him; this is man’s fate.” (GNB)

8:15: ¹⁵ “So I am convinced that a man should enjoy himself, because the only pleasure he has in this life is eating and drinking and enjoying himself. He can at least do this as he labors during the life that God has given him in this world.” (GNB)

9:7: ⁷ “Go ahead--eat your food and be happy; drink your wine and be cheerful. It's all right with God.” (GNB)

6. If we reach old age without being able to show “any worthy action done” will God treat us any differently? In contrast to Solomon—who did not remember God throughout his life—can you think of anyone in the Bible who did?
7. How would you have ended the book? Are we terrified that “God will bring every work into judgment, whether it be good or evil?” (Ecclesiastes 12:14) *If God asked you to write a book about your life and its accomplishments, what would you say?*
8. Are we afraid to have our lives come up in review by our gracious God? Are we afraid of a “punishing God?” Is it what we know about ourselves that makes us afraid? Is it what we know about Him that makes us afraid? Even if our final diagnosis is “unsavable,” do we have anything to fear? Compare 1 John 4:17,18, “In this is love perfected . . . that we may have confidence for the day of judgment . . . there is no fear in love, but perfect love casts out fear. For fear has to do with punishment and he who fears is not perfected in love.”
9. Some are afraid to sin because it will make God angry. Others are afraid to sin because it grieves God. Still others are afraid to sin because of what sin does to the sinner or others around him. Should we be afraid to sin? If so, why?
10. God not only forgave Solomon but honored him by having him write another book of the Bible. Did God not know the details of Solomon's life? God watched Solomon do all the things that he did. But when he came back, a genuinely-repentant but tired old king, God didn't just forgive him, He honored him and treated him like “a holy man of God.” (2 Peter 1:21) Did forgiveness give him back the wasted years? Isn't the story of the life of Solomon a living illustration of the “prodigal son?” What made Solomon finally come back to the true God?
11. What does it mean to really “fear God and keep His commandments?” (Ecclesiastes 12:13)
12. Would you agree with Solomon's conclusions? Are you happy with them? Who came to better conclusions—Solomon or Job? Did Solomon “say of God what is right?” (Compare Job 42:7,8)
13. What does it say to you about God that He gave all that wisdom to Solomon, but did not take away his freedom even to misuse God's gifts?
14. What are we supposed to learn from Ecclesiastes 3:1-8? What are we to learn from Solomon's words: “Everything that happens in this world happens at the time God chooses.” (3:1, GNB)

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khart@llu.edu