



Ecclesiastes – A Study

About this Study:

The Word of God is timeless, and very timely. It addresses our situation, whatever the circumstances. In what seems like uncertain times, the book of Ecclesiastes has spoken across the centuries to the pain of our experience. And, ironically, Ecclesiastes seems to give us a rare kind of assurance that even our troubles are known by God. We decided it's time to take a fresh look at this powerful testament to man's anxiety, and God's sufficiency. Included you'll find a very modern translation of the text which, hopefully, will help you consider the message with a fresh perspective. And we invite you to add **your** perspective to ours. Let us know what you discover as you study along with us! Just send an email to: **bramfloria@compassionradio.com**

Bram's Introduction:

Have you ever worked **very hard** for something, and in the end felt like it was all for nothing? This is not the lament of the lazy. It is the agony of the hardworking and well-intentioned. Sometimes it seems like life is full of disappointments that shouldn't have been. Others may regret something they've done, or something they should have done. The diligent person has less regrets, but is still mystified when life so often just doesn't add up.

Have you been that person? The book of Ecclesiastes is for you.

Have you walked through life afraid to try something new? Many of the best dreams ever conceived are stillborn. Have you lived with the fear of condemnation or failure? Have you been convinced by circumstances, by others, or by **yourself** that your life doesn't matter much?

Are you afraid to hope; to dream; to try? The book of Ecclesiastes is for you.

Have you lived a life of character and integrity and still been accused of dishonesty, disloyalty, selfishness or deceit? History, and God's word, are replete with examples of the righteous maligned and brought low. Have you done the 'right thing' and paid a heavy price for it? Has Evil survived your greatest efforts to defeat it?

Do you wonder if Good will ever prevail? The Book of Ecclesiastes is for you.

This collection of wisdom literature, lament, poetry and pondering, attributed to the final years of King Solomon, has always held a fascinating place in the Canon of Scripture. It so eloquently speaks our own frustrations and frustrates at the same time. It reads like the bitter whining of an old man who had no right to resent life. He had everything a man could ever hope for, and

yet he still wrestles – not only with the meaning of life - but with the value of a life well-lived. A man with hundreds of wives and offspring wonders if anything he’s accomplished will outlast him; if he will have any lasting legacy. The most famous mind of wisdom in the history of the written word wonders – frets – over whether he’ll be remembered.

From our perspective, all the fretting, whining, worrying and pining seem so useless – like “chasing after the wind.” And yet to varying degrees we **all** do the same thing...

Here, across the centuries, the dark corners of one man’s soul are laid bare with a frankness that startles, mixed with a huge dollop of wisdom that was his special gift from God Himself. And the two don’t seem to mix very well. We are left to struggle with so many unanswered questions. The unknown scribe who later assembled all these passages into this book makes an attempt to sum it up at the very end. While he makes some commonsense statements, there’s no escaping the feeling that the conclusion is somehow abrupt, trite and unsatisfactory.

So, what’s going on here? Is life really “meaningless?” Is there nothing more that can be said about the purpose and value of an individual? Does hard work and faithful obedience to God’s Word bring meaningful rewards? Does anything really **matter**?

There are many places in Scripture where God’s Presence and Power are plainly visible. God’s Purpose and man’s response are right there in the narrative. Other times, it seems like God is hiding and we wonder what He’s up to. Ecclesiastes is definitely one of those books. But God does have plenty to show us in these unique pages. Is it possible to peel back the curtain a little and see God’s fingerprints on the machinery of the Universe? To feel the warmth of His Hand holding us? Yes, I believe it is possible, and Ecclesiastes can help. First we’ll need to let a frustrated old man tell us his story, from the frayed edge of Wisdom as it rubs on the sunbaked rocks that we call “real life.”

Notes on how to use this study: I would encourage you to familiarize yourself with the twelve short chapters of Ecclesiastes as a **whole work** before pouring yourself into the individual themes and details of each chapter. This study was written after, and not until, reading through the entire book many times. A certain tone emerges and starts begging questions. The questions arising from each chapter will have a greater impact if you’re already familiar with the whole book. Read it from your favorite translation, then read along in the contemporary translation provided in this study. You might find some striking differences from what you expect in certain passages. I did not rely on previous versions in preparing this manuscript. I went straight to the transliterated Hebrew and specific word definitions. Sometimes a fresh look at a Bible passage can provide a valuable and refreshing contrast. I encourage **you** to dig into these scriptures yourself if you are so inclined. A wonderful and **free** resource is available online at: www.scripture4all.org

Sandi’s Introduction:

How often do we feel as though we’re working for the weekend or like our work is meaningless and not worth anything more than just getting a paycheck? How do we move beyond looking at our work as a necessary evil and begin looking at it as a purposeful calling from God? Can we allow ourselves to find meaning in the mundane and daily rhythms of our lives? I believe we can. The writer of Ecclesiastes (presumably Solomon) paints a dismal picture of life and calls it

all futile. But if we look beyond (outside) ourselves and really see the world around us—as believers we will truly begin to see a bigger purpose for our lives. We will see a world filled with God’s beautiful creation—His children—made in His image. Not only are we created for fellowship with God, we are created for relationship with others.

The more we are willing to give ourselves to others in service of God, the more we find meaning and purpose for our lives.

Solomon was undoubtedly one wisest men in history. However, even with all the wisdom he gained, he still got to the end of his life a defeated man. I believe one of the reasons can be found in Ecclesiastes 1:13, which says, “I decided to seek out and study the wisdom of the ages, of all that had been done **under** the heavens...” (emphasis mine)

The wisdom of the ages limits us to only what man can teach us. It is limited to what has occurred here on earth. Solomon dedicated himself to all the wisdom done **under** heaven—leaving critical gaps in his learning. And, he came up short.

Dictionary.com defines **wisdom** as

1. The quality or state of being wise; knowledge of what is true or right-coupled with just judgment as to action; sagacity, discernment, or insight.

This kind of wisdom comes from past experiences – either yours or someone who has gone before you. Solomon was relying on his experiences and the experiences of those who had gone before. He amassed great storehouses of wealth, had 100’s of wives and concubines and more children than are counted in scripture. He built great palaces and gardens AND he built a temple for the Most High God, the likes of which was never seen before nor since. Yet, at the end of his life, he called it all futile. Solomon had not realized God’s greatest gift to him (wisdom) was for the glory of God and not for his earthly gain.

So, how do we move beyond this kind of worldly wisdom to access the wisdom of God? James 1 gives us both a clue and a warning.

“Now if any of you lacks wisdom, he should ask God, who gives to all generously and without criticizing, and it will be given to him. But let him ask in faith without doubting. For the doubter is like the surging sea, driven and tossed by the wind. That person should not expect to receive anything from the Lord. An indecisive man (or woman) is unstable in all his ways.”

We can only access this wisdom by the grace of God, and only then by humbling ourselves to ask for it. By not fully trusting in God to provide his wisdom, but looking back and forth from God to our own (worldly) wisdom we are divided in our thinking and it causes us to be unstable. That kind of thinking can and will lead to confusion and poor choices. 1 Corinthians 14:33 reminds us that “God is **NOT** a God of confusion but of peace.” (emphasis mine)

God’s blessings as you ‘Chase the Word’ together with us!

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