

TNT BIBLE STUDY
WHERE TO TURN WHEN LIFE LETS YOU DOWN

A STUDY IN ECCLESIASTES
“INTRODUCTION”
Focus Scriptures: Ecclesiastes 1:1(b); 1 Kings 3:10-12

SEPTEMBER 17, 2024

WELCOME/PRAAYER

WELCOME BACK TO TNT! Would you agree with me tonight when I say that life is a gift, but it doesn't always turn out how we expect. Why? Because the world has convinced us that things like wealth, power, fame, and control will give us meaning and lead us to a flourishing life. ***“But what do we do when the bottom falls out?” “Where do we turn when things are going great, but we still feel empty?”***

INTRODUCTION

Over the next several weeks we will take a journey thru an unusual and provocative book found in the Old Testament, called *Ecclesiastes*, which can shed some light on these questions and more -- as the writer reiterates that everything is meaningless (***“vanity”***) without a proper focus on God. In our first session, I want to make the time to lay out the background which will help you to better understand the Who, What, When, and Where of this book.

INTERACTIVE QUESTION: ***What “good things” have you pursued in life only to find them to be empty—and-- how long did it take for you to discover that they couldn't provide the meaning you were seeking*** (write your answers in the comment box if you are livestreaming)?

Let's look at this short video clip by “Spoken Gospel” which will give us a quick overview of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Play video clip (9-minutes long but will play only 5-6 minutes) [**Ecclesiastes: The Bible Explained - YouTube**](#)

THE BOOK OF ECCLESTIASTES

Aligned with the Poetic division found in the O.T. Christian Bible includes Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon, The Book Of Ecclesiastes is named after its central character, *Qoheleth* (translated “the Preacher” in the ESV translation). *Qoheleth* is the Hebrew title that is translated *Ekklesiastēs* in Greek. It speaks of someone who might gather, lead, or speak to a group of people like a congregation [sermon]. *It is perhaps one of the most difficult to understand for three reasons:*

- 1. It has a spirit of hopeless despair**
- 2. It has no praise or peace**
- 3. It seems to promote questionable conduct**

Yet these words of the Preacher show us the uselessness and foolishness of a life lived without an eternal perspective. Ecclesiastes reveals the necessity of fearing God in a fallen and frequently confusing and frustrating world – during that time period and in our 21st century today. So, we are not alone in our search for meaning. It began years ago.

WARNING – this is not a happy book! But I promise you that there are hidden nuggets we can glean that will help us to maneuver our lives successfully in an upside-down world. The question in Ecclesiastes isn’t about the existence of God; the author is no atheist, and God is always there. *The question is whether or not God matters. The answer to that question is vitally connected to a responsibility to God that goes beyond this earthly life.*

In the search for this answer, the Preacher searched the depths of human experience, including despair. He thoroughly examines the emptiness and futility of a life lived without eternity -- before concluding the necessity of eternity. We can almost line up the Preacher’s thoughts as “Christian philosophy [*Socrates*].”

In his study guide on *Ephesians*, Theologian David Guzik writes, “*We face the appalling inference that nothing has meaning, nothing matters under the sun. It is then that we can hear, as the good news which it is, that everything matters — ‘for God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.’*”

Guzik’s study outline further reveals the thought that *Ecclesiastes* does not pretend to preach the Gospel. Rather, it encourages the reader to consider a God-centered worldview rather than falling victim to frustrations and unanswered questions. None of its contents has to be rejected in the light of the New Testament.

THE IDENTITY OF THE PREACHER

Strictly speaking, a time period is not given, and the book is anonymous since there is not a personal name attached to it. Scripture is silent on this matter, so we cannot be fully confident in identifying the Preacher. However, there are several passages of scripture such as *Ecclesiastes 1:1(b)* and *1 Kings 3:10-13[NIV]* that refer to King Solomon, son of David, as being the Preacher. In *Eccl. 1:1(b) the Preacher opens up the dialogue on “Vanity.”* It reads -- “*The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.*” Additionally, since one of the main threads found in *Ecclesiastes* speaks a lot about wisdom, we can also refer to *1 Kings 3:10-13[NIV]* -- 10 “*The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this.*” 11 “*So, God said to him, ‘Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice.’*” 12 “*I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.*” 13 “*Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings.’*”

God didn't only give Solomon wisdom. As we will read later in Ecclesiastes, but He also gave him wealth and honor. To some degree, the book of Ecclesiastes is an account of Solomon's experience with these things.

Solomon's first words in *Ecclesiastes 1:1*, clue us in on how empty wealth, honor, and power truly are apart from God. The Preacher's argument stands on its own feet and does not depend on Israel's covenant faith to be valid. He is appealing only to universally observable facts.

Even though there may be a few differing opinions about the authorship of Ecclesiastes, it is not un-reasonable to strongly suggest that Solomon is the preacher. For example, Solomon had both the wisdom and the resources to work through these kinds of problems. With *Qoheleth* we put on the mantle of a Solomon, that most brilliant and least limited of men, to set out on the search. It is written in a style understood and appreciated in his day. The particular brand of wisdom that characterizes Ecclesiastes is well documented in the ancient world. We may call it 'pessimism literature.' Ecclesiastes is the only biblical example of this old literary tradition."

WHY STUDY ECCLESTIASTES

A. Ecclesiastes Imparts Wisdom

Like the other books of wisdom in the Bible, Ecclesiastes is concerned with imparting wisdom and teaching all to fear the Lord. However, it serves as a balance for the practical wisdom of Proverbs. Although Ecclesiastes finds practical wisdom beneficial, it comes to it along a reflective path.

Job asks for personal vindication -- Ecclesiastes shares in Job's intensity, but searches for happiness and something that would endure. Ecclesiastes is consistent with the rest of Scripture in Job where he discovers that true wisdom is to fear God

even when we cannot see all that God is doing. We can leave it to him to make sense of it all.

B. Ecclesiastes Prepares Us for God’s Rescue Mission

Ecclesiastes describes the meaninglessness of living without God. In creation, we see that God created the world and He called it “good.” But despite this original goodness, humanity fell into sin and all creation was subjected to the curse of God. This brought into the world meaninglessness, vanity, violence, and frustration. Graciously, God did not leave his creation to an endless round of meaninglessness.

God’s response to sin [disobedience to God] is to:

1. Redeem
2. Renew
3. Restore
4. Recreate.

The Bible traces this history of salvation from beginning to end. While this starts immediately after the Fall, God’s rescue mission culminates in Jesus Christ, (*John 3:16 ref*) who has rescued us from the meaninglessness of the curse that plagues us.

REFLECT ON THESE THINGS

Here are a few nuggets to take away from this first introductory session:

1. **Everything will be beautiful in its time.** If you want your life to be beautiful then chase God and not His blessings.
2. **The world cannot bring us total satisfaction.** The Preacher authored this book at the end of his life. He realized that, in the end, the world could not satisfy him. King Solomon of Jerusalem had many treasures, powers, wives, and concubines, as well as other things, but yet all of it was vanity. Man is born into the world – lives – and then he dies.

3. **The only source of human satisfaction is God alone.** The things of God are always a blessing if we live in Him. Why? Because when we live in God, He is our sole source of satisfaction.

PASTORAL CONCLUSION

No matter how wise or rich or successful we may be, we cannot find meaning in life apart from God. In Ecclesiastes, the fact that “all is vanity” should drive us to fear God, whose work endures forever. God does what He will, and all beings and all of creation stand subject to him.

Rather than striving in futile attempts to gain meaning on our own terms, what really is significant is taking pleasure in God and His gifts and being content with what little life has to offer and what God gives. In Ecclesiastes, while God is in the horizon of the Preacher’s thinking, God is not brought in as a solution to the meaninglessness with which the Preacher is struggling.

This study through Ecclesiastes will help us better understand the necessity of fearing God in a fallen and frustrating world, pointing us to God’s mission to restore creation from the curse through the power of the gospel.

Life Change Reflection: How can I purposely make God my highest priority in life.

NEXT WEEK 9/24

Session 2: Looking For Meaning In The Wrong Places

Reading: Chapters 1-2