

IN  
OUT

# *Ecclesiastes*

LIFE UNDER THE SUN

IN AND OUT®  
ECCLESIASTES  
LIFE UNDER THE SUN

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## BEFORE YOU BEGIN WE WANT YOU TO KNOW . . .

We are thrilled that you have chosen to study *Ecclesiastes* with us. It will be such a blessing to your life because it is part of God's Word. The Bible is a progressive revelation—all sixty-six parts are essential to understanding the whole counsel of God. The content of each book of the Bible is critical to our lives; otherwise, God would not have included it in His eternal Word.

*Ecclesiastes* holds a unique place in the Bible. It's usually categorized as one of the wisdom or poetry books of the Bible. But it has in it several kinds of biblical literature which makes it some times difficult to interpret.

It has narrative like Job, dialogue like Song of Solomon, short statements of truth on various topics like Proverbs, and as in Psalms a variety of statements of truth, cries for help, and praises to God. *Ecclesiastes* is closer to a proverbial style, with many short statements of truth, but is almost its own category of wisdom literature.

It is full of truth that guides us in life. So as you dig into this sometimes perplexing book, remember that God wants us to learn principles for wise living. Search out those principles, those truths, and thank God for His gift of *Ecclesiastes*.

In this study we're going to approach interpreting *Ecclesiastes* from its own internal context. Therefore, only a few cross-references are in this study, which might be different from other Precept Upon Precept courses you have studied. That means prayerful, careful, and time-consuming observation of the text is the foundation for interpreting this book—even more so than with others

It's our prayer that you will see how critically relevant *Ecclesiastes* is to our times and to your life.



## Nothing New Under the Sun

**“A generation goes and a generation comes . . . the sun rises and the sun sets . . . the wind continues . . . rivers flow into the sea . . . So there is nothing new under the sun” (Ecclesiastes 1:4-9).**

**What is life all about? How are people to view their lives?**

### TAKING IT IN

If you haven't, please read “Before You Begin We Want You to Know. . .” on page 1. Ecclesiastes is going to be a most interesting study! Like each of the 66 books that comprise the Bible, Ecclesiastes has its own unique purpose. You'll want to remember this when you get into *this* book! There are truths and insights that you need to know and understand that will perfect you as a disciple of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Before you begin any study of God's Word, it's always good to go to the Author and ask Him for His help as you study HIS book—to give you wisdom and understanding by the help of the Holy Spirit who is our teacher.

1. Read Ecclesiastes 1.
  - a. Mark or color-code references to the author. You might color each mention of him blue, including pronouns.
  - b. Now summarize what the author tells you about himself.

- c. As you observed, the author is the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Keeping in mind your observations from chapter 1 on the author, let's look at some cross-references that give us valuable information. Read the references and answer the questions. Compare the answers with what you observed in Ecclesiastes 1.

Which of David's sons became king in Jerusalem after him? And what was he like?

1) 2 Chronicles 1:1, 7-12

2) Proverbs 1:1

2. Now let's go back to Ecclesiastes and compare 1:1-2 with 12:8.
- a. What does this book seem to be about?

- b. The Hebrew word translated “vanity” is “*vapor, breath*”<sup>1</sup>; “emptiness, futility, uselessness.”<sup>2</sup> It “means something meaningless and purposeless.”<sup>3</sup>
3. Now let’s observe Ecclesiastes 1 more closely.
  - a. Using your Observation Worksheets, read chapter 1 and mark *vanity*.
  - b. Look at the places you marked *vanity* and list what chapter 1 tells you about this key idea in Ecclesiastes in the space following.

- c. On the back cover of this workbook is a **Key Word Bookmark** suggesting ways to mark some words often used in the Bible.

Cut out this bookmark and on the blank side write *vanity*, as well as the words listed below, then mark them the way you will throughout Ecclesiastes.

- 1) *under the sun, under heaven* (Mark these phrases the same way.)
- 2) *wisdom*
- 3) *striving after wind*
- 4) *folly*
- 5) *God\**

An asterisk [\*] indicates a suggested mark on the Key Word Bookmark.

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<sup>1</sup> Robert L. Thomas, *New American Standard Hebrew-Aramaic and Greek Dictionaries: Updated Edition* (Anaheim: Foundation Publications, Inc., 1998), H1892.

<sup>2</sup> James Swanson, *Dictionary of Biblical Languages with Semantic Domains: Hebrew (Old Testament)* (Oak Harbor: Logos Research Systems, Inc., 1997).

<sup>3</sup> W. E. Vine, Merrill F. Unger, and William White Jr., *Vine’s Complete Expository Dictionary of Old and New Testament Words* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson, 1996), 25.

- d. Now read the chapter once again and mark the key repeated words and phrases each in a distinctive way—colors help.

Read the chapter more than once, marking only two or three words each time. By the way, if you read it aloud repeatedly, you'll find yourself memorizing it—and recalling it to mind!

- e. Next, let's dissect this chapter paragraph by paragraph. What did the Preacher want his readers to understand from this first chapter?

Note the main point of each paragraph in the margin of your Observation Worksheet or in the following space. The first verse of each paragraph is indicated with a bold verse number.

To see the main points in each paragraph, look at the key words you marked. Be sure to take time to think about the teaching in each of these paragraphs.

1) Verses 1-2

2) Verses 3-11

3) Verses 12-15

4) Verses 16-18

- f. Now you are ready to summarize what the whole chapter is about. Considering the paragraph content and using words from the text, write a possible theme for chapter 1 on your *Ecclesiastes at a Glance* chart in the Appendix. You might use a pencil to do this, especially if you're new to this kind of Bible study.

4. Let's move on in chapter 1.
  - a. First, let's focus on Ecclesiastes 1:3-11. Read these verses on your Observation Worksheet and answer the questions below.
    - 1) What's the question in verse 3?
    - 2) How do verses 4-9 relate to or answer the question?
    - 3) What's the question in verse 10?
    - 4) How do verses 10-11 relate?
  - b. We want to understand the flow of thought in this chapter. So, moving on to verses 12-15, how does what the Preacher says in verses 12-15 relate to the questions and answers in verses 3-11?
  - c. Based on your study so far, what do you think, "under the sun" and "under heaven" refer to?

- d. How does this chapter end—verses 16-18? What is the connection with what is before in the chapter?
- e. The Preacher realized what he had set his mind to was “striving after wind.”
- 1) What does verse 6 say about the wind?
  
  
  - 2) So what does “striving after wind” mean?
- f. In verses 13, 16, and 17 the word “mind” is literally “heart” according to the New American Standard Bible (NASB) marginal note. You might mark these words with a red heart and add to your Key Word Bookmark.
5. Now let’s go to Ecclesiastes 2.
- a. After prayer, read chapter 2 using your Observation Worksheets and mark the words and phrases on your Key Word Bookmark.
  - b. Read the chapter again and mark the following. Add them to your Key Word Bookmark:
    - 1) *futility* (like you mark *vanity*—By the way, these two translate the same Hebrew word.)
    - 2) time references\*
    - 3) *joy, enjoy, pleasure*
    - 4) *work, labor*
    - 5) *wise* (like *wisdom*)

- 6) *fool* (like *folly*)
- 7) *die*
- 8) *evil, sinner* (see *sin*\*)

Remember, an asterisk [\*] indicates a suggested marking on the Key Word Bookmark.

c. Summarize the main points of the paragraphs in this chapter either in the margin of your Observation Worksheets or below.

- 1) 1-8
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 2) 9-11
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 3) 12-17
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 4) 18-23
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
  
- 5) 24-26

d. Carefully look at the paragraph themes and note the progression of thought in this chapter.

- e. Summarize a theme for this chapter and note it on the At a Glance chart. Then record who you think the author is.
6. What do Ecclesiastes 1 and 2 say about God? Look at where you marked God and record what the text says on the page in the Appendix, “What Ecclesiastes Teaches about God.”
7. Now, prayerfully think through the first two chapters of Ecclesiastes. If the Preacher spoke about man trying to understand life from a purely human perspective, how do you see that leading to despair?
8. How does Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 relate to labor under the sun, folly, pleasure, and God?

LIVING  
IT OUT

Finally, it's take-away time.

1. What have you learned from Ecclesiastes 1 and 2 for your life? For example: do you feel like your life is vanity? Does it seem like you're striving after wind? Do you want to avoid the grief that comes with much wisdom and the pain that comes with increasing knowledge?

You might want to write what the Lord shows you for your life. Ask Him to give you understanding of why He has you studying these words of His at this time in your life.

2. Look at where you marked "mind/heart." What have you set your mind on—your heart on?
3. What have you learned from this lesson that you can share with others?

*There is nothing new under the sun—man is born, lives, and dies. What gives meaning to a person’s life? Think on Ecclesiastes 2:24-26.*

# ECCLESIASTES 1

## Observation Worksheet

Chapter Theme \_\_\_\_\_

THE words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

- 2 “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher,  
“Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”
  
- 3 What advantage does man have in all his work  
Which he does under the sun?
- 4 A generation goes and a generation comes,  
But the earth remains forever.
- 5 Also, the sun rises and the sun sets;  
And hastening to its place it rises there *again*.
- 6 Blowing toward the south,  
Then turning toward the north,  
The wind continues swirling along;  
And on its circular courses the wind returns.
- 7 All the rivers flow into the sea,  
Yet the sea is not full.  
To the place where the rivers flow,  
There they flow again.
- 8 All things are wearisome;  
Man is not able to tell *it*.  
The eye is not satisfied with seeing,  
Nor is the ear filled with hearing.
- 9 That which has been is that which will be,  
And that which has been done is that which will be done.  
So there is nothing new under the sun.

- 10 Is there anything of which one might say,  
“See this, it is new”?  
Already it has existed for ages  
Which were before us.
- 11 There is no remembrance of earlier things;  
And also of the later things which will occur,  
There will be for them no remembrance  
Among those who will come later *still*.
- 12 I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.
- 13 And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that  
has been done under heaven. *It* is a grievous task *which* God has given  
to the sons of men to be afflicted with.
- 14 I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and  
behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.
- 15 What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is lacking cannot be  
counted.
- 16 I said to myself, “Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more  
than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has  
observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge.”
- 17 And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I  
realized that this also is striving after wind.
- 18 Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing  
knowledge *results in* increasing pain.

## ECCLESIASTES 2

### Observation Worksheet

Chapter Theme \_\_\_\_\_

- 1 I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.” And behold, it too was futility.
- 2 I said of laughter, “It is madness,” and of pleasure, “What does it accomplish?”
- 3 I explored with my mind *how* to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding *me* wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives.
- 4 I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself;
- 5 I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees;
- 6 I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees.
- 7 I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem.
- 8 Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines.
- 9 Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me.
- 10 All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor.

- 11 Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.
- 12 So I turned to consider wisdom, madness and folly; for what *will* the man *do* who will come after the king *except* what has already been done?
- 13 And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.
- 14 The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I know that one fate befalls them both.
- 15 Then I said to myself, "As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?" So I said to myself, "This too is vanity."
- 16 For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man *as* with the fool, inasmuch as *in* the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die!
- 17 So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind.
- 18 Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me.
- 19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity.
- 20 Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun.
- 21 When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil.
- 22 For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun?
- 23 Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity.

- 24 There is nothing better for a man *than* to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God.
- 25 For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?
- 26 For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God's sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind.



ECCLESIASTES AT A GLANCE

**Book Theme:**

**Segment Divisions**

<b>Author:</b>		<b>Chapter Themes</b>
		1
<b>Date:</b>		2
<b>Purpose:</b>		3
		4
		5
<b>Key Words:</b>		6
		7
		8
		9
		10
		11
		12



## WHAT ECCLESIASTES TEACHES ABOUT GOD

