



## Ecclesiastes

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### **BIG IDEA**

Everything is temporary and fleeting like smoke from a fire.

### **Interpretive Key**

Ecclesiastes is the real and raw ancient wisdom of a Solomon-like prodigy who experienced everything the world had to offer. It's luxuries and cruelties, pleasures and injustices. Reflecting back on it, he teaches that if all there is is what there is under the sun, then life is a meaningless "vapor". The narrator concludes that the path to meaning is to (1) fear God, (2) obey His commands, and (3) remember the Day of Judgment will be come.

### **Opening Question:**

What are some noble things people chase to give meaning to life?

How often do you get a chance to reflect on what is meaningful about life?

### **About the book:**

Ecclesiastes is a part of the Old Testament writings that falls into a category called wisdom literature. This writing is intended to help us understand how to live with meaning and purpose in our lives. Yet a lot of what this book talks about is translated as meaningless or vapor.

**Read:** Ecclesiastes 1: 1-9.

**Question:** What is it about our human appetites that they never seem fully and finally satisfied?

The author of the book takes on the persona of a teacher or someone who is there to instruct us the readers. That is a good way to approach the book of Ecclesiastes as a student of what it has to teach you.

There are a lot of paradoxes in this book, it will highlight the goodness of something in one moment and point out how fleeting that can be in the next moment.

**Read:** Ecclesiastes 2:1-3

You will see most things people chase after, wealth, relationships, health, sex, power, and influence in the end are said to be meaningless by the teacher. Just a vapor, something that can never be grasped or held on to.

**Read:** Ecclesiastes 2:12-17

The refrain of the question, people chase these good and bad things in life and ultimately they are meaningless. It forces us as students to ask what we pursue.

**Read:** Ecclesiastes 3:1-13

**Personal Reflection:** What have you been pursuing as the primary value in life? Would the teacher say it is vapor?

There are portions of the book where the teacher seems to take a break from analyzing the things that people chase after to give some insight and wisdom.

**Read:** Ecclesiastes 5:1-7

In chapter 6 the teacher returns to his lesson pointing out that people sometimes receive blessings but do not even get to enjoy them. His advice in this chapter is "Enjoy what you have rather than desiring what you don't have."

**Questions:** How have you seen this advice be useful in your own life?

Why is it difficult to balance healthy ambition and contentment?

**Read:** Ecclesiastes 7:3-11

Discuss which of these wise sayings stands out to you and why. Are there any that you disagree with, or some that resonate more than others?

There is something inside the human condition that cries out for justice. A cheater getting ahead, someone stealing but never getting caught just rubs us the wrong way.

In chapter 9 the teacher points out that our perspective is not big enough because we all ultimately suffer the same outcome. Death.

Chapter 9:11 says "I have observed something else under the sun. The fastest runner doesn't always win the race, and the strongest warrior doesn't always win the battle. The wise sometimes go hungry, and the skillful are not necessarily wealthy. And those who are educated don't always lead successful lives. It is all decided by chance, by being in the right place at the right time."

Chapter 12 sounds like the thoughts of an old wise man reflecting on his life. Each of the stanzas starts by encouraging the student to remember your creator while you are young.

**Read:** Ecclesiastes 12:1-7

The close of the book the author steps back and appears as a different voice than the teacher. The author talks about the summary of what the teacher had been doing through this book and concludes with this thought.

**Read:** Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

**Questions:**

How does the conclusion the author draw follow from everything you have read today?

What are some practical ways you can follow the author's advice here?

**"Under the Sun" Worldview:**

If all there is under the sun is what there is under the sun, then life is ultimately meaningless!

**Over the Sun Worldview:**

You will find meaning under the sun if you: (1) fear God (exaltation); (2) obey His commands (sanctification); (3) remember the Day of Judgment will come (perseverance).