

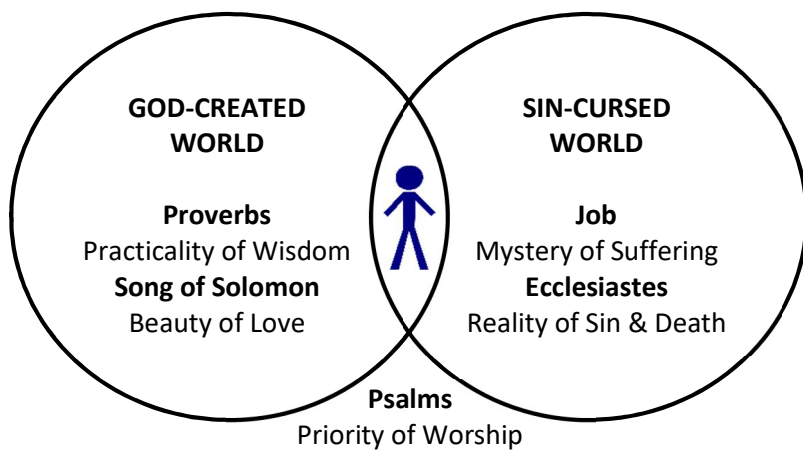


Ecclesiastes 1:1-18

TAKING A HARD LOOK AT REALITY

The book of Ecclesiastes is one of God's gifts to help us live in the real world. It's a book in the Bible that gets under the radar of our thinking and acts like an incendiary device to explode our make-believe games and jolt us into realizing that everything is not as clean and tidy as the "let's pretend" world suggests. Ecclesiastes is the words of "the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem," and begins with shock tactics. The very first thing he wants to tell us is that "all is vanity," "vanity of vanities." If you want readers to wake up and stop pretending about what life is like, that's a pretty good way to get their attention.
—David Gibson, *Living Life Backward*

Ecclesiastes is part of the Wisdom Literature of the OT which includes Job, Proverbs, Song of Solomon and the Psalms. The goal of the Wisdom Literature is to teach us how to live in this present world—a world created by God but impacted by sin.



Ecclesiastes presents the voice of Solomon, the son of David, the king of Jerusalem, as "the Teacher" (1:1). Though gifted with unparalleled wisdom and riches by God, Solomon strayed from the Lord and experienced the emptiness of life apart from Him (cf. 1 Kings 4:29-34, 11:1-43).

THE PREMISE: Life is _____ (1:2-3; 12:8)!

- _____ (6:12; Ps. 39:5; 144:4).
- _____ (1:14; 2:11, 17; Isaiah 49:4).
- _____ (3:16-19; 4:7-8; 6:2; 8:14).

Perhaps no book of the Bible is more perplexing—and yet more majestic in its appeal—than the book of Ecclesiastes. ...It has been called "the black sheep of the Bible" and "the strangest book of the Bible." —Roy Zuck

It is no exaggeration to say that there may be less agreement about the interpretation of Ecclesiastes [Qoheleth] than there is about any other biblical book, even the Revelation of John!
—David Hubbard

Preacher. Hebrew, *qoheleth*, "one who addresses a public assembly and discourses of human affairs" (Gesenius).

Vanity. Hebrew, *hebel*, literally, "vapor, breath." Used 38x in Ecclesiastes. It signifies that which is insubstantial, transitory.

The core meaning of hebel is "enigmatic." Something that is hebel cannot be grasped or controlled. ...In the OT, hebel is also the name for Adam and Eve's second son, Abel (Gen. 4:2)... Abel's unjust and meaningless murder is just the kind of reality that Qoheleth wrestles with.
—Craig G. Bartholomew

One of the other key phrases in Ecclesiastes is “under the sun,” used 27x throughout the book (e.g., 1:3, 9, 14; 2:11, 17-22; 8:15). The Teacher is describing life in this present world—life as it is apart from any special revelation or intervention from God.

LIFE UNDER THE SUN DESCRIBED (1:4-11)

- This naturalistic world is not _____ about you.
- This naturalistic world is not _____ by you.
- This naturalistic world will not _____ you.

LIFE UNDER THE SUN ANALYZED (1:12-18)

After introducing his premise—*life under the sun is vanity*—the Teacher gives his own personal story and observations. As the Teacher, Solomon is uniquely qualified to give his assessment on life since he had the time, the resources, the motivation, the power, the opportunity, the knowledge, and the wisdom to pursue all that this world can offer.

**1. *What is crooked cannot be made straight,
And what is lacking cannot be numbered.* (1:15)**

There is something fundamentally wrong with this world and it cannot, and will not, be _____ by you or me.

**2. *For in much wisdom is much grief,
And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.* (1:18)**

The more you see and know of this world, the more it will _____, _____, and _____ you.

Thus, if you want true meaning, purpose, significance, and joy in this life, then you better have a sure hope that is “above the sun.”

You are born into the world, you live your life, and then you die, but the earth keeps right on going. It's like you are walking across a desert, leaving foot-prints in the sand that the wind erases as though you were never there....Nature is not benevolent. ...Nature is an impersonal machine that consumes you.

—Tommy Nelson

We don't want to admit that we are fundamentally dishonest about reality, that we do not really control our own lives. ...It can't be overstressed, one final time, to see the world as it really is is devastating and terrifying.

—Ernest Becker

The reality is, we spend our lives trying to escape the constraints of our created condition. Opening our eyes to this is a significant breakthrough. To be human is to be a creature, and to be a creature is to be finite. We are not God. We are not in control.

—David Gibson

Grief. Hebrew, *ka'as*, “anger, vexation, grief, frustration.”

Sorrow. Hebrew, *makob*, “pain, both physical and mental.”

If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it, that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing.

—C.S. Lewis