

# Intro to Ecclesiastes

## Lesson for Sunday, May 5, 2024

### INTRODUCTION:

- ⇒ Today we begin a new series through the book of Ecclesiastes! (Sorry – no flannelgraph for this one!) Ask: *What do you know about this important book?*
  - Who wrote it? What is the theme? Etc. See what they know...
  - Encourage them to spend some time in this book during the weeks we are teaching.
- ⇒ Fill in the blank: *If I had \_\_\_\_\_ I would be happy.*
  - Have some discussion about some of the things people might say to complete that sentence.
  - Typically, we can sum it up with “more.” We often think that if we just had a little more then everything would be fine.
- ⇒ In Ecclesiastes, we see a man who had the opportunity to test this theory, and test it he did! For the next several weeks, we have the opportunity to sit at his feet and to learn from his mistakes.

### OUTLINE:

1. MEET THE AUTHOR (1:1)
  - a. The author introduces himself in verse 1 as “the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.” There is only one candidate and he is Solomon.
  - b. Remind your class briefly about his background:
    - i. Served after his father David.
    - ii. When he was young he asked God for wisdom (1 Kings 3:5-15).
    - iii. God granted his request making Solomon the wisest man to ever live.
    - iv. Solomon wrote much of Proverbs, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes.
  - c. Solomon started well and loved the Lord (1 Kings 3:3).
  - d. But he didn’t end well (1 Kings 11:1-4, 11). Solomon became a greedy, lustful, power-hungry, idolatrous fool. He violated the kingly commands of Deuteronomy 17.
    - i. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines.
    - ii. The foreign women pulled his heart away from God.
    - iii. As he refused to deny himself anything he wanted, he ruined the kingdom, ultimately leading to its division.
  - e. Most believe that Solomon penned this book at the end of his life as he contemplated the mistakes he had made and sharing what he had learned.
  - f. Here’s an important key to remember as we study this together: Solomon had it all. He had wisdom, money, accomplishments, etc.
    - i. He tried it all and he had it all!
    - ii. This makes his message to us just as relevant in 2024 as it was the day it was written.
    - iii. Most of us have thought, *“If I could just have more money, more pleasure, or more success, then I would be happy.”* Solomon says, *“No so fast!”*
2. LEARN THE POINT (1:2-3)
  - a. Like a good author, Solomon begins by clearly stating his thesis. Read verses 2-3. What is he trying to tell us?
  - b. “Vanity of vanities” is a key phrase to unlocking the meaning of this book.
    - i. It is used 38 times in Ecclesiastes.
    - ii. The phrase means emptiness, futile or meaninglessness.
    - iii. It paints a picture of water vapor. Think of the steam coming off a boiling pot of water. How long does it last? Can you catch it? If you try to grasp it, what do you end up with? Nothing. To even try is the definition of vanity.
    - iv. A more formal definition: It describes whatever disappears quickly, leaves nothing behind and does not satisfy.
    - v. Point out that Solomon says “all” is vanity, leaving us no wiggle room.

- c. "Under the sun" is another key concept we must understand.
    - i. It is used 29 times in Ecclesiastes.
    - ii. This phrase defines Solomon's outlook as he views life from a naturalist point of view. This is the perspective that leaves God out of the picture, as if He doesn't exist.
  - d. Other key words we see in these verses:
    - i. "Profit" – 10 x's – that which is left over – the opposite of vanity.
    - ii. "Labor" – 23 x's – to work to the point of exhaustion and yet experience little or no fulfillment in your work.
    - iii. "Man" – 49 x's – man as made from the earth.
  - e. Class exercise: Using these definitions, rewrite verses 2-3 in your own words. Use it as a group exercise.
  - f. [Here is Jeff's attempt: *"Emptiness and unsatisfactory futility," says the Preacher. "Everything is futile, empty, and disappears like a vapor. A man of the earth can work to the point of exhaustion in search of meaning and still find no satisfaction in his efforts as long as his focus is under the sun (or man's way)."* Don't cheat and use this one! Write you own!]
  - g. Discuss: How does Solomon's intro hit you? What is your reaction – do you agree or disagree? Why? Does it ring true? What would our culture say about it? As you facilitate this brief discussion, push for examples and specifics.
3. DON'T FORGET OUR CREATOR
- a. The Hebrew word used for "vanity" is often used throughout Scripture in connection with idols. It reminds us of Paul's warning in Romans 1:21-23.
  - b. The natural bent for humans is to try and find satisfaction in created things rather than the Creator, and seeking satisfaction in anything or anyone other than God is idolatry. We become like children who do not say thank you for Christmas presents, we worship the gift instead of the Giver.
  - c. The search does not work because created things cannot bring ultimate satisfaction. It's not that they are necessarily bad things in and of themselves, but when they become a ultimate things to us, they let us down.
  - d. A good thing turned into a God thing becomes a bad thing. It becomes an idol.
  - e. Solomon's point in Ecclesiastes is this: *Everything is meaningless with Jesus*. Whatever you try to build your life on other than Jesus is ultimately utterly meaningless.
  - f. Atheist philosopher, Bertrand Russell understood this as well as Solomon. Listen to his quote:
    - i. "What else is there to make life tolerable? We stand on the shore of an ocean, crying to the night and to emptiness. Sometimes a voice of one drowning, and in a moment the silence returns. The world seems to me quite dreadful, the unhappiness of many people is very great, and I often wonder how they all endure it. It is usually the central thing around which their lives are built, and I suppose if they did not live most of their lives in the things of the moment, they would not be able to go on."
    - ii. *Everything is meaningless with Jesus*.
  - g. Is there anything in your life that you set up as the center? You have a center. You have that one thing that you live for, that you believe if you obtain it you will be happy. If it's not Jesus, it's an idol, and it will never satisfy.

THIS WEEK: Spend time reading Ecclesiastes 1:1-18.