

# Ecclesiastes

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## The Author/Dating

Internal evidence points to Solomon as the author in a roundabout way. The author was a Son of David and King of Jerusalem (1:1) who is known for his wisdom (1:16) extensive building projects (2:4-6) servants (2:7) and wealth (2:8). Such qualities distinctly characterize Solomon. If Solomon is adopted as the author he more than likely wrote the book during the later part of his life having had opportunity to experience the ways of life expressed within the book. Therefore a date of (940-931 B.C.) may be held.

There are those who object to Solomonic authorship. It is noted that a difference in vocabulary and syntax exists between Ecclesiastes and other books written from that period.<sup>1</sup> However the differences in both grammar and vocabulary are inconclusive.<sup>2</sup> It should also be kept in mind that Ecclesiastes represents a diverse group of literary style of that culture.<sup>3</sup>

“The authorship of Ecclesiastes is greatly debated. Many hold to Solomonic authorship, whereas others adamantly oppose that position. Some statements in the book make Solomonic authorship difficult. Nevertheless, the best position is still that King Solomon wrote this book.”<sup>4</sup>

## The Purpose

Ecclesiastes was written to show that although man’s life is short, unpredictable, and temporal, God has designed purpose and reward for those who fear God and keep his commandments.

## The Message

Life is Short and grievous but God has designed life with purpose, rewards and judgment.

Life is the subject of Ecclesiastes since the book begins with the theme of life (1:1-7) and then continues that theme throughout its entirety. Within the text, life is described as short (1:1-8), and grievous (1:1-11; 2:11). After establishing the nature of life in the first two chapters, Solomon then proceeds to teach that God has design and purpose (3:1-17) for man’s life. In this second section (2:26-8:15), Solomon described God’s design. After noting that God doesn’t take any pleasure in broken vows, Solomon records that He gives good and bad days, and also accepts the labor of man (5:3-5; 7:14; 9:7). Through various observations, Solomon informs the reader that while life is passing and

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<sup>1</sup> Gleason L. Jr. Archer, *A Survey of Old Testament Introduction* (Chicago: Moody Press, 1994), 528.

<sup>2</sup> *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*, ed. Ronald B. Allen Earl D. Radmacher, H. Wayne House (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999), 780.

<sup>3</sup> Archer, , 533.

<sup>4</sup> Paul N. Benware, *The Essential Bible Survey of the Old Testament* (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003), 178.

uncertain (8:14,17), life is still has design (8:6-8,17). Considering the facts that Solomon observed in the first and second section, He charges the people to respond in the third section (8:16-12:14). Although the last section is difficult to isolate, Solomon gradually and firmly moves from an attitude of observation to an attitude of instruction (8:16; 9:9, 10; 11:1-7; 11:9; 12:13, 14). Solomon charged the reader to respond due to the information he mentioned in the previous chapters (12:13,14). By the end of the book, the reader understands that although life is quickly passing and unpredictable there is design, reward, joy and purpose for mankind.

“Negative descriptions such as “cynical,” fatalistic” or “existential” do not do the Book of Ecclesiastes justice. There is too much evidence of robust cheerfulness throughout its pages. “So I commended enjoyment” (8:15) is a recurrent theme that pervades the book; in fact, the Hebrew words for “gladness” and “being glad” appear seventeen times in Ecclesiastes. The underlying mood of the book is joy: finding pleasure in life despite the troubles that often plague it. Those who fear and worship God should experience this joy; they should rejoice in the gifts God has given them.”<sup>5</sup>

## **The Theme**

The futility of life outside God

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<sup>5</sup> *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*, , 780.

# A Sentence Outline of Ecclesiastes

- I. Man's life passes away quickly and is full of grievous works that are without lasting profit. 1:1-2:25**
  - A. Life will pass away soon 1:1-11
  - B. Life's works are Grievous with no lasting value 1:12-2:25
  
- II. Man's life is designed by God and filled with burdens, uncertainty, and reward. 2:26-8:15**
  - A. Man is designed to learn to fear God 3:11-15
  - B. Man is designed with brevity and uncertainty 6:3, 6, 12; 9:11
  - C. Man is designed with need of Companionship 4:1, 7-12
  - D. Man is designed to Labor 5:19; 8:16; 9:7
  - E. Man is designed to reap and enjoy Reward 3:13,22; 5:19
  - F. Man is designed upright but sinned 7:20,22,29
  
- III. Man's burdens, uncertainty and reward have purpose. 8:16-12:14**
  - A. Since life is short and uncertain (6:3, 6, 12; 9:11), man should fear God (12:13).
  - B. Since life is short and uncertain (6:3, 6, 12; 9:11), man should remember and serve the creator while young (11:9-12:7)
  - C. Since God has designed man for companionship (4:1, 7-12), man should enjoy spouse (9:9, 10).
  - D. Since God has given labor (5:19; 8:16; 9:7), man should labor intently for profit despite circumstances (9:10; 11:1-7).
  - E. Since God has provided reward for labor (3:13, 22; 5:19), man should enjoy his reward. (8:16; 9:9).
  - F. Since Man has sinned (7:20, 22, 29), man needs to prepare for judgment (11:9; 12:13,14).

## Topics in Ecclesiastes

### God

God has provide both wisdom and labor for man in order to: search out (1:13), gain benefit (2:24; 3:9, 10, 13), learn to fear God (3:10-18) and to be held accountable (8:12, 13; 11:9, 14).

### Man

Man's short life (6:3, 6, 12) is unsatisfied with riches (5:10-11), full of unexplained events (3:11) and ends up with death (8:8).

### Wisdom

Wisdom is a sore travail (1:13) that is of great value (4:13-16) because it strengthens (7:11,13,19), protects (9:18) and provides an advantage for success (10:10).

### The Will of God for man's personal life

God's will is for man to fear God (3:14), work with all his might (9:7-10), enjoy the fruits of his labor (2:24,25), enjoy the companionship of his wife (9:9) and remember that judgment day is coming (11:9).

### The Fool

A fool is lazy (4:5) and known by a multitude of prideful (5:1-3) empty (7:4-6) words which begin with folly and end with madness (10:12-15).

### Work for Selfish Gain

Man's exhausting labor (4:4) doesn't have any lasting profit (1:11; 2:11; 5:16) for an unsatisfied body (6:7).

### Work as designed by God

God has approved (9:7) and designed labor for man to enjoy (8:16) exert much energy (9:10) and from which to get benefit (2:24; 5:18).

### Reward or Benefit from God

God has given fruit of labor (2:24-26); 3:13, 22) and spouse for mankind to enjoy (9:9).

### The contradictions of Life

Various contradictions of life (2:16; 7:2,4; 8:14; 9:6) prove that life is unpredictable for both the righteous and the wicked.

## **Bibliography**

*Archer, Gleason L. Jr. A Survey of Old Testament Introduction. Chicago: Moody Press, 1994.*

*Benware, Paul N. The Essential Bible Survey of the Old Testament. Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2003.*

*Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary. ed. Ronald B. Allen Earl D. Radmacher, H. Wayne House. Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1999.*

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
God	God gave wisdom for man to search vs 13		God has designed life Vs 1-17		God Has no pleasure in broken vows vs 3-5		God has given both good days and 'bad' days. 14	God will judge the wicked vs 12, 13	God accepts labor of man vs 7		God's works are past finding out. Vs 5	God will judge every work vs 14
Man	Man's wearisome and short life is passing vss 1-8	Man's life accomplishments are temp. and unsatisfactory. 1-25	Man's life is designed by God to teach man to fear God. vs 11-15	Man is designed for companionship. Vs. 1, 7-12	Man Isn't satisfied with Silver vs 10, 11	Man's labor is for his mouth. Vs 7 Man has a short life vs 3, 6, 12	Man made upright but has sinned vs 20, 22, 29	Man is powerless over death. vs 8 Man's knowledge is limited. vs 17	Man's heart is full of Evil vs 3			
Wisdom	Wisdom is a sore travail and brings grief. vs 13	Wisdom excels folly vs 13		Wisdom with poverty is better than foolish with riches vs. 13-16			Wisdom is profitable today as it strengthens the wise vs 11, 13, 19	Wisdom makes the face to shine vs 1	Wisdom is better than weapons of war vs 18	Wisdom is an advantage for success. Vs 10		
The will of God for man's personal life	Man should seek wisdom vs 13	Man should enjoy the fruits of his labor and the Lord. (vss. 24, 25)	Man should fear, rejoice and do good before God vs 14		Man should limit words and think of God vs 1,2	Man should know Good vs 3	Man doesn't need to be hasty with anger vs 9		Man should live right, labor hard and love his spouse vs 7-10		Man should remember that he will be judged. vs 9	Man should remember and serve creator while young. Vs 1,2
The fool		The fool walks in darkness vs 14		The fool is lazy to his own destruction vs 5	The fool doesn't see his own evil and is known by a multitude of words vs 3		The fool's pleasure, song and laughter are empty Vs 4-6 The fool is soon angry vs 9			The fool has many words that end with madness. Vs. 12-15		
Work for selfish gain	Works are grievous. vs 1-11	Works do not profit eternally vs 1-11		Works are vanity and vexation of Spirit vs 4	Works have no profit v 16	Works never satisfy vs 7						
Work as God designed it		Man is to enjoy good of labor vs 24			Man is to enjoy the good of his labor vs 18			Labor is given by God for man to enjoy vs 16	God approves Works vs 7 Man is to work with all his might vs 10			
Reward or benefit from God		God has given fruit of labor to enjoy (vss 24- 26)	Fruit of Labor is a gift of God vs 13, 22		Fruit of labor is a gift of God for man to enjoy vs 19				Man has given spouse for enjoyment. vs 9			
The Contradictions of life		The wise man dies as the fool vs 16					Death better than life and mourning is better than mirth. vs 2, 4	Sometimes wicked find good and the righteous receive evil. 14	Folly is set in high places and rich in low. Vs 6			