

The author's name is not mentioned in the book, but King Solomon probably wrote it. He calls himself "the Preacher," which means "one who calls an assembly and discusses a topic." The Greek word for "assembly" is *ekklesia* (the New Testament word for "church"), and the book's title comes from this word. As the wisest, wealthiest, and most powerful man of his day, Solomon certainly had the opportunity and resources to do the things mentioned in Ecclesiastes.

In this book, Solomon seeks to answer the question, "Is life worth living?" First, he states the problem and argues for the negative (chaps. 1–2). Then he examines the problem from many different angles (chaps. 3–10) and argues for the positive. He concludes that life is worth living if you put God first and obey His Word (chaps. 11–12).

Called a pessimistic book, Ecclesiastes is actually realistic. Solomon looked at life and death, success and failure, time and events, and wrote some wise counsel about how to live a meaningful life in a world of contradictions and seeming futility. When viewed apart from God ("under the sun"), life is indeed "vanity" (futility); but when you live for Christ, life is never "in vain" (1 Corinthians 15:58).

Six times Solomon advises you to enjoy life *now* and be grateful for God's gifts (2:24; 3:12–15, 22; 5:18–20; 8:15; 9:7–10; 11:9–10). This is not the pleasure-seeking philosophy of the epicurean ("eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die") but the joyful outlook of the believer who accepts life as God's gift to enjoy and employ for His glory (1 Timothy 6:17–19).

Ecclesiastes is a widely misunderstood book. It appears to be Solomon's sermon on the natural man's quest for the good life. Solomon had inconceivable wealth and power, and he was able to satisfy his every wish. But he ended up pretty cynical about it all. Solomon's authorship of Ecclesiastes is important because here's someone who really knew, who had really "been there." In contrast to the Book of Proverbs, this is not a collection of scattered precepts, but a cumulative sermon with a climax.

Many people misunderstand Ecclesiastes because, while it penetrates the human condition, it looks beyond death. It seems pessimistic at first, but only if you stop at death. In fact, the main thrust of the book is that you need to look beyond, into the afterlife, to make sense out of anything. In other words, it is, in a sense, the cure for pessimism.

The conclusion in Ecclesiastes: all is vanity (literally "vapor breath"). It's bravely honest, rather than pessimistic. It sees beyond life's ironies and wearying repetition to the divine control and future restitutions.

The first two chapters are the quest by personal experiment—the preacher's own search for wisdom and pleasure. The next few chapters are the quest by general observation; these deal with the enigmas of human society. And the next few chapters are the quest by practical morality. The conclusion is that material things cannot satisfy the soul. As Jesus told the Samaritan woman at the well of Sychar, *"Whoever drinks of this water will thirst again, but whoever drinks of the water that I shall give him will never thirst. But the water that I shall give him will become in him a fountain of water springing up into everlasting life."* (John 4:13-14)

The last few chapters are the quest reviewed and concluded. And it concludes that all is vanity.

The final significance is, *“Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man”* (12:13). This is written by the exhausted man at the end, and he goes on (in verse 14), *“For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil.”* It really sets the stage for the Book of Romans and is the opposite of pessimism. Romans 8:20,21 says, *“For the creature was made subject to vanity, not willingly, but by reason of him who hath subjected the same in hope, because the creature itself also shall be delivered from the bondage of corruption into the glorious liberty of the children of God.”*

Ecclesiastes Deals with Ten Vanities:

1. The vanity of human wisdom: both the wise and foolish die.
2. Human labor: the worker is no better than the shirker in the end.
3. Human purpose: man proposes, but God disposes.
4. Human rivalry: success brings more envy than joy.
5. Human avarice: much feeds lust for the elusive more.
6. Human fame: brief, uncertain, and soon forgotten.
7. Human insatiety: money does not satisfy but only feeds other desires.
8. Human coveting: gain cannot be enjoyed despite desire.
9. Human frivolity: only camouflages the inevitable sad end.
10. Human awards: good and bad often get wrong deserts.