

path to
purpose
A STUDY ON THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

This study belongs to:

ALEXA HESS

Without Jesus, there is no hope for
this world or meaning in this life, which
is what Ecclesiastes shows us.



week one day one

A Frustrating Quest

READ ECCLESIASTES 1-12

A man sets out on a journey. He does not have all the details of this trip planned, but he does know what he is looking for—happiness and satisfaction. First, he tries a road marked “wisdom and knowledge,” and while he experiences some delight along the way, eventually, the road leads to a dead end. He turns around and tries another path called “riches and glory,” but this path ends the same as the first. Frustrated, he tries a path called “the fruits of labor,” but sadly, this path leads to a dead end as well.

We are no different from the man in this situation. Each of us sets out on a journey of discovery, a journey to find answers and experience the destination our hearts desire. But without our compass, we reach a dead end each time. The book of Ecclesiastes describes this journey that each of us takes. It reveals the insights of someone who sought to discover the meaning of life and what makes life worth living. Ecclesiastes describes this man’s frustrations with each pursuit that results in a dead end. Who is this man?

This man is traditionally believed to be Solomon. The book of Ecclesiastes opens with “the words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem” (Ecclesiastes 1:1). The name given, “the Teacher,”



Reading Ecclesiastes focuses our eyes on our need for Christ.

is where the title “Ecclesiastes” comes from. The Hebrew word for Ecclesiastes is the word *Qōhelet*, which translates as “preacher” or “teacher.” The word *Qōhelet* describes someone who addresses an assembly. This title, as well as the title of “son of David, king in Jerusalem,” strongly points to Solomon, who was David’s son and became king over Israel. However, most scholars agree that the words of Ecclesiastes are likely from an editor who presents the teachings of Solomon. This editor probably took the lessons of Solomon’s life and wrote them, intending to teach readers the wisdom gleaned from Solomon’s experiences.

The purpose of imparting wisdom and knowledge causes Ecclesiastes to fall into the genre of wisdom literature. Scholars have disagreed over the years about how to interpret the wisdom of Ecclesiastes. Some believe the main takeaway is a pessimistic view of life, whereas others believe it provides an optimistic view. Some assume Solomon is a skeptic who takes an irreligious point of view, while others assume that Solomon is a believer who teaches about faithfulness to God. But as the years have passed, scholars tend to agree that Ecclesiastes is an apologetic essay, meaning that it is a defense for faith in God.

The author accomplishes this purpose by describing Solomon’s thoughts, feelings, and experiences that reveal life’s grimness without a relationship with God. The negativity, positivity, skepticism, and faith in the book of Ecclesiastes portray an

accurate picture of humanity’s quest for truth and meaning. Like Solomon, we too struggle to understand how this world works and the purpose of our existence. We wrestle with questions about God, suffering, injustice, and the future. Solomon tackles these struggles and questions in Ecclesiastes. Through it all, Solomon seeks to give readers a realistic perspective on the brokenness of this world and how one can still live with hope and joy in a dark and fleeting world.

While reading Ecclesiastes, it is important to keep in mind where Solomon was in redemptive history. During his life and reign as king, Israel was in a covenantal relationship with God. Israel was experiencing the fulfillment of God’s promise to bring them to the Promised Land and grow them into a thriving nation. God had also promised a deliverer who would crush the enemy (Genesis 3:15), and God expanded on this promise through the covenant He made with Solomon’s father, David. God promised that from David’s line would come a king who would deliver His people and rule over an eternal kingdom. The people of Israel, Solomon included, hoped for this coming Messiah. Many years later, this coming Messiah would be revealed as Jesus, but for now, the nation of Israel waited for God’s promise to be fulfilled.

Because Solomon lived before Jesus came, Solomon did not know the whole picture of God’s redemptive plan. We should remember this real-

ity as we read verses in which Solomon wrestles with questions about the meaning of life and what lies beyond death. At times, we may be frustrated that Solomon does not seem to always give us answers to his questions. However, the open-ended nature of some of Solomon’s questions reveals the need for Jesus and an eternal perspective. Without Jesus, there is no hope for this world or meaning in this life, which is what Ecclesiastes shows us.

Ecclesiastes points us to our need for Jesus by describing different aspects of this world that appear futile or meaningless. These areas include work, riches, and possessions. Solomon also speaks about the themes of injustice, wickedness, and death to teach about the brokenness of our world. In reading Ecclesiastes, we may find ourselves feeling downcast and disheartened, but these feelings are necessary in that it is good

for us to realize how the world is broken and how the pursuits we often chase will not save or satisfy us. When all else is taken away, we can see our need for God more clearly.

Therefore, the journey Solomon makes in Ecclesiastes acts as a warning to readers. The dead ends Solomon finds in his pursuit of happiness and satisfaction warn readers not to follow down the same paths. In the end, Solomon’s experiences reveal that we need our compass, God, who gives us guidance to follow the path to life. Ultimately, the path to life is found in Jesus Christ. It is salvation through Jesus that secures us with eternal life and enables us to live the fullness of life in the present. Reading Ecclesiastes focuses our eyes on our need for Christ and teaches us how nothing else in this world can save or satisfy us but Jesus.

study questions

What key words or themes stood out to you while reading Ecclesiastes?
