

ECCLESIASTES

GOD STATEMENT: THE GOD WHO DEFINES _____ (a) _____ (b)

The title of this book in the Hebrew Bible is *Qohelet* or *Koheleth*, a word that is usually translated “_____ (c)” or “teacher” in Ecclesiastes 1:1. Our English name *Ecclesiastes* is derived from the Greek and Latin Bibles. This term in Greek means “the one who addresses the assembly.”

AUTHORSHIP

Jewish tradition from the earliest times has attributed the authorship of Ecclesiastes to _____ (d). It seems rather clear-cut that Solomon is the author since he is described as “the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (Eccl 1:1). Most people believe Solomon wrote this book as an _____ (e) man toward the end of his reign and life. Confirmation of this seems to be found in a verse toward the end of the book: “Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth, before the evil days come and the years draw near when you will say, ‘I have no delight in them’” (Eccl 12:1).

As an old man, Solomon has reflected deeply upon life, and the insights in this book are the result of his observations. As some have said, Ecclesiastes is an inspired confession of _____ (f) and pessimism coming from the lips of a man who _____ (g) most of his life. He relates his discovery that life without _____ (h) is a long and fruitless search for enjoyment, meaning, and fulfillment. Solomon hopes to spare his readers the bitterness of learning through personal experience that carrying out life’s pursuits apart from God is empty, hollow, fruitless, and meaningless.

The book of Ecclesiastes is structured like a sermon on the subject of “the quest for _____ (i) and _____ (j) in life.” First, he describes the results of his personal _____ (k). Second, he moves from personal experiences to general observations about the world and human activity, and he offers practical _____ (l) for living as he moves toward his conclusion. Third and finally, he concludes that true satisfaction in life comes from _____ (m) and _____ (n) God.

SOLOMON'S PERSONAL INVESTIGATION (Chapters 1-2)

Ecclesiastes begins with the famous refrain: "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity!" (1:2). That word appears more than 30 times in this book. It describes human existence, and it's the Hebrew superlative form. For example, "Holy of Holies" means it's the most holy place on the planet." So, "vanity of vanities" means life is as _____ (o) as it can possibly be. The word literally means "breath" or "vapor," so it carries the idea of fleeting, like a puff of smoke, or a hot breath on a cold morning. So, the idea is that life is _____ (p) because everything is so frail and so fleeting.

Solomon begins by asking a question to prove this point, and then comes his answer in verses 4-11. He points to repetitive cycles in nature to prove the point that nothing is gained from all our activity. The universe is trapped in a meaningless _____ (q) that never accomplishes anything, and human experience as a whole mirrors it.

Solomon then describes his experiential quest for meaning and satisfaction. With his vast personal resources, he could have anything he wanted and do anything he wanted . . . and he did. He moves from wisdom to laughter to hedonism, and from wine to works, women, and wealth. But his journey left him deflated, _____ (r), and disillusioned. Nothing brought him lasting satisfaction. He felt the same way before his journey to find meaning and satisfaction and after it.

The purpose of Ecclesiastes is to bring us to the point to where we're afraid that this appalling view of life is true—that nothing matters. But it's not the only honest view of life. Of course, it is true *IF* we merely look at life from an "_____ (s) the _____ (t)" perspective. Time after time—dozens of times in this book—you'll see that phrase: "under the sun." It's the key to understanding the book. Life was drab and meaningless to Solomon because he seldom looked "above the sun."

To see things "under the sun" is to look at them from ground level. It's an _____ (u) point of view. He went everywhere to find happiness, but he left _____ (v) out of the picture. But there is a God who rules _____ (w) the sun. And Ecclesiastes begs us to view life from a celestial perspective—that is, from an "above the sun" perspective—instead of an "under the sun" perspective. When you put God back in the picture, it changes everything.

SOLOMON'S PRACTICAL COUNSEL (Chapters 3-8)

From chapter 4, it's not easy to trace a clear consecutive argument. From here through part of chapter 8, Ecclesiastes resembles the book of Proverbs with short, memorable remarks dealing with various aspects of life. It's best to treat this section as a _____ (x) to living life "under the sun" as people of faith.

This section begins with one of the most well-known poems in the Bible. It begins with the words, "There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven" (Eccl 3:1-10). Some look to this poem for comfort at funerals, but it doesn't bring comfort. It haunts us. It tells us that time crushes dreams, causes tears to fall, and brings all kinds of pain and sadness to life. It tells us that time is fleeting and is filled with both _____ (y) and _____ (z). It's filled with both sorrow and joy. There are fourteen _____ (aa) listed and fourteen _____ (bb). Fourteen pluses and fourteen minuses. One day you're born and the next you're in a box in the cold, hard ground.

So, how do we survive in a world where sorrow is inescapable? In no particular order, here are a few principles that Solomon counsels us to embrace: develop healthy companionships (Eccl 4:9-12), have respect and reverence for God (Eccl 5:1-3), be _____ (cc) (Eccl 4:4-8; 5:10-12), be committed to character development (Eccl 7:1), keep the end of life in the forefront of your mind (Eccl 7:8) always remember that God is in _____ (dd)—even in adversity He is there and He cares (Eccl 7:13), don't exhaust yourself trying to untie the knots of a fallen universe (Eccl 7:15ff), and enjoy and be _____ (ee) for the good gifts that God has given you (Eccl 8:15).

SOLOMON'S FINAL CONCLUSION (Chapters 9-12)

"Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth" (Eccl 12:1). As we rejoice in—and enjoy—the strength of our youth, we must remember our Creator-God. To set this command in its biblical context we need to fast-forward to the end of life, which for most people comes in _____ (ff) age (that's what "the days of evil" are in Eccl 12:1).

The one thing we know with certainty is that we will _____ (gg). Most will grow old and die. If it's hard to imagine what old age will be like, Ecclesiastes can help. Here the Preacher gives us one of the most memorable passages in the Bible. It's a poem about aging, and it's the reality coming to us all (if we don't die young).

The troubles of old age are compared to a gathering _____ (hh). Both night and day the skies are darkened by clouds, and after the rain

falls, the storm clouds gather again (Eccl 12:2). This is what happens when you get old. When we're old, one _____(ii) follows another; one _____(jj) follows another with little or no time to _____(kk).

The poem then compares the problems that typically plague aging to a house that's falling apart (Eccl 12:3-5). Your hands tremble, major muscles begin to fail, your teeth fall out, your eyesight gets weak, your hearing begins to go, your sleep may become more fitful, your voice won't be as strong as it once was, your body is more fragile and easily breakable, and your energy goes away. Things just won't work like they once did. AND THEN YOU _____(ll). That's a pretty painful, pretty sobering, pretty depressing text. But Solomon isn't trying to depress us. He's trying to stir us to action. He's trying to _____(mm) us to God right now. He's saying "Don't delay. Today is the day to turn to God and _____(nn) Him."

And what exactly does "remember God" mean? The ancient Hebrew term means "to act decisively on behalf of someone." He's saying, "Right now you need to start acting decisively for God." In other words, it means we need to _____(oo) to Him right now. Of course, the flesh will answer back, "What's the rush? Live for yourself for the next 30 to 40 years. When you've scratched all your itches, then turn to Him. That way you get the best of both worlds." That's _____(pp). The more He can convince you to keep putting off committing to God and keep living like the world, the more likely you are to be hardened (1 Tim 4:2). The deeper the hole, the tougher it is to get out of it.

There are a lot of good reasons to remember God, but the best reason of all is this: *if you remember _____(qq), He'll remember _____(rr)*. God shows us this throughout the Bible—He remembers people who remember Him. That is, He remembers those who are committed to Him (Gen 8:1; 19:29; 30:22; Ex 2:24; 1 Sam 1:19-20; Luke 23:43).

Ultimately, no one else will remember you (Eccl 1:11; 2:16). People may cheer you now, but that's _____(ss). People may reward you now, but that's _____(tt). The icons of culture are soon _____(uu). The world's most admired, the world's richest, the world's most beautiful—all are soon _____(vv). So, Solomon is urging us to stop scrambling to be loved by people who will never remember us. Instead scramble to be loved by the only one who will remember you.

LESSONS FROM ECCLESIASTES

- When you put _____(ww) in the picture, it changes everything. With God in the picture, today is good and tomorrow will be better through Him.
- Without God in our life, _____(xx) can bring us deep, lasting satisfaction. Without God, our destiny is to grow old, wear out, die, decompose, and be forgotten.
- _____(yy) God right now. That is, _____(zz) to following Him now. If you'll remember Him, He'll remember you.
- Accept that sometimes life in the here-and-now is _____(aaa). Don't exhaust yourself trying to untie all the knots of an unfair universe.
- Soak yourself in the _____(bbb) (Eccl 7:19). When we soak ourselves in God's Word, it will help us to get through the unfairness of life.
- Stay true to what you know is _____(ccc) (Eccl 10:4-7). The right thing will always have the edge with God. When the final bell sounds, be holding on to truth.
- _____(ddd) is not the answer to everything (Eccl 10:19). In this verse, Solomon is summarizing a fool's words. Fools think money solves all, but it doesn't; knowing God does.
- Use your _____(eee) to bless people (Eccl 10:12). A wise person has a mouth that's gracious. Words have such power; they can bless or destroy.
- Be mindful of the _____(fff) of God (Eccl 7:13). Take quiet comfort in knowing "This is my Father's world. O let me ne'er forget that, though the wrong seems oft so strong, God is the ruler yet."
- _____(ggg) and be _____(hhh) for the blessings that God has given you (Eccl 8:15). Part of the secret to survival in this world of sorrow is to enjoy life's joys as a gift from God.
- _____(iii) is the solution to dissatisfaction (Eccl 4:4-8). Contentment with what you have, and having people to enjoy life with, is the best thing of all.
- Life is _____(jjj). Have _____(kkk) (Eccl 4:9-12). Another secret to enduring life sorrows is companionship.

KEY PASSAGES FROM ECCLESIASTES

- Ecclesiastes 2:16-17
- Ecclesiastes 3:1-8
- Ecclesiastes 7:1
- Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

FILL-IN-THE-BLANK ANSWER KEY

[a] MEANINGFUL	[kk] recover
[b] LIVING	[ll] DIE
[c] preacher	[mm] drive
[d] Solomon	[nn] remember
[e] old	[oo] commit
[f] failure	[pp] Satan
[g] wasted	[qq] Him
[h] God	[rr] you
[i] meaning	[ss] fleeting
[j] satisfaction	[tt] fleeting
[k] investigation	[uu] forgotten
[l] counsel	[vv] forgotten
[m] acknowledging	[ww] God
[n] obeying	[xx] nothing
[o] meaningless	[yy] Remember
[p] pointless	[zz] commit
[q] cycle	[aaa] unfair
[r] depressed	[bbb] Bible
[s] under	[ccc] true
[t] sun	[ddd] Money
[u] earthly	[eee] words
[v] God	[fff] sovereignty
[w] over	[ggg] Enjoy
[x] guide	[hhh] thankful
[y] bad	[iii] Contentment
[z] good	[jjj] hard
[aa] positives	[kkk] friends
[bb] negatives	
[cc] content	
[dd] control	
[ee] thankful	
[ff] old	
[gg] die	
[hh] storm	
[ii] storm	
[jj] trouble	