

## Adult Sunday Bible Study Lesson

### Ecclesiastes

July 25, 2021

**Situational Context:** This book reads like a journal detailing from the mind of Solomon, his search for meaning and purpose in life through wisdom. He clearly realizes that life is short and that the things of earth are vanity, that is temporary, a vanishing fog.

**Lesson Theme: Ecclesiastes 1:12-15** The teacher observes God's governance of the world through the activities of His human creatures and tries to understand by wisdom, the purpose for which God created us. He explores meaning and purpose in life through material goods, pleasure, work, and the mind. Since these things are temporary or limited to each person's lifetime, the teacher cannot understand God's overarching purpose for them.

**1. Puzzled: Ecclesiastes 1:12-15 (NIV2011)** <sup>12</sup> I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. <sup>13</sup> I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens. What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind!<sup>14</sup> I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind. <sup>15</sup> What is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.

**Interpretation:** Solomon's personal investigation concludes that human culture is misdirected and incomplete. The endeavors of this world performed under the curse of God are futile and frustrating. Human existence includes divinely imposed burdens. Jesus makes them bearable. God's personal covenant name "Yahweh" is not used in this book. Under heaven and under the sun are synonymous. Solomon had an accurate perspective on the present, because of God's gift, as well as on the past, because he meditated on God's revealed Word. Crooked means out of order contrary to 'normal' This is the result not only of human evil, but also of the divine curse.

### **Supporting Texts:**

**Genesis 3:16-19 (NIV2011)** <sup>16</sup> To the woman he said, “I will make your pains in childbearing very severe; with painful labor you will give birth to children. Your desire will be for your husband, and he will rule over you.” <sup>17</sup> To Adam he said, “Because you listened to your wife and ate fruit from the tree about which I commanded you, ‘You must not eat from it,’ “Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat food from it all the days of your life. <sup>18</sup> It will produce thorns and thistles for you, and you will eat the plants of the field. <sup>19</sup> By the sweat of your brow you will eat your food until you return to the ground, since from it you were taken; for dust you are and to dust you will return.”

**Romans 8:22-23 (NIV2011)** <sup>22</sup> We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time. <sup>23</sup> Not only so, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for our adoption to sonship, the redemption of our bodies.

### **Discussion Starters:**

**Why is seeking wisdom a heavy burden?**

**What is the trap of pursuing worldly goals?**

**Why is wisdom like chasing the wind?**

**Why doesn't the accumulation of wisdom bring fulfillment?**

**Reflect on the Teachers frustration in verse 15.**

**2. Rewards Vanish: Ecclesiastes 2:18-21 (NIV2011)** <sup>18</sup> I hated all the things I had toiled for under the sun, because I must leave them to the one who comes after me. <sup>19</sup> And who knows whether that person will be wise or foolish? Yet they will have control over all the fruit of my toil into which I have poured my effort and skill under the sun. This too is meaningless. <sup>20</sup> So my heart began to despair over all my toilsome labor under the sun. <sup>21</sup> For a person may labor

**with wisdom, knowledge and skill, and then they must leave all they own to another who has not toiled for it. This too is meaningless and a great misfortune.**

**Interpretation:** The teacher was clearly frustrated with the realization that the reward for toil can be had by others who did not work for it, stolen reward. He obviously realizes that toil is the result of the fall but he cannot see any point to it. He is particularly piqued by leaving the rewards of his work to others after his death.

**Supporting Texts:**

**Genesis 1:28 (NIV2011)** <sup>28</sup> God blessed them and said to them, “Be fruitful and increase in number; fill the earth and subdue it. Rule over the fish in the sea and the birds in the sky and over every living creature that moves on the ground.”

**Matthew 6:20 (NIV2011)** <sup>20</sup> But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moths and vermin do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

**Psalms 39:6 (NIV2011)** <sup>6</sup> “Surely everyone goes around like a mere phantom; in vain they rush about, heaping up wealth without knowing whose it will finally be.

**Discussion Starters:**

**What is driving the teacher mad?**

**Why can't the possession of things in this life be reward enough?**

**3. A Realization: Ecclesiastes 2:22-26 (NIV2011)** <sup>22</sup> What do people get for all the toil and anxious striving with which they labor under the sun? <sup>23</sup> All their days their work is grief and pain; even at night their minds do not rest. This too is meaningless. <sup>24</sup> A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, <sup>25</sup> for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? <sup>26</sup> To the person who

**pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.**

**Interpretation:** Only in God does life have meaning and true pleasure. Without him nothing satisfies, but with him we find satisfaction and enjoyment. True pleasure comes only when we acknowledge and revere God.

**Supporting Texts:**

**Job 5:7 (NIV2011)** <sup>7</sup> Yet man is born to trouble as surely as sparks fly upward.

**Job 14:1 (NIV2011)** <sup>1</sup> “Mortals, born of woman, are of few days and full of trouble.

**Discussion Starters:**

**How do we find satisfaction in our work?**

**Why does the Teacher consider verse 26 unfair?**

**How would the teacher view heaven as a reward granted by faith not works?**

**Isn't this benefiting from someone else's work, Christ's?**