OLD TESTAMENT · POETRY AND WISDOM · BOOK 21 OF 66

Ecclesiastes

Fear God, and keep His commandments (12:13)

12	Solomon	c. 935 B.C.	“Vanity”
Chapters, 222 Verses	The Preacher (1:1)	Late in His Reign	Used 38 Times

STRUCTURE

The Book in Four Parts

The book opens with “Vanity of vanities” (1:2) and returns to the same words before its conclusion (12:8).



Each bar shows that part’s share of the 222 verses.

I 1–2 · 44 verses

The Search

Wisdom, pleasure, works and wealth put to the test.

II 3–5 · 58 verses

Time and Toil

A season for every thing; injustice, worship and riches.

III 6–8 · 58 verses

What Is Good?

“Better” sayings and the limits of wisdom.

IV 9–12 · 62 verses

Live Wisely

Enjoy God’s gifts, remember thy Creator, fear God.

ECCLESIASTES 1–2

The Preacher’s Search

The king tried everything a man could want, to see what would last.

> *“Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all is vanity.”*
>
> Ecclesiastes 1:2 (KJV)

1 1:16–18

Wisdom

“In much wisdom is much grief”

2 2:1–3

Pleasure

Laughter and wine

3 2:4–6

Great Works

Houses, vineyards, gardens and pools

4 2:7–8

Wealth

Servants, singers, silver and gold

The Verdict

“All was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun” (2:11).

Under the Sun and a Time for Every Thing

ECCLESIASTES 1

Nothing New under the Sun

"Under the sun" means life as we see it here on earth. Round and round it goes.

1:4
Generations
One passeth away, another cometh

1:5
The Sun
Riseth, goeth down, and hasteth back

1:6
The Wind
Whirleth about continually

1:7
The Rivers
Run into the sea; yet the sea is not full

> *"The thing that hath been, it is that which shall be; and that which is done is that which shall be done: and there is no new thing under the sun."*
>
> Ecclesiastes 1:9 (KJV)

ECCLESIASTES 3

A Time to Every Purpose

"To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven" (3:1). Fourteen pairs of times:

3:2
To Be Born
and a time to die

3:2
To Plant
and a time to pluck up

3:3
To Kill
and a time to heal

3:3
To Break Down
and a time to build up

3:4
To Weep
and a time to laugh

3:4
To Mourn
and a time to dance

3:5
To Cast Away Stones
and a time to gather stones

3:5
To Embrace
and a time to refrain

3:6
To Get
and a time to lose

3:6
To Keep
and a time to cast away

3:7
To Rend
and a time to sew

3:7
To Keep Silence
and a time to speak

3:8
To Love
and a time to hate

3:8
Of War
and a time of peace

> *"He hath made every thing beautiful in His time: also He hath set the world in their heart."*
>
> Ecclesiastes 3:11 (KJV)

Better Than, and Gifts from the Hand of God

WISE SAYINGS

Better Than

The Preacher weighs one thing against another, and some come out “better.”

4:6
Quietness
A handful with quietness, than both hands full with travail

4:9
Two
“Two are better than one”

4:13
A Wise Child
Better than an old and foolish king

7:1
A Good Name
Better than precious ointment

7:2
Mourning
The house of mourning, than the house of feasting

7:8
The End
Better than the beginning thereof

9:16
Wisdom
Better than strength

9:18
Wisdom
Better than weapons of war

JOY

From the Hand of God

Again and again the Preacher says that simple joys are God’s gifts, to be received with thanks.

2:24
Food and Work
“This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God.”

3:12–13
Rejoice and Do Good
It is the gift of God.

5:18–19
Riches Enjoyed
The power to enjoy them is “the gift of God.”

9:7
Eat with Joy
“Eat thy bread with joy.”

9:9
Marriage
“Live joyfully with the wife whom thou lovest.”

11:9
Youth
Rejoice, but know that God will bring thee into judgment.

ECCLESIASTES AT A GLANCE · PART 4 OF 6

Living Wisely and Remembering Thy Creator

ECCLESIASTES 5–11

Living Wisely in an Uncertain World

No one knows what tomorrow will bring, so the Preacher gives plain counsel for today.

5:1–2
Let Thy Words Be Few
"God is in heaven, and thou upon earth."

5:4–5
Pay Thy Vows
Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.

5:10
Love of Money
"He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver."

9:10
With Thy Might
"Whatsoever thy hand findeth to do, do it."

11:1
Cast Thy Bread
"Thou shalt find it after many days."

11:6
Sow in the Morning
"Thou knowest not whether shall prosper."

ECCLESIASTES 12

Remember Now Thy Creator

"Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth" (12:1). Then come pictures of the body in old age:

12:3
The Keepers Tremble
The hands and arms grow weak.

12:3
The Grinders Cease
The teeth are few.

12:3
The Windows Darkened
The eyes grow dim.

12:4
The Daughters of Musick
The hearing fades.

12:5
The Almond Tree
The hair turns white.

12:6
The Silver Cord Loosed
Life itself ends.

> *"Then shall the dust return to the earth as it was: and the spirit shall return unto God who gave it."*
>
> Ecclesiastes 12:7 (KJV)

The Conclusion and Christ in Ecclesiastes

ECCLESIASTES 12:13–14

The Conclusion of the Whole Matter

After all his searching, the Preacher sums up the answer in two verses.

> *"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil."*
>
> Ecclesiastes 12:13–14 (KJV)

UNDER THE SUN	WITH GOD
"All is vanity" 1:2	**"Fear God, and keep His commandments"** 12:13
"No profit under the sun" 2:11	**Joy and labour "from the hand of God"** 2:24
Wickedness in the place of judgment 3:16	**"God shall judge the righteous and the wicked"** 3:17
"The dust return to the earth" 12:7	**"The spirit shall return unto God who gave it"** 12:7

LOOKING FORWARD

Christ in Ecclesiastes

The Preacher found nothing under the sun to satisfy. Christ came from above to give what lasts.

12:11 · JOHN 10:11

The One Shepherd

The words of the wise "are given from one Shepherd"; Christ is the good Shepherd.

1:1 · MATTHEW 12:42

Greater Than Solomon

"Behold, a greater than Solomon is here."

2:18 · MATTHEW 6:20

Treasure That Lasts

Solomon had to leave all he gained; Christ bids us lay up treasures in heaven.

1:2 · 1 CORINTHIANS 15:58

Not in Vain

"Your labour is not in vain in the Lord."

Key Themes and Key Verse

BIG IDEAS

Key Themes

Vanity
Life without God is a vapour.
1:2; 12:8

Under the Sun
This world cannot satisfy.
1:3, 9

God's Timing
A time to every purpose.
3:1, 11

The Fear of God
The whole duty of man.
3:14; 12:13

Joy as God's Gift
Receive it from His hand.
2:24; 9:7

Wisdom's Limits
Man cannot find out all.
8:17

Death Comes to All
One event to all.
9:2

Remember Thy Creator
While you are young.
12:1

Judgment
God will judge every work.
12:14

KEY VERSE

"Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep His commandments: for this is the whole duty of man."

Ecclesiastes 12:13 (KJV)