

# THE BIBLE

## in a nutshell *Ecclesiastes*



—by Peter Hammond

*“Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. For God will bring every deed into judgement, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.”*

**Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**



**K**ing Solomon, the author of the Book of Ecclesiastes, was the richest and most powerful king in the world at his time. Solomon was famous for his wisdom, riches and literary achievements.

very up-to-date. Solomon’s search for meaning and purpose in life resonates through the ages.

He asks the fundamental questions: Is life more than the things we see, do and

**Through the writing of Ecclesiastes, King Solomon searches for meaning and purpose, asking the fundamental question: What is the meaning of life? What is our purpose?**

Solomon had the power to do anything he wanted and he had the wealth to indulge every whim.

possess? What is the meaning of life?

### **The right questions**

Ecclesiastes was written almost 3 000 years ago yet it seems so

### **Understanding the times**

Solomon accurately describes the attitude of cynical indifference and hopeless pessimism which, in so many ways, characterises our age. **Fatalism:** Whatever will be, will be. **Existentialism:** Live for

## *Ruinous road of the rat race*

Solomon goes down one dead-end-street after another. He pursues pleasure, entertainment, alcohol, parties, great projects, commerce, science, agriculture, architecture, arts, culture, materialism, wealth, treasure, money, possessions, wine, women and song. Yet our soul is too big for this world to fill.

## Limits of human wisdom

Ecclesiastes documents the utter futility of secular philosophies. Solomon lists the absurdities, mysteries, disappointments and disillusionments of a life spent outside of the Lord. Life separated from God is meaningless. Everything done this side of Eternity is meaningless, if one separates it from the source of all meaning and purpose: our Creator. Seeking meaning and purpose in life through philosophic speculation "under the sun" will only lead to frustration. The term "under the sun" occurs 28 times in Ecclesiastes, and nowhere else in the Bible. If we limit our worldview to this earth and fail to consider everything from God's perspective, then we will be frustrated with emptiness and meaninglessness. Revelation from God is essential if we are to understand and fulfil our purpose on earth.



the moment. **Hedonism:** Live for pleasure. **Pessimism:** Things are bound to get worse. **Cynicism:** Even good things are not what they seem. **Materialism:** Life consists of the things we accumulate.

*time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up; a time to weep, and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance; a time to cast away stones, and a time to gather stones; a time to embrace, and a*

**King Solomon explains in his book that if this world is all there is, if there is no Day of Judgement, no eternity, and no God, then life is aimless, purposeless, meaningless, and futile!**

### Chasing the wind

Those who attempt to find meaning and purpose in hedonism, wine, women and song, or in drugs, music and sex, through materialism, fame and fortune, through philosophy, degrees and psychology, in pragmatism and workaholicism, through the treadmill of achievements, or through an existential journey of self-discovery, 'finding themselves' in self-actualisation, will also ultimately be crying "Meaningless! Meaningless!" All achievements and experiences are for but a season. Death is inevitable and then fools inherit what others have worked hard for.

### A time for every purpose

Solomon writes: "To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under Heaven: A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck what is planted; a

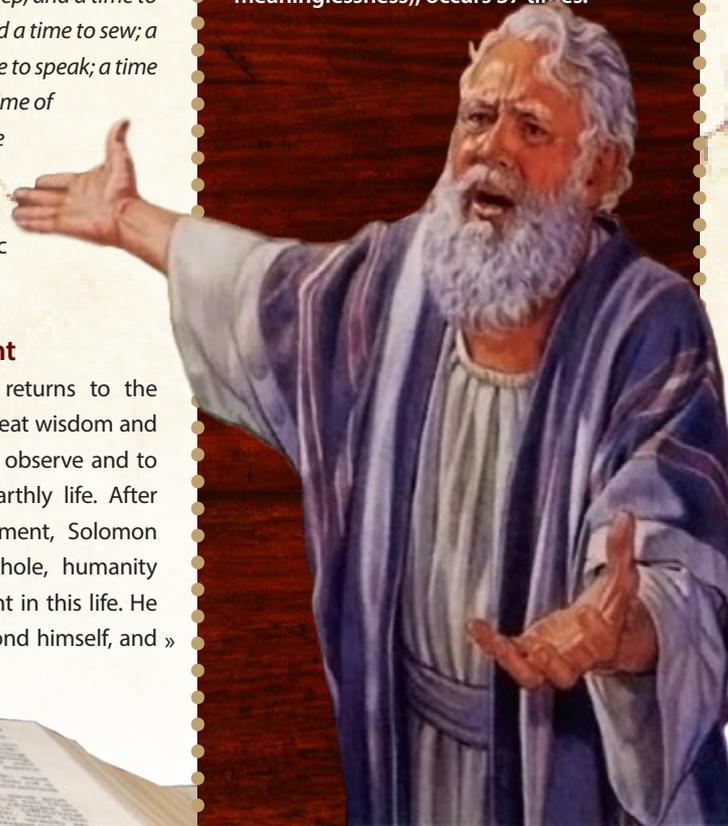
*time to refrain from embracing; a time to gain, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to throw away; a time to tear, and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak; a time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace... He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts..." Ecc 3:1-11*

### Tragedy of the transient

Time and again Solomon returns to the theme of Eternity. He had great wisdom and unparalleled opportunity to observe and to explore every avenue of earthly life. After much research and experiment, Solomon concluded that, on the whole, humanity found little joy and fulfilment in this life. He yearned for something beyond himself, and »

## Ecclesiastes vs. Psalms

Ecclesiastes is very different from the Book of Psalms. Solomon's father, King David, was forever shouting: "Rejoice, sing praises to God, magnify His Name, Glory in His splendours." The Psalms of David are full of blessings and joy. However, the refrain of King Solomon in Ecclesiastes is: "Vanity!" The word vanity (futility, or meaninglessness), occurs 37 times.



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## in a nutshell

### *Ecclesiastes*

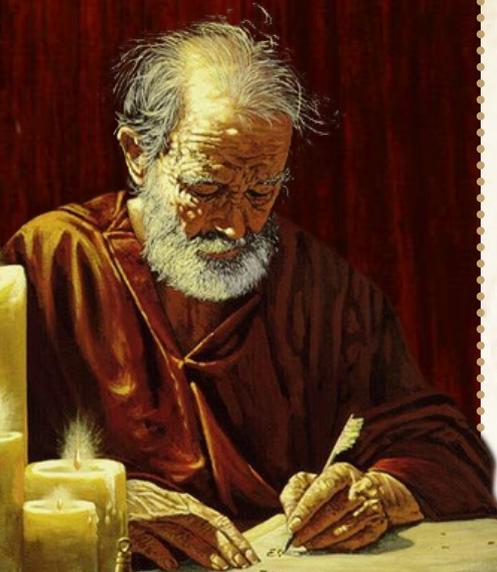


### Focus on God and His Word

After all the philosophical dead-end streets, Solomon concludes that meaning and purpose can only be found in God alone. *"Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all. For God will bring every work into judgement, including every secret thing, whether good or evil."* Ecc 12:13-14. Our responsibilities are far more important than our rights. The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.

### All areas of life

Conviction affects character through conduct. Conduct divorced from conviction is destructive. Conduct guided by conviction is constructive. The Bible tells us how we should live and why: For the glory of God, in the light of eternity, in accordance with the Word of God.



beyond this world. Everything passes away, everything in this life fails to completely satisfy. He grieved over the prevalent wickedness and cruelties of men. He despaired of any meaning and purpose if death ends life, and if there is nothing beyond this present world. If this world is all there is, if there is no Day of Judgement, no eternity, no God who will make all things right, then life is aimless, purposeless, meaningless, and futile!

cludes: *"Because the sentence against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil."* Ecc 8:11.

### Madness in their hearts

*"This is an evil in all that is done under the sun: that one thing happens to all. Truly the hearts of the sons of men are full of evil; madness is in their hearts while they live, and after that they*

Solomon has looked back, he has looked within, he has looked around, and he has looked out for meaning and purpose "under Heaven", finding it all "meaningless." Then he finally looks up.

### Wisdom accepts warnings

There are great gems of wisdom in Ecclesiastes: *"Better a poor and wise youth than an old and foolish king who will be admonished no more."* Ecc 4:13.

*go to the dead."* Ecc 9:3

### Trapped by evil times

*"...The race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong...For man also does not know his time: Like fish taken in a cruel net, like birds caught in a snare, so the sons of men are snared in an evil time, when it falls suddenly upon them."* Ecc 9:11-12

### A funeral is better than a party

*"Better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting, for that is the end of all men; and the living will take it to heart."* Ecc 7:2.

### Make the most of every opportunity

Solomon also warns us not to be unduly deterred from seizing the moment by adverse circumstances. *"He who observes the wind will not sow, and he who regards the clouds will not reap. As you do not know what is the way of the wind, or how the bones grow in the womb of her who is with child, so you do not*

### The song of fools

*"It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than for a man to hear the song of fools."* Ecc 7:5.

### The curse of crime

Why does crime increase? Solomon con-



***“Remember now your Creator in the days of your youth...” Ecc 12:1***

*know the works of God who makes everything. In the morning sow your seed, and in the evening do not withhold your hand; for you do not know which will prosper, either this or that, or whether both alike will be good.” Ecc 11:4-6*

### **Seize the moment**

Solomon urges a strong work ethic. Do not procrastinate. Seize the moment. *“Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might...”* Ecc 9:10. Life is long enough to live out God’s purposes, but it’s too short to waste a moment.

**The message of Ecclesiastes is that without God, everything is meaningless. Life is a dead-end when we exclude the Creator from our lives.**

### **The futility of the finite**

After racing down every dead-end-street, pursuing all the pleasures and philosophies of life, Solomon, the richest, most powerful and wisest king of his day, pronounces that it is all meaningless. *“Vanity of vanities; all is vanity.”* Solomon has looked **back**, he has looked **within**, he has looked **around**, and he has looked **out** for meaning and purpose *“under Heaven”*. Then he finally looks **up**.

### **Live in the light of eternity**

God has set eternity in the hearts of men. In the light of Eternity, knowing that the Day of Judgement will come, when we will have to stand before the Judgement Seat of Christ, we must fear God and keep His Commandments. ■

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