

Abundant Life in a Meaningless world.

Who wants reality?

- Do you prefer to watch fiction (to escape reality) or fact (to confront reality) on TV?
- "The humankind cannot bear very much reality" T.S. Elliot
- Eccl 1:1-11 the Teacher opens the book with a hard, honest look at reality.
- His conclusion of life is at the beginning at v1:2

Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless."

He is saying life is empty, useless, insignificant, (what is left over when a soap bubble bursts)
This phrase appears 30 times in the book one way or another.

Intro to Ecclesiastes

- The writer of Ecclesiastes is most likely King Solomon
- He is a pessimist, a skeptic, and we are not sure if he is a real skeptic or just writing to get us thinking
- He does not deliberately answer every question he raises by stating "God is the answer", instead he works through in detail to analyze the situation of man in this meaningless life.
- The Teacher in the book explores the various avenues of potential meaning of life. He comes up frustrated and angry
- The book is an idol buster. Idols were statues worshiped by many nations including Israel, they were peoples "**ultimate concern**"
- You don't have to bow before a statue to worship an idol, idol worship can take on many subtle forms as seen in this book, money, position, and any object of desire. As Christians we have many temptations to worship these idols and we may not even realize.
- The book of Ecclesiastes is essentially a dialogue between two wise men-a skeptic and a person of faith. And for most of Ecclesiastes, the skeptic does the talking.

He recounts his search for meaning in life.

He explores the different idols he pursued to bring meaning to his life:

- control,
- relationships,
- work,
- pleasure,
- wisdom,
- religion,
- life itself.

His search ended in frustration, so he renounces all his effort is futile, warning his listeners that

- control will always slip out of our grasp.
- relationships will always disappoint.
- work will leave us frustrated.
- pleasure is always fleeting.

- wisdom is never an adequate guide.
- being religious usually gives in to legalism.
- life ends in decay and death.

The Key Message

It's a disturbing message-and Ecclesiastes is not a book that most Christians enjoy reading. Yet it is the skeptic's bleak view that allows us to see through the fog of our hectic lives to the book's final conclusion:

We find purpose when we submit to God's great desires for us.

Now all has been heard;
 here is the conclusion of the matter:
 Fear God and keep his commandments,
 for this is the whole <duty> of man.
 For God will bring every deed into judgment,
 including every hidden thing,
 whether it is good or evil. Eccl. 12:13

Most of us at one time or another find ourselves tempted to move toward the worship of one of these seven idols, hoping to find joy, success and meaning.

Ecclesiastes invites us to struggle against these futile temptations and move back toward God, the source of our hope. For if we allow ourselves to be disturbed and our idols challenged, we will find an essential and solid hope.

For in Ecclesiastes the skeptic's statements are not the answer. The ultimate answer lies in a paradox-that in losing our idols, we find not only meaning, but also God himself. And with this Ecclesiastes points to a different possibility the possibility of real change. This comes when our hearts pursue a narrow way that at first seems more difficult than the problems we face. This new course of life sets the possibility for new decisions, new behavior and new meaning.

Is Christ in the centre of our lives?

What fuels the passions of your life?

With this study we want to rediscover the abundant life that comes with putting Jesus in the centre of our lives.

How can this happen?

It starts by being brutally honest

It starts with a deep dissatisfaction with the way things are and a hungry willingness to try something completely different

The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy; I have come that they may have life, and have it to the full. John 10:10 NIV

The thief does not come except to steal, and to kill, and to destroy. I have come that they may have life, and that they may have *it* more abundantly. John 10:10 NKJV

OUTLINE

Key theme: Is life really worth living?

Key verses: 1:1–3; 12:13–14

I. THE PROBLEM DECLARED (1–2)

Life is not worth living! Consider:

- A. The monotony of life. 1:4–11
- B. The vanity of wisdom. 1:12–18
- C. The futility of wealth. 2:1–11
- D. The certainty of death. 2:12–23
Enjoy life. 3:12–15, 22

II. THE PROBLEM DISCUSSED (3–10)

He considers each of the above arguments:

- A. The monotony of life—3:1–5:9
 - 1. Look up—3:1–8
 - 2. Look within—3:9–14
 - 3. Look ahead—3:15–22
 - 4. Look around—4:1–5:9
Enjoy life. 2:24
- B. The futility of wealth—5:10–6:12
 - 1. Employing wealth—5:10–17
 - 2. Enjoying wealth—5:18–6:12
Enjoy life. 5:18–20
- C. The vanity of wisdom—7:1–8:17
 - 1. We make life better—7:1–10
 - 2. We see life clearer—7:11–18
 - 3. We face life stronger—7:19–8:17
Enjoy life. 8:15
- D. The certainty of death—9:1–10:20
 - 1. Death is unavoidable—9:1–10
 - 2. Life is unpredictable—9:11–18
 - 3. Beware of folly—10:1–20
Enjoy life. 9:7–10

III. THE PROBLEM DECIDED (11–12)

- A. Live by faith—11:1–6
- B. Enjoy life now. 11:7–12:8
- C. Prepare for judgment—12:9–14
Enjoy life. 11:9–10

King Solomon

The third king of Israel and the second son of David and Bathsheba, Solomon ruled Israel for forty years (970-930 BC). His other name was Jedidiah, "beloved of the Lord."

APPOINTED TO THE THRONE

Solomon asked for the wisdom to be a good ruler for Israel, and God was pleased with the request (1 Kings 3:1). Israel's king was given his wish, along with the gifts of long life, riches, and fame.

SOLOMON'S ACCOMPLISHMENTS

HIS GOVERNMENT

David had brought the twelve tribes of Israel together, but Solomon organized the entire state with the help of many officials (1 Kings 4:1). The entire country was divided into twelve major districts. Each district had to pay for the expenses of the king's court for one month each year. The system was fair and distributed the tax burden equally over the entire country.

HIS BUILDINGS

- One of Solomon's earliest building projects was to construct the temple, which David had dreamed of building.
- Hiram, king of Tyre, provided cedar trees from Mount Lebanon for the temple (1 Kings 5:1-12), and he was repaid with food.
- To provide workers for these building projects, the Canaanites were made slaves (1 Kings 9:20-21).
- Israelites likewise were forced to work in groups of 10,000 (1 Kings 5:13-18; 2 Chronicles 2:17-18).
- The workers for the temple alone included 80,000 stonecutters, 70,000 common laborers, and 3,600 foremen.

It took 7 years to finish the temple, which by modern standards was a rather small building: 90 feet (27.4 meters) long, 30 feet (9.1 meters) wide, and 45 feet (13.7 meters) high. But the gold covering put over the walls and furniture made it quite valuable.

- In the eleventh year of Solomon's reign, the dedication of the temple was celebrated (1 Kings 6:38; 1 Kings 8:1-5). The presence of the Lord filled the temple, and Solomon then offered a great prayer dedicating the temple (1 Kings 8:23-53).
- Afterward, he offered up 22,000 oxen and 120,000 sheep as well as other offerings. The people were full of joy because such a great king had replaced David.
- Solomon built other buildings: the House of the Forest of Lebanon, the Hall of Pillars, a hall for his throne, and a house for the daughter of Pharaoh (1 Kings 7:2-8).
- Thirteen years were involved in the building of his own house, which was large enough to take care of his many wives, concubines, and servants. A great fortress, Millo, was also built, which was used to protect the temple (1 **Kings 9:24**).

HIS TRADE WITH OTHER NATIONS

- The king had an agreement with Hiram, king of Tyre. For cedar trees, stonecutters, and other buildings, Solomon paid 125,000 bushels (4.4 million liters) of wheat and 115,000 gallons (435,275 liters) of olive oil (1 Kings 5:11) every year.
- In addition, Hiram received twenty cities in Galilee to cover all indebtedness. Although Israel's law forbade the trading of horses (Deuteronomy 17:16), Solomon bought horses and chariots from the Egyptians, and some of these in turn were sold to the Hittites and Arameans at a profit (1 Kings 10:28-29).
- Furthermore, Solomon engaged in sea trade. Ships built at shipyards at Ezion-geber sailed to ports on the Red Sea and Indian Ocean. The sailors collected gold, ivory, and peacocks. From Ophir, the traders brought back 420 talents of gold, a considerable fortune.

HIS WISDOM

- Solomon wrote three thousand proverbs and over a thousand songs (1 Kings 4:32). Most of the book of Proverbs is attributed to him (Proverbs 25:1), as well as Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs, and Psalms 72 and 127. The Bible particularly mentions his accomplishments as a writer (1 Kings 11:41).
- The queen of Sheba came to see and hear if the reports of Solomon's fame and wisdom were true. After viewing all he had in Jerusalem and hearing his wisdom, she blessed the Lord God of Israel for raising up such a wise person to sit upon such a magnificent throne (1 Kings 10:1).

HIS FALL

- Despite his wisdom, Solomon made some bad judgments during his reign.
- His worst blunder was to marry many wives and take many more concubines.
- He also built pagan shrines for them to worship their various gods (1 Kings 11:1-8).
- The Lord punished Solomon, allowing Israel to be attacked on all sides.
- Although the kingdom was not damaged during Solomon's lifetime, his son saw the kingdom divided. There is no record of Solomon repenting of his sins, but the book of Ecclesiastes shows Solomon's guilt over his wrong decisions.