

# ECCLESIASTES

## "THE FUTILITY OF LIFE; THE IMPORTANCE OF FEARING GOD"

"Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities! All is vanity."

"The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil." (Ecclesiastes 1:2; 12:13-14)

### OUTLINE OF ECCLESIASTES

Prepared by James T. Bartsch

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MAJOR DIVISIONS OF ECCLESIASTES  
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CONDENSED OUTLINE OF ECCLESIASTES  
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B2 The Theme: The apparent worthlessness, or futility of existence <sup>1</sup> 1:2

### **A2 THE PREACHER'S DEMONSTRATION OF THE THESIS OF THE FUTILITY OF EXISTENCE 1:3 - 2:26**

**B1 The Futility of the Cycles of Life: The endless repetition <sup>2</sup> of life's cycles 1:3-11**

C1 The coming and going of generations 1:3-4

C2 The rising and setting of the sun 1:5

C3 The changing of the wind 1:6

C4 The endless water cycle 1:7

C5 Man's insatiable thirst for seeing and hearing 1:8

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<sup>1</sup> 1892 *hebel* {heh'bel} or (rarely in the abs.) *habel* {hab-ale'} from 1891; TWOT - 463a;

n m

1) vapor, breath

1a) breath, vapor

1b) vanity (figurative)

adv

2) vainly

This word appears 38 times in Ecclesiastes, and in AV is translated "vanity," "vanities," and "vain." In NAS it is normally translated "vanity" and sometimes "futility" (see chs. 6, 7) and even "emptiness" (5:7) and "fleeting" (9:9). It certainly signifies that life without Divine perspective and since the fall of man in Genesis 3 is vain, meaningless, futile, worthless.

As Ryrie affirms, "The thesis of the utter futility of all things is developed in 1:3-11 and throughout the book. This thesis accords with Rom. 8:20-22 (see note there). Creation is subject to futility because of sin (Gen. 3:17-18)." (RSB)

<sup>2</sup> Life "under the sun," without any Divine perspective, appears vain or worthless. That which the human eye, unaided by Divine perspective, can see appears devoid of meaning. The phrase "under the sun" occurs 29 times in Ecclesiastes: 1:3, 9, 14; 2:11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22; 3:16; 4:1, 3, 7, 15; 5:13, 18; 6:1, 12; 8:9, 15 (2x), 17; 9:3, 6, 9 (2x), 11, 13; 10:5.

C6 The repetition of events and circumstances 1:9-10

C7 The fading of memories 1:11

**B2 The Futility of Human Wisdom: The methodology and expansion of the thesis of the author / preacher 1:12-18**

C1 His methodology: To explore human activity by wisdom<sup>3</sup> 1:12-13a, 16-17a

C2 His thesis: Man's existence is grievous, his works futile and meaningless 1:13b-15

C3 His methodology: To pursue wisdom contrasted with its antithesis -- madness and folly 1:17a

C4 His corroborating experience: The acquisition of wisdom is futile and causes grief 1:17b-18

**B3 The Futility of Pleasure 2:1-11**

C1 The Preacher's resolve to test pleasure; his conclusion: futility! 2:1

C2 The futility of laughter and pleasure 2:2

C3 His exploration of wine 2:3

C4 His pursuit of construction projects: homes, vineyards, gardens, parks, ponds 2:4-6

C5 His acquisition of possessions: slaves, flocks and herds, silver and gold, singers, concubines 2:7-8

C6 His growth in honor tempered by wisdom 2:9

C7 His acquisition of every pleasure as a reward for his labor 2:10

C8 His conclusion: All seeking after pleasure is futile and profitless 2:11

**B4 The Futility of Wisdom in Contrast to Madness and Folly 2:12-17**

C1 The excellence of wisdom over folly 2:12-14a

C2 The futility of wisdom 2:14b-17

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<sup>3</sup> "Wisdom" occurs five times in 1:12-18.

**B5 The Futility of Labor 2:18-23**

- C1 Because labor must be left to he who comes afterwards, whether he be wise or a fool 2:18-21
- C2 Because labor is hard, endless work 2:22-23

**B6 Preliminary Conclusion: Enjoy and Be Content with the Providence of God 2:24-26**

- C1 Eat and drink <sup>4</sup> and view labor as good 2:24a
- C2 View (normal) life as a gift from God 2:24b-25
- C3 God is the giver of wisdom to the good 2:26a
- C4 God is the judge of the sinner 2:26b
- C5 Yet there remains a certain futility 2:26c

**A3 THE PREACHER'S CONTEMPLATION OF TIME AND ETERNITY: God's Divine Plan 3**

**B1 There is a Divinely Appointed Time for All Things 3:1-8**

- C1 For birth and death 3:2
- C2 For planting and uprooting
- C3 For killing and healing 3:3
- C4 For demolition and building
- C5 For weeping and laughing 3:4
- C6 For mourning and dancing
- C7 For stoning and gathering stones 3:5
- C8 For embracing and refraining
- C9 For searching and quitting 3:6
- C10 For keeping and disposing
- C11 For ripping and sewing 3:7
- C12 For silence and speech
- C13 For love and hate 3:8
- C14 For war and peace

**B2 The Proper, Divine Perspective on Labor and Work 3:9-11**

- C1 The Preacher's contemplation of work, which God has given man to perform 3:9-10
- C2 God's decree 3:11

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<sup>4</sup> I.e., "Go through the normal cycles of life."

**B3 Truths on Time and Eternity 3:12-22**

- C1 There is nothing better -- and it is the gift of God -- than for a man to do good, working; to rejoice, eating and drinking, during his life. 3:12-13
- C2 All God does lasts forever, and He decrees that which comes to pass. 3:14-15
- C3 God will judge both the righteous and the wicked. 3:16-17
- C4 Both man and beast face a similar fate -- death. 3:18-21
- C5 It is good for man to enjoy his work during his lifetime -- for once he dies, he will not be able to experience it. 3:22

**A4 THE PREACHER'S DISCOURSE ON THE FUTILITY OF THE VARIOUS CIRCUMSTANCES OF LIFE 4 - 5**

**B1 His Consideration of Oppression 4:1-3**

- C1 The comfortlessness of the oppressed 4:1
- C2 The comfortlessness of the oppressors 4:1
- C3 The advantage of the dead 4:2
- C4 The supreme advantage of those never born, for they need see no evil 4:3

**B2 His Consideration of Work 4:4-12<sup>5</sup>**

- C1 The futility of earthly endeavor 4:4-6
- C2 The advantage of companionship 4:7-12

**B3 His Consideration of Political Success: The futility of royal popularity 4:13-16**

**B4 His Consideration of False Worship 5:1-7**

**B5 His Consideration of Oppression: Corruption exists at all levels of government<sup>6</sup> 5:8-9**

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<sup>5</sup> From here on out, the outline is structured after and borrowed from RSB with snippets from Harold Hoehner added in. I simply haven't time to do it myself before departing for Ukraine. Nevertheless, the details of the outline are largely mine. [JTB]

<sup>6</sup> (Class notes, Harold Hoehner, Bible 604 (Old Testament Survey), Dallas Theological Seminary, 1971.)



**B6 His Consideration of Hoarded Riches 5:10-17**

C1 Riches do not satisfy 5:10-12

C2 Riches are temporal 5:13-17

**B7 His Conclusion: The foundation of happiness is in God 5:18-20**

**A5 THE PREACHER'S DISCOURSE ON THE FUTILITY OF MAN'S LOT 6**

B1 The Futility of Unenjoyed Wealth and Children 6:1-6

B2 The Futility of Unsatisfying Labor 6:7-8

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**A6 THE PREACHER'S COUNSEL FOR LIVING 7 - 12**

**B1 His Counsel to Choose an Expedient Course of Behavior 7**

C1 The wisdom in choosing things that are better 7:1-12

C2 The importance of submission to the Sovereignty of God 7:13-14

C3 The importance of moderation in life 7:15-22<sup>7</sup>

C4 His frustration in searching for wisdom, especially among women 7:23-29

**B2 His Counsel in View of God's Impenetrable Sovereignty 8:1 - 9:12**

C1 The importance of submission to earthly authority 8:1-8

C2 The inevitability of the ultimate triumph of justice over evil 8:9-13

C3 The dismaying incidents in which justice does not seem to prevail in this life 8:14

C4 The importance of a positive outlook 8:15

C5 The impossibility of man's fully understanding God's ways, no matter how wisely and diligently he seeks 8:16-17

C6 The importance of understanding the inevitability of death, whether one is righteous or evil 9:1-6

C7 The importance of enjoying life and doing one's best while one is still alive 9:7-12

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<sup>7</sup> Being extra righteous so one lives longer will not guarantee him a longer life. (Class notes, Harold Hoehner, Bible 604 (Old Testament Survey), Dallas Theological Seminary, 1971.)

**B3 His Counsel Regarding Wisdom 9:13 - 10:20**

C1 The irony of wisdom: Wisdom is better than power, but wisdom oft goes unheeded 9:13-18

C2 Observations on wisdom and folly: Counsel in view of the uncertainties of life 10

**B4 His Counsel in View of the Aging Processes of Life 11:1 - 12:8**

C1 His counsel to be bold, diversified, and decisive in life's endeavors, yet acknowledging God's sovereignty 11:1-6

C2 His counsel to the young 11:7 - 12:7

**A7 THE CONCLUSION OF THE PREACHER 12:8-14**

**B1 The Theme of the Preacher: Life is essentially meaningless 12:8<sup>8</sup>**

**B2 The Educational Program of the Preacher 12:9-10**

C1 His qualification: wisdom 12:9

C2 His teaching the people knowledge

C3 His composing and collecting of proverbs

C4 His commitment to appropriate and true words 12:10<sup>9</sup>

**B3 The Value of Education 12:11-12**

C1 The words of the wise prod one to action 12:11

C2 All true wisdom comes from God

C3 There is a limit to the value of the publication and reading of books 12:12

**B4 The Conclusion of the Whole Matter 12:13-14**

C1 Every person must fear God and keep His commandments 12:13

C2 God will judge every act of man 12:14

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<sup>8</sup> Life "under the sun," without any Divine perspective, appears vain or worthless. That which the human eye, unaided by Divine perspective, can see appears devoid of meaning.

<sup>9</sup> Cf. Eph. 4:15 - "speaking the truth in love."

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