

St John's Baptist Church
38-40 Everett Street, Woburn, MA.
Rev. Dr. Neal E. Pearson, Associate Pastor
Rev. Dr. Larry Edmunds, Senior Pastor

INTRODUCTION TO: ECCLESIASTES

Facilitator: Deaconess Esther Pearson

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Introduction: The word “Ecclesiastes” means preacher. Ecclesiastes is found in the Old Testament. Many Biblical Scholars believe Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is one of the biblical examples of wisdom literature. Ecclesiastes is usually included in the category of wisdom literature along with Proverbs and Job.

Background: In the two opening chapters the author of Ecclesiastes describes himself as the son of David, and king over Israel in Jerusalem (Ecclesiastes 1:1), presenting himself as a philosopher at the center of a brilliant court. Thus, the author of the book of Ecclesiastes is believed to be king Solomon.

Ecclesiastes teaches that “life not centered on God is purposeless and meaningless”. Without God nothing else can satisfy. With God, all of life and God’s other good gifts are to be gratefully received and used and enjoyed to the full.

Ecclesiastes provides reflections on life and God of an old man, most of whose life was meaningless because he had not himself totally relied on God. This old man is believed to be King Solomon (also credited with the writings of Proverbs).

Outline of Ecclesiastes: Ecclesiastes has four sectional and thematic outlines. They include:

1. Working to accumulate things to achieve happiness is profitless (without value or reward).
2. Life is to be enjoyed and respected as a gift from God.
3. Life should be enjoyed from youth with the remembrance old age and death will come soon and God will judge us.
4. We must with deep respect trust and obey God.

Conclusions of Ecclesiastes: Solomon is seeking for the value (profit) that can be found in life. He explores the many paths tried by humans to give meaning to life, including worldly wisdom, pleasure, wealth, great accomplishments, and materialism. Solomon soon concludes these to be nothing but “vanity” (translated as “chasing the wind”, “mere breath”, or “fleeting, not lasting”).

But, if accomplishments or material things have no lasting value, what should one's attitude be toward them? Solomon concluded that one should enjoy both life and the things God provides; but he also realized that true value and meaning in life are found only in reverence (deep respect) for and obedience to God. And although this life may contain trouble, pain, disappointment, and injustice, God will eventually judge all that is or occurs and set it right.

Solomon the wisest man who ever lived, who attained all the wealth and success this world offers, concludes that in life, everything is vain and meaningless without God. In other words, worldly wisdom, pleasure, wealth, great accomplishments, worldly success, and materialism are a reflection of conceit; are characteristic of false pride; cause an exaggerated sense of self-importance; make us a conceited fool demonstrating an attitude of self-conceited arrogance with an egotistical disregard of others.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION:

1. We live our lives “on the dash”; time between birth – death. In reflection how have you lived life?
2. Foolish people seek folly which is in line with three other “F’s” they seek. These are:
 - FUN
 - FAME
 - FORTUNE

Are you following a plan toward failure?

3. How can you stop “chasing the wind” and help others to do the same?