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THE HOLY BIBLE **NKJV** REFERENCE GUIDE

OLD TESTAMENT

BOOK 21

ECCLESIASTES



King Solomon Supervises His Temple by Mary Evans

SUMMARY

The Book of Ecclesiastes is an essay on the topic "Is life worthwhile?" Ironically, the writer answers this question in the negative. He considers the various ends or goals for which people live and finds that each of these reasons brings only vanity and frustration:

"Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun." Referring to himself as an elderly person of considerable means and as a man who personally has tested the ways by which people pursue a meaningful life, the writer finds that life, ultimately, is self-defeating.

He has tried riches and found that they do not satisfy. He has sought fame and found that it, too, is an empty feeling. He has even pursued wisdom, but it, likewise, fails to satisfy the human spirit. The more he learns, the more dissatisfied he becomes with that which he has already attained.

Some people follow the course of justice, believing that they will be rewarded, but the author of Ecclesiastes is convinced that there are no rewards. His observations tell him that a righteous person fares no better than a wicked person; at times, the righteous person doesn't even fare as well.

Regardless of how an individual lives, we will all be forgotten after we die, for death comes to the righteous and the wicked alike. The writer appears to be familiar with some people's belief that rewards and punishments will be meted out to individuals in a future life that is beyond the grave, but he takes no stock in this notion.

He tells us that the death of a human is comparable to that of a beast, and he asks ironically, "Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?" He says emphatically, "All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal."

Everything is meaningless." He does not believe in progress but is committed to a theory of cyclical history: "What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun."

True, each generation thinks it develops something new, but the achievements of former generations are forgotten, just as those of the present generation will not be remembered. Furthermore, the writer sees no point in trying to make the world better:

"What is twisted cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted." People's desires cannot be satisfied, for the more people see, the more they want to see; the more things people acquire, the less satisfied they become with what they have obtained.

The Ecclesiastes writer is indeed a cynic, but he is a gentle cynic who has not become embittered toward the world, for he resolves to make the best of what he can. Unlike the author of Job, who is emotionally troubled that innocent people suffer, the Ecclesiastes writer accepts his situation as it is and refuses to become upset about it.

SUMMARY Continued

Throughout the book, again and again he says, "A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work." Although he accepts a kind of fatalism according to which there is a definite time and place for everything, his book is filled with advice about how a person should live in order to get the greatest enjoyment out of life.

Above all else, he counsels moderation: "Do not be over righteous, neither be otherwise — why destroy yourself?" A person should find a happy medium. One of the tragedies of life, the author tells us, is for a person to spend so much time and energy preparing for old age that when it arrives, the person is unable to enjoy it.

We should enjoy life while we are young, for old age is characterized by weakness and infirmities that are but a prelude to the time when "the dust returns to the ground it came from, and the spirit returns to God who gave it."

The Book of Ecclesiastes is unique in many respects. One wonders how it happened that a book so skeptical in tone and so unorthodox in its contents would ever have been placed in the canon of sacred writings.

Presumably, several factors secured its inclusion among the books of the Old Testament. Ecclesiastes strongly appeals to many individuals because of the honesty with which the author expresses his own convictions.

He knows that what he says is not in accord with generally accepted ideas, but he has the courage to say what he believes to be true. Because the name of King Solomon had long been associated with the work of the sages, it became attached to this particular piece of writing and gave an added prestige to it.

But even with these two factors in support of the book's inclusion in the Old Testament, Ecclesiastes probably would have been excluded from the canon of Scriptures had it not been for an addition that appears to have been made to the last chapter.

Here, we find the words "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."

NKJV SELECTED SCRIPTURE

- 1:4** One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever.
- 2:26** For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.
- 3:11** He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.
- 3:12** I know that nothing is better for them than to rejoice, and to do good in their lives,

NKJV SCRIPTURE Continued

- 3:13** and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor--it is the gift of God.
- 3:15** That which is has already been, And what is to be has already been; And God requires an account of what is past.
- 7:9** Do not hasten in your spirit to be angry, For anger rests in the bosom of fools.
- 7:10** Do not say, "Why were the former days better than these?" For you do not inquire wisely concerning this.
- 7:16** Do not be overly righteous, Nor be overly wise: Why should you destroy yourself?
- 7:17** Do not be overly wicked, Nor be foolish: Why should you die before your time?
- 7:18** It is good that you grasp this, And also not remove your hand from the other; For he who fears God will escape them all.
- 7:19** Wisdom strengthens the wise More than ten rulers of the city.
- 7:20** For there is not a just man on earth who does good And does not sin.
- 8:8** No one has power over the spirit to retain the spirit, And no one has power in the day of death. There is no release from that war, And wickedness will not deliver those who are given to it.
- 8:16** When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night,
- 9:10** Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might; for there is no work or device or knowledge or wisdom in the grave where you are going.
- 11:5** 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 know the works of God who makes everything.

BIBLE TIMELINE

937 BC Ecclesiastes Words of the Preacher

Ecclesiastes 1 - 12

MAP REFERENCES

ECCLESIASTES						
	Introduction	Investigation and Discoveries <i>I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom. (1:13)</i>			Admonition	Conclusion
	Writer Theme Questions and illustrations	PERSONAL PURSUITS Knowledge Amusements Possessions Madness and folly Labor Philosophy Riches	V A N I T Y	CONCLUSIONS Without God's help: Humans cannot discover what is good for them to do. Without God's revelation: Humans do not know what will come after them.	A warning to the young A picture of old age A final admission	THE END OF THE SEARCH Fear God! Obey Him! Someday you will face Him!
	CHAPTER 1:1-11	CHAPTERS 1:12-6:12		CHAPTERS 7:1-11:6	CHAPTERS 11:7-12:8	CHAPTERS 12:9-14
Search	Nature	Philosophy	Materialism	Fatalism Relationships	Theology	
Style	Proverbial			Personal	Poetical	
Theme	The meaninglessness of life apart from God					
Key Verses	2:11; 12:13-14					
Christ in Ecclesiastes	The "one Shepherd" (12:11) who offers abundant life					