

SCHOOL ECCLESIASTES

of the Bible

BOOK OF LIFE UNDER THE SUN



AUTHOR

- ♦ The human author is Solomon, “the son of David, king in Jerusalem.” (1:1)

DATE

- ♦ This book was written ca. 935 B.C., when Solomon was old and reflective, looking back across his life.

THEME

“LIFE UNDER THE SUN IS VANITY”

- ♦ “under the sun” = living on earth with no regard for God
- ♦ “vanity” = emptiness; void of any lasting fulfillment

♦ Solomon’s life was filled with so many things, yet he was an empty king.

1. He had *unrivaled wisdom*. (1:16-18)
2. He had *unlimited pleasure*. (2:1-3)
3. He had *unsurpassed accomplishments*. (2:4-7)
4. He had *unimaginable wealth*. (2:8-10)

♦ Solomon looked at his life and said, “*all is vanity and vexation of spirit*.” (See 2:11, 17.) This is the sermon’s central theme--everything apart from God is empty.

♦ Solomon’s final conclusion about life is found in Ecc. 12:13, “*Fear God, and keep his commandments.*”

OUTLINE

- I. The Quest for Chief Good by Personal Experiment (ch. 1-2)
- II. The Quest for Chief Good by General Observation (ch. 3-5)
- III. The Quest for Chief Good by Practical Morality (ch. 6-8)
- IV. The Quest for Chief Good Reviewed and Concluded (ch. 9-12)

KEY VERSE

“I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and, behold, all is vanity and vexation of spirit.”
Ecclesiastes 1:14

SPECIAL FEATURES

- ♦ Three books--Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes--are called the “Books of Wisdom.” They all teach that true wisdom comes only from fearing God.

CHRIST IN THE BOOK

- ♦ The only answer to this sermon of Solomon is Jesus Christ Himself! Life under the sun is *unfulfilling* and *temporal*. Life in Christ is *abundant* and *everlasting*! (Jn. 3:16, 10:10)

Book of Ecclesiastes

Author: The Book of Ecclesiastes does not directly identify its author. There are quite a few verses that imply Solomon wrote this book. There are some clues in the context that may suggest a different person wrote the book after Solomon's death, possibly several hundred years later. Still, the conventional belief is that the author is indeed Solomon.

Date of Writing: Solomon's reign as king of Israel lasted from around 970 B.C. to around 930 B.C. The Book of Ecclesiastes was likely written towards the end of his reign, approximately 935 B.C.

Purpose of Writing: Ecclesiastes is a book of perspective. The narrative of "the Preacher" (KJV), reveals the depression that inevitably results from seeking happiness in worldly things. This book gives Christians a chance to see the world through the eyes of a person who, though very wise, is trying to find meaning in temporary, human things. Most every form of worldly pleasure is explored by the Preacher, and none of it gives him a sense of meaning.

In the end, the Preacher comes to accept that faith in God is the only way to find personal meaning. He decides to accept the fact that life is brief and ultimately worthless without God. The Preacher advises the reader to focus on an eternal God instead of temporary pleasure.

Key Verses: Ecclesiastes 1:2, Ecclesiastes 1:18, Ecclesiastes 2:11, Ecclesiastes 12:1, Ecclesiastes 12:13

Brief Summary: Two phrases are repeated often in Ecclesiastes. The word translated as "vanity" in the KJV appears often, and is used to emphasize the temporary nature of worldly things. In the end, even the most impressive human achievements will be left behind. The phrase "under the sun" occurs 28 times, and refers to the mortal world. When the Preacher refers to "all things under the sun," he is talking about earthly, temporary, human things.

The first seven chapters of the book of Ecclesiastes describe all of the worldly things "under the sun" that the Preacher tries to find fulfillment in. He tries scientific discovery (1:10-11), wisdom and philosophy (1:13-18), mirth (2:1), alcohol (2:3), architecture (2:4), property (2:7-8), and luxury (2:8). The Preacher turned his mind towards different philosophies to find meaning, such as materialism (2:19-20), and even moral codes (including chapters 8-9). He found that everything was meaningless, a temporary diversion that, without God, had no purpose or longevity.

Chapters 8-12 of Ecclesiastes describe the Preacher's suggestions and comments on how a life should be lived. He comes to the conclusion that without God, there is no truth or meaning to life. He has seen many evils and realized that even the best of man's achievements are worth nothing in the long run. So he advises the reader to acknowledge God from youth (12:1) and to follow His will (12:13-14).

Foreshadowings: For all of the vanities described in the Book of Ecclesiastes, the answer is Christ. According to Ecclesiastes 3:17, God judges the righteous and the wicked, and the righteous are only those who are in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). God has placed the desire for eternity in our hearts (Ecclesiastes 3:11) and has provided the Way to eternal life through Christ (John 3:16). We are reminded that striving after the world's wealth is not only vanity because it does not satisfy (Ecclesiastes 5:10), but

even if we could attain it, without Christ we would lose our souls and what profit is there in that (Mark 8:36)? Ultimately, every disappointment and vanity described in Ecclesiastes has its remedy in Christ, the wisdom of God and the only true meaning to be found in life.

Practical Application: Ecclesiastes offers the Christian an opportunity to understand the emptiness and despair that those who do not know God grapple with. Those who do not have a saving faith in Christ are faced with a life that will ultimately end and become irrelevant. If there is no salvation, and no God, then not only is there no point to life, but no purpose or direction to it, either. The world "under the sun," apart from God, is frustrating, cruel, unfair, brief, and "utterly meaningless." But with Christ, life is but a shadow of the glories to come in a heaven that is only accessible through Him.

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES

The name "*Ecclesiastes*" is the Greek Septuagint word equivalent to the Hebrew word translated "*the Preacher*" (Ecclesiastes 1:1). The writer claims to be "*the son of David, king in Jerusalem*"—hence Solomon, and this is the traditional view of both Jews and Christians. However, many scholars, including a number of conservatives, have argued that, while the purported speaker is Solomon, it was actually written long after his day. Nevertheless, there is good reason to believe that Solomon wrote it himself, probably in his old age, as he was looking back on the happy early years

1. You are a creature; He is your Creator: you are not your own. You owe Him all you are and have.
2. You must remember Him. It is easy to remember all else but Him and His rights.
3. Get saved in youth and use your vitality to avoid the thorns and scars of others.
4. You must do so now: don't boast of tomorrow, the matter is crucial, and death comes.
5. Childhood and youth are vanity (11:10), for they are filled with foolish lusts and optimism that deceive you to believe you can do anything and live forever (Pr 22:15; Ps 25:7; II Tim 2:22).
6. Old age will bring evil days, when you will have no pleasure in natural life; so you must wisely make the effort to remember and worship your Creator now, in the vitality of your youth (12:1).

of his reign and regretting his tragic failures in his later years. He could give wise counsel if anyone ever could, concerning the "*vanity*" of a life centered "*under the sun,*" in contrast to a life dedicated to the spiritual realm above the sun.

The deeper purpose of Ecclesiastes seems to be to convince younger people of the futility of worldly learning, riches, and pleasures, as ends in themselves, with the goal of exhorting them to "*Remember now thy Creator in the days of thy youth*" (Ecclesiastes 12:1).

Fear God (v. 13).

Ecclesiastes ends where the Book of Proverbs begins (Prov. 1:7), with an admonition for us to fear the Lord. (See 3:14; 5:7; 7:18; and 8:12-13.) The "fear of the Lord" is that attitude of reverence and awe that His people show to Him because they love Him and respect His power and His greatness. The person who fears the Lord will pay attention to His Word and obey it. He or she will not tempt the Lord by deliberately disobeying or by "playing with sin." An unholy fear makes people run away from God, but a holy fear brings them to their knees in loving submission to God.

"The remarkable thing about fearing God," wrote Oswald Chambers, "is that, when you fear God, you fear nothing else; whereas, if you do not fear God, you fear everything else." The prophet Isaiah says it perfectly in Isaiah 8:13, and the psalmist describes such a man in Ps. 112.

Keep His Commandments (v. 13).

God created life and He alone knows how it should be managed. He wrote the "manual of instructions" and wise is the person who reads and obeys. "When all else fails, read the instructions!"

The fear of the Lord must result in obedient living, otherwise that "fear" is only a sham. The dedicated believer will want to spend time daily in Scripture, getting to know the Father better and discovering His will. "The fear of the Lord is the beginning of knowledge, but fools despise wisdom and instruction" (Prov. 1:7).

The last phrase in verse 13 can be translated "this is the end of man" (i.e., his purpose in life), or "this

is for all men." Campbell Morgan suggests "this is the whole of man." He writes in *The Unfolding Message of the Bible*, "Man, in his entirety, must begin with God; the whole of man, the fear of God" (p. 228). When Solomon looked at life "under the sun," everything was fragmented and he could see no pattern. But when he looked at life from God's point of view, everything came together into one whole. If man wants to have wholeness, he must begin with God.

Prepare for Final Judgment (v. 14).

"God shall judge the righteous and the wicked" (3:17). "But know that for all these God will bring you into judgment" (11:9). Man may seem to get away with sin (8:11), but their sins will eventually be exposed and judged righteously. Those who have not trusted the Lord Jesus Christ will be doomed forever. "The eternity of punishment is a thought which crushes the heart," said Charles Spurgeon. "The Lord God is slow to anger, but when he is once aroused to it, as he will be against those who finally reject his Son, he will put forth all his omnipotence to crush his enemies."

Six times in his discourse, Solomon told us to enjoy life while we can; but at no time did he advise us to enjoy sin. The joys of the present depend on the security of the future. If you know Jesus Christ as your Saviour, then your sins have already been judged on the cross; and "there is therefore now no condemnation to them who are in Christ Jesus" (Rom. 8:1 and see John 5:24). But if you die having never trusted Christ, you will face judgment at His throne and be lost forever (Rev. 20:11-15).

Is life worth living? Yes, *if you are truly alive through faith in Jesus Christ*. Then you can be satisfied, no matter what God may permit to come to your life.

SCHOOL SONG OF SOLOMON

of the BIBLE

BOOK OF UNION &
COMMUNION



AUTHOR

- ♦The human author is Solomon. Of Solomon's 1,005 songs (1 Kings 4:32), this is the most important. It is the "song of songs" (1:1).

DATE

- ♦Solomon wrote this book early in his reign, when he was young and in love (ca. 965 B.C.).

THEME

"UNION WITH CHRIST"

- ♦This song tells the story of true, blissful love between a man and his wife, a love which pictures the true, divine love between the Lord and His people.

1. Israel is called the wife of Jehovah. (i.e. Is. 54:5-6)
2. The church is called the bride of Christ. (i.e. Eph. 5:23-25)
3. The believer individually has entered into a loving union with the Lord Jesus Christ. (i.e. Rom. 8:35-39, Eph. 3:17-19)

- ♦In this song, the intimacy of love in the union of marriage is a picture of the intimacy we have with the Lord in our spiritual union with Christ.

*Union -- "*My beloved is mine, and I am his.*" (2:16)

*Communion -- "*Let me hear thy voice...*" (2:14)

OUTLINE

- I. The Courtship Days (1:1 - 3:5)
- II. The Wedding (3:6 - 5:1)
- III. The Married Life (5:2 - 8:14)

KEY VERSE

"I am my beloved's, and my beloved is mine: he feedeth among the lilies."

Song of Solomon 6:3

SPECIAL FEATURES

- ♦This book emphasizes the sacred honor which God places upon the union of a husband and wife.
- ♦C.H. Spurgeon called this book, "The Holy of Holies of the Bible."

CHRIST IN THE BOOK

- ♦Jesus Christ is "*the rose of Sharon, and the lily of the vallies.*" (2:1)
- ♦Christ is "*the chiefest among ten thousand.*" (5:10)
- ♦The Lord Jesus is the "*altogether lovely*" one. (5:16)

Song of Solomon

Author: Solomon wrote Song of Solomon, according to the first verse. This song is one of 1,005 that Solomon wrote (1 Kings 4:32). The title "Song of Songs" is a superlative, meaning this is the best one.

Date of Writing: Solomon most likely wrote this song during the early part of his reign. This would place the date of composition around 965 B.C.

Purpose of Writing: The Song of Solomon is a lyric poem written to extol the virtues of love between a husband and his wife. The poem clearly presents marriage as God's design. A man and woman are to live together within the context of marriage, loving each other spiritually, emotionally, and physically.

This book combats two extremes: asceticism (the denial of all pleasure) and hedonism (the pursuit of only pleasure). The marriage profiled in Song of Solomon is a model of care, commitment, and delight.

Key Verses:

Song of Solomon 2:7; 3:5; 8:4 - "Do not arouse or awaken love until it so desires."

Song of Solomon 5:1 - "Eat, O friends, and drink; drink your fill, O lovers."

Song of Solomon 8:6-7 - "Place me like a seal over your heart, like a seal on your arm; for love is as strong as death, its jealousy unyielding as the grave. It burns like blazing fire, like a mighty flame. Many waters cannot quench love; rivers cannot wash it away. If one were to give all the wealth of his house for love, it would be utterly scorned."

Brief Summary: The poetry takes the form of a dialogue between a husband (the king) and his wife (the Shulamite). We can divide the book into three sections: the courtship (1:1 - 3:5); the wedding (3:6 - 5:1); and the maturing marriage (5:2 - 8:14).

The song begins before the wedding, as the bride-to-be longs to be with her betrothed, and she looks forward to his intimate caresses. However, she advises letting love develop naturally, in its own time. The king praises the Shulamite's beauty, overcoming her feelings of insecurity about her appearance. The Shulamite has a dream in which she loses Solomon and searches throughout the city for him. With the help of the city guards, she finds her beloved and clings to him, taking him to a safe place. Upon waking, she repeats her injunction not to force love.

On the wedding night, the husband again praises the beauty of his wife, and in highly symbolic language, the wife invites her spouse to partake of all she has to offer. They make love, and God blesses their union.

As the marriage matures, the husband and wife go through a difficult time, symbolized in another dream. In this second dream, the Shulamite rebuffs her husband, and he leaves. Overcome with guilt, she searches the city for him; but this time, instead of helping her, the guards beat her—symbolic of her pained conscience. Things end happily as the lovers reunite and are reconciled.

As the song ends, both the husband and wife are confident and secure in their love, they sing of the lasting nature of true love, and they yearn to be in each other's presence.

Foreshadowings: Some Bible interpreters see in Song of Solomon an exact symbolic representation of Christ and His church. Christ is seen as the king, while the church is represented by the Shulamite. While we believe the book should be understood literally as a depiction of marriage, there are some elements that foreshadow the Church and her relationship with her king, the Lord Jesus. Song of Solomon 2:4 describes the experience of every believer who is sought and bought by the Lord Jesus. We are in a place of great spiritual wealth and are covered by His love. Verse 16 of chapter 2 says, "My beloved is mine, and I am his. He feeds his flock among the lilies". Here is a picture of not only the security of the believer in Christ (John 10:28-29), but of the Good Shepherd who knows His sheep—believers—and lays down His life for us (John 10:11). Because of Him, we are no longer stained by sin, having had our "spots" removed by His blood (Song of Solomon 4:7; Ephesians 5:27).

Practical Application: Our world is confused about marriage. The prevalence of divorce and modern attempts to redefine marriage stand in glaring contrast to Solomon's Song. Marriage, says the biblical poet, is to be celebrated, enjoyed, and revered. This book provides some practical guidelines for strengthening our marriages:

- 1) Give your spouse the attention he or she needs. Take the time to truly know your spouse.
- 2) Encouragement and praise, not criticism, are vital to a successful relationship.
- 3) Enjoy each other. Plan some getaways. Be creative, even playful, with each other. Delight in God's gift of married love.
- 4) Do whatever is necessary to reassure your commitment to your spouse. Renew your vows; work through problems and do not consider divorce as a solution. God intends for you both to live in a deeply peaceful, secure love.

I. The King Courts His Bride (1:1-3:5)

- A. The banquet hall fellowship (1:2-2:7)
- B. The springtime visit (2:8-17)
- C. The night quest (3:1-5)

II. The King Claims His Bride (3:6-5:1)

- A. The majestic marriage procession (3:6-11)
- B. The beauty of the bride (4:1-5:1)

III. The King Communes with His Wife (5:2-8:14)

- A. The separation from her husband (5:2-9)
- B. Her admiration of her husband (5:10-16)
- C. Their meeting in the garden (6:1-13)
- D. His admiration of his wife (7:1-9)
- E. Their satisfying communion (7:10-8:14)

Note: This is a “generic” outline that can apply to any of the interpretations suggested. Some interpreters see three main characters—**Solomon, a shepherd lover**, and **his beloved**. However, it is possible to see only Solomon and his beloved presented in the book.

The Song of Solomon

The title “Song of Songs” (like “holy of holies”) means “the finest of all songs.” Since Solomon composed over 1,000 songs (1 Kings 4:32), this must be classified as the best of them all. It is a book full of symbols and images, a book that requires maturity and spiritual discernment to appreciate and enjoy. Any student who would abuse the language and message of this priceless book is certainly revealing the carnality of his own life. We cannot examine this book in detail, but we do want to seek to understand its message from a four-fold approach.

I. THE **LITERAL** MEANING

We have here a precious love story. It involves three characters: a lovely maiden, forced to work by her family (1:5-6; 2:15); her beloved, undoubtedly a neighbor lad who has won her heart, who is also a shepherd (1:7); and King Solomon, who is known for his attraction to beautiful women (1 Kings 11:3). While on one of his trips to examine his lands, Solomon meets the lovely maiden and takes her to his palace. There she can think only of her beloved back home (1:1-2:7). She tells the women of the harem (“daughters of Jerusalem” in 2:7, 3:5, 8:4) not to try to persuade her to forsake her true love. In 2:8-3:5 she recalls her beloved and even has a dream about him. Solomon visits her (3:6-4:16) to try to win her love, but she cannot forget her beloved back home. Her beloved sees her in a dream (5:1-6:3). Again, the king tries to win her (6:4-7:9), but the maiden refuses (7:10-8:3). She is not impressed with the king’s wealth, spices, lands, or flattery. Finally, true love wins out and the maiden is set free. She flees to her beloved (8:4-14) and is restored to her family again.

Of course, this interpretation does not put Solomon in a very good light. But he was not faithful when it came to marital matters, and certainly it is not wrong to see him as a type of the world, trying to woo the believer away from her true love. This will become clearer as we examine the different interpretations and applications of the story.

The Song of Solomon magnifies and sanctifies married love. God made both male and female and it was He who “invented” sex. The love of a man and wife ought to be a beautiful experience, as described in this book, but sin can destroy this beautiful gift. In the Book of Proverbs, Solomon warns against sexual sins; in Song of Solomon, he extols the beauty and joy of married love.

II. THE **HISTORICAL** MEANING

From the earliest days, the Jews saw in this story a picture of the relationship between Jehovah God and Israel. Israel was “wedded” to the Lord at Mt. Sinai, when the nation accepted the Law. Isaiah 54 spells out this marriage relationship; see also Jer. 3 and the entire Book of Hosea. Alas, Israel was not faithful to her Divine Husband and “played the harlot” with the idolatrous nations of the world. She turned her back on her Beloved. However, there will come a day when, like the maiden in Song of Solomon, Israel will return home and be restored to her Beloved.

III. THE **TYPICAL** MEANING

The marriage relationship is also used to describe the relationship between Christ and the church. See Eph. 5:23-33. This applies not only to the church collectively (all believers of this church age), but also the church locally (2 Cor. 11:2). Paul saw each local church “wedded to Christ” and in danger of being seduced into sin by Satan and the world. Just as husband and wife are “one” and belong to each other, so Christ and His church are one. We are “bone of His bone, flesh of His flesh.” He is in us, we are in Him. He loved us (past tense) and showed this love by dying for us on the cross. He loves us (present tense) and shows this love by caring for us, nourishing us through the Word, and seeking to make us as beautiful spiritually as possible. In the future He will continue to love us and we will share His glory in eternity. The “marriage of the Lamb” is coming (Rev. 19:7-9). Christ shall return in glory and take His bride to heaven.

IV. THE **PRACTICAL** MEANING

This book presents a vivid picture of faithful love and deepening communion. The intimate terms used only illustrate the wonderful love between Christ and the Christian. Let us note how love and marriage illustrate the Christian life:

A. Salvation

We are “married to Christ” (Rom. 7:4). Marriage involves the whole person—mind, heart, will, body. A boy meets a girl and comes to know her with his mind. Perhaps this friendship deepens and his heart is captured. But he is not yet married to her. It is not until he says “I will” that he is married. Many people know about Christ, and even have emotional feelings that are exciting, but they have never said “I will” and trusted the Lord.

B. Dedication

When a man and woman are married, all that they are and all that they have belong to each other. Their bodies are not their own (1 Cor. 7:1-5); they live to please the other. So it is with the Christian life: our bodies belong to Christ (see Rom. 12:1-2), and we live to please Him, not the world. Satan and the world (like Solomon in our story) may try to tempt us from our devotion to Christ (James 4:4), but we must remain true to Him. When a man and woman love each other, no sacrifice is too great, no burden is too heavy. See 2 Cor. 11:2 for Paul’s warning about “spiritual adultery.”

C. Communion

This is perhaps the greatest lesson in Song of Solomon—the deepening communion that ought to exist between those who love each other. No matter where Solomon took the maiden, her heart was always with her beloved. She spoke of him, she dreamed of him, and when she was free, she rushed home to him. Do we have this kind of love for Christ? Do we see His beauty? (Ps. 45) Do we realize how much He loves us and longs to fellowship with us?

In Song of Solomon 5 we have an interesting picture of the believer's communion with the Lord. The maiden is asleep, but the voice of her beloved comes from outside the door. He wants her to share her love with him, but she is too lazy to get up. "I have put off my coat; I have washed my feet." It is as though she says, "Please, don't bother me. I'm too comfortable." Then she sees his hand (v. 4) and realizes her sin. Remember—his hands are pierced. She then rises, but, alas, her beloved has gone. He left some perfume at the door, but what good is the blessing without the Blessor? In trying to find her beloved, the maiden runs into trouble and discipline.

How often the Lord wants to fellowship with us during the day, but we are too busy. Like Martha (Luke 10:38-42), we are "troubled about many things." How much happier our lives would be if we would only keep our hearts open to the stirrings of His love. Just as a loving husband and wife think of each other when apart during the day, so a faithful Christian ought to think of his Savior and fellowship with Him. In 1:1-7, the maiden sees no beauty in herself, but in 1:14-17, her beloved describes her beauty in tender words. She sees herself in 2:1 as the common rose, the ordinary lily, but the beloved sees her as a beautiful apple tree, as a lily among thorns (2:2-3). (In spite of what we sing in the familiar song, it is the woman who speaks in 2:1 and not the Lord.)

D. Glory

The marriage has not yet taken place. We are engaged to our Lord, and the Holy Spirit is the "divine engagement ring" (Eph. 1:13-14). We have not yet seen Him, though we love Him (1 Peter 1:8). But one day the voice of the Bridegroom will be heard, and Jesus will return for His church. Then the wonderful marriage supper will take place (Rev. 19:1-9) and we shall forever be with the Lord. No wonder the maiden closes Song of Solomon by saying, "Make haste, my beloved." We can only add, "Even so come quickly, Lord Jesus."