



DAILY
B I B L E G U I D E

The Book of Ecclesiastes

Days 206-208 of a Yearly Bible Reading Program

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Daily Bible Reading Plan

Day	Passage	☒
Day 206	Ecclesiastes 1-4	☐
Day 207	Ecclesiastes 5-8	☐
Day 208	Ecclesiastes 9-12	☐

Introduction to Hebrew Poetry

The books of Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon, and Lamentations are all written as Hebrew poetry. There are of course other portions of Scripture that contain poetry, but these are almost entirely that. In modern English, we use patterns of rhymes and accents to add artistic beauty to our poetry. In ancient Hebrew there is no rhyme or rhythm. The way I like to describe it is that it rhymes ideas. Each verse is either a couplet or triplet of ideas and imagery that enhances the meaning.

Welcome to the Book of Ecclesiastes!

The Book of Ecclesiastes is got its name from the Septuagint, an early Greek translation of the Old Testament, which translated the opening the word *koheleth* as *ecclesiastes*. Both words carry the idea of someone speaking to an assembly and is often translated into English as preacher or teacher. The book was written as Solomon looks back on his life and takes stock of his mistakes. “All is vanity!” is the conclusion he makes about every endeavor he attempted. All his attempts to find peace and happiness brought instead emptiness. He realizes in the end that the only place where true blessing and joy may be found is in serving the Lord. This book is a dark and raw look at humanity, much of which reflects the thinking of a mortal mind.

A few quick facts about Ecclesiastes:

- The author is Solomon.
- The time of the writing is shortly before his death in 975 B.C.
- The key verse is 1:2 – “Vanity of vanities, saith the Preacher, vanity of vanities; all *is* vanity.”
- A brief outline:
 - Prologue and Solomon’s Search – Chapters 1-2
 - Solomon’s Discoveries – Chapters 3-4
 - Solomon’s Conclusions – Chapters 5-6
 - Solomon’s Advice – Chapters 7-12
- Key events:
 - A season for all things – 3:1-8
 - Solomon’s verdict – 12:1,13-14

Chapter 1 Notes

In this chapter Solomon declares his purpose and searches through wisdom.

vs. 1-11 – Solomon examines life through his human eyes and understanding. All is vanity, that is, empty! Life marches on with its unending cycles and nothing new is discovered. It is a depressing outlook that is true without Divine purpose.

vs. 12-18 – Solomon first seeks meaning through wisdom. This, of course, is something that God had supernaturally gifted to him. But in the end, all the knowledge and intelligence brought no relief. There is no peace in the tumultuous sea of human understanding.

Chapter 2 Notes

In this chapter Solomon searches through self-indulgence

vs. 1-11 – Solomon seeks meaning through the luxuries and comforts of this life. He had everything a person could wish for. He lived in the greatest palace of his day. He had a virtually inexhaustible treasury. He was perhaps the most famous man of his day. What did he gain through this? Nothing.

vs. 12-26 – Solomon tries to make sense of his experiences. Wisdom and folly seemed to have no effect. All the fruits of human labor and the wealth we may store up also had no effect. He begins to conclude that in vs. 24 that life is meaningless without God.

Chapter 3 Notes

In this chapter Solomon speculates about life and the brief existence of man.

vs. 1-11 – Solomon examines the existence of man. All his existence is seen in cycles and appointed times. Good will come, but so will the bad. God is seen as the author of it all but had also made it impossible for man to find meaning without Him.

vs. 12-15 – Solomon concludes that we might as well make the best of our short existence. It is akin to the concepts of epicureanism or hedonism. This is not a correct conclusion and fails to give meaning to life.

vs. 16-22 – Solomon speculates on the judgment of God. He assumes that God will judge all men, the righteous and the wicked. In his human understanding, he cannot see the supernatural or eternal in these equations. He concludes that God is teaching man that they are no better than animals because they all share the same fate of death. This is similar to fatalism or nihilism. Without divine revelation this is the natural conclusion of human wisdom.

Chapter 4 Notes

In this chapter Solomon continues his speculations about life and human existence.

vs. 1-3 – Building on the hopeless conclusions he just made in the final verses of Chapter 3, Solomon surveys the injustices of this world and concludes it is better to have not lived than to have experienced them. Again, this is akin to fatalism or nihilism.

vs. 4-7 – Solomon surveys the ideas of labor and success. The successful may have more comforts but they also create envy against them. This is contrasted with the lazy fool who starves because he has no food. Solomon suggests a middle road between the two of a modest lifestyle. This is similar to stoicism.

vs. 8-12 – Solomon examines the greedy miser, who accumulates wealth that only benefits himself. What good are the riches if they are not shared with others? Solomon concludes it is better to have family and friends than to be alone with countless possessions.

vs. 13-16 – Solomon now examines the influence of men on each other. Kings are seen as replaceable. You could take a child out of prison, place them on the throne, and the nation would continue, and the people would continue to suffer. No meaning is to be found in these leaders.

Devotional Thoughts for Day 206

You have to keep in mind while reading Ecclesiastes how the conclusions are being made. It is similar to reading the words of Job's friends in that there can be some truth but overall it is a flawed argument. Solomon is speaking through his human understanding. Much of his conclusions have truth to them, but without the light of God's revelation he is groping for answers. There are many people today that doing the same thing. They try and fail to make sense out of life, but without God it is impossible.

Hymn for Day 206

Our hymn today sometimes appears under the heading "Worldly Pleasures Renounced". It was written by David E. Ford and first published in 1828. It reminds us of the vanities that distract us and exhorts us to focus our eyes heavenward.

*Vain are all terrestrial pleasures,
Mixed with dross the purest gold:
Seek we, then, for heavenly treasures,
Treasures never waxing old.
Let our best affections center
On the things around the throne:
There no thief can ever enter;
Moth and rust are there unknown.*

*Earthly joys no longer please us;
Here would we renounce them all;
Seek our only rest in Jesus,
Him our Lord and Master call.
Faith, our languid spirits cheering,
Points to brighter worlds above;
Bids us look for His appearing;
Bids us triumph in His love.*

*May our light be always burning,
And our loins be girded round,
Waiting for our Lord's returning,
Longing for the welcome sound.
Thus the Christian life adorning,
Never need we be afraid,
Should He come at night or morning
Early dawn, or evening shade.*

Chapter 5 Notes

In this chapter Solomon continues his search for meaning to humanity's existence.

vs. 1-7 – Solomon now searches for meaning and satisfaction in religion. Note his description of the emptiness of the actions of the worshippers around him. They make vows but never fulfill them. Did this improve the lot of man from what Solomon discussed in the previous chapter? No. It was all vanity. The ceremonies and rituals did nothing. The only power in religion comes from God alone, serving Him according to His revelation. This is done through the heart and not just with the hands.

vs. 8-9 – Solomon now looks to human government. Is there peace of mind in this? No. Only corruption of justice. Livelihood does not come from the top down, but from the bottom up. Take away the prince and people will survive. Take away the pasture and the plow and society will collapse.

vs. 10-17 – Solomon turns his attention to wealth. A fat bank account does not bring satisfaction. There is a story attributed to many different wealthy individuals, who are asked how much money is enough. The reply: "One more dollar". In short, no amount of money is ever enough. We bring nothing with us into this world and take nothing with us out of this world.

vs. 18-20 – Solomon concludes that it is good to enjoy the life that God gives to us and that we build with our labor. We must acknowledge that the source of whatever true joy there may be is ultimately because of God. This discussion continues in the next chapter.

Chapter 6 Notes

In this chapter Solomon continues in vain to search for meaning in life.

vs. 1-2 – Solomon contradicts his own conclusion from 5:18-20, where he stated that it is good to enjoy the gifts from God and fruits of our labors. Now he sees a person with more wealth than they could ever hope to spend. That wealth is consumed by others, proving his initial argument false.

vs. 3-9 – Solomon presents a hypothetical case of a man that has a hundred children and lives so long that it seems he would never die, even for thousands of years. Long life and large families are often seen as signs of success, but Solomon says it is vanity and that it would have been better to be still born than experience it. Still man's appetite is not satisfied.

vs. 10-12 – Solomon declares that man, being simply man, cannot contend against God. According to human wisdom, there is no true peace, or joy, or hope in this life. We do not know what we need to be truly satisfied or to live a good life. We do not know what lies beyond this mortal existence.

Chapter 7 Notes

In this chapter Solomon begins to test his theories.

vs. 1-14 – Solomon builds on his observations, experiences, and conclusions and now begins to develop a system of morals. These are not necessarily based on God's truth, but rather man's wisdom. These morals are an attempt to find peace and satisfaction. A good name is highly valued, which is good advice. This is followed by saying that death, mourning, and sorrow aid us more than joy and laughter. Wisdom is greater than folly. He concludes in vs. 14 by again looking heavenward and, seeing the futility of man's actions against God's, assumes yet another fatalist position.

vs. 15-18 – Solomon concludes in his earthly reasoning that it is better to live a life of moderation because the extremes make no difference. Again, a fatalist approach to life.

vs. 19-22 – True wisdom is marked by its acknowledgement of its own limitations. We should not judge others because we should be judged ourselves. Logical, but fatalist.

vs. 23-29 – Solomon continues his quest for wisdom but finds it cannot be fully obtained. In his attempts to understand wisdom and folly, he finds his conclusions tested and found wanting in some situations. The first case is that of the deceitful woman. There is in this conversation an allusion to the first woman, Eve. That appears to be the meaning of vs. 29 where it speaks of man and not woman being created upright. Not satisfied with God's provisions and commands, Adam and Eve sought for answers outside of them.

Chapter 8 Notes

In this chapter Solomon continues to test his theories and begins to realize a solution.

vs. 1-10 – Carrying on the flow of thought from the previous chapter, Solomon continues to acknowledge examples where his earthly wisdom has not proven adequate. Here he tackles the relationship between ruler and subject. The wise faithfully serve their king as they would serve God. In doing so, they need to fear his judgment (Romans 13:2). But what is the result? Ruler and subject, faithful and rebellious, all die.

vs. 11-13 – The next case that defies Solomon's logic is the slowness of judgment against the sinner. For true justice we must factor in that true judgment is not part of this life but the next.

vs. 14-15 – The last case is the wicked that seem to be rewarded and blessed in this life. Why then should it matter how we live? Eat, drink, and be merry! Live it up while we can! That is the natural conclusion without God.

vs. 16-17 – Solomon's conclusion is that man's earthly wisdom is insufficient to make sense of this life.

Devotional Thoughts for Day 207

A common misconception about the Scripture is that it teaches that wealth is evil. That is not the case. While the clearest teaching shows that our best life is one of moderation, there is nothing said against having possessions. I Timothy 6:10 does not say that money is evil, but the *love* of money. Someone said it is not wrong to have things, but it is wrong for things to have you. There is nothing wrong with wealth as long as it is in its place. If the accumulation of wealth is our goal, it will never be enough. True peace comes from contentment and thankfulness for what God has blessed us with.

Hymn for Day 207

Our hymn today is “While Others Crowd the House of Mirth”, by William Carmeron. It is based on 7:2-6.

*While others crowd the house of mirth,
and haunt the gaudy show,
let such as would with Wisdom dwell,
frequent the house of woe.*

*Better to weep with those who weep,
and share th’ afflicted’s smart,
than mix with fools in giddy joys
that cheat and wound the heart.*

*When virtuous sorrow clouds the face,
and tears bedim the eye,
the soul is led to solemn thought,
and wafted to the Sky.*

*The wise in heart revisit oft
grief’s dark sequester’d cell;
the thoughtless still with levity
and mirth delight to dwell.*

*The noisy laughter of the fool
is like the crackling sound
of blazing thorns, which quickly fall
in ashes to The ground.*

Chapter 9 Notes

In this chapter Solomon begins to discern some hope through wisdom in his search for meaning.

vs. 1-6 – Solomon again revisits his fatalist conclusion that life does not matter and that death awaits all. Those living have an advantage over the dead in that they still possess understanding. The dead have run their race and not more can be done for them except for forgetting them.

vs. 7-10 – Solomon concludes that mankind should make the most of this life while they can. Live it up! Whatever you do, you should do to the best of your ability. You only have one life so make the most of it. Eat, drink, and be merry! This is worldly wisdom that focuses on the now with no thought for eternity.

vs. 11-12 – Again, worldly wisdom says that there is use in trying to fight against our lot in life. We might as well give into the randomness of our existence, it says. A very fatalist and flawed way to see the world.

vs. 13-18 – Solomon now counters his own conclusions with an observation concerning wisdom. He relates how through wisdom a city was delivered from its attackers. The man was forgotten, but his impact was still felt. He begins to extol the greatness of wisdom as the means to make a difference in this life.

Chapter 10 Notes

In this chapter Solomon shows how folly counters wisdom.

vs. 1-4 – The counter to wisdom is folly. Foolishness betrays and spoils wisdom.

vs. 5-7 – An illustration of the power of folly to spoil wisdom. Here, leadership falls through folly.

vs. 8-11 – A second illustration of the power of folly to spoil wisdom. In this case, a man's labor betrays him. Labor is counterproductive without wisdom.

vs. 12-15 - A third illustration of the power of folly to spoil wisdom. Here, the words of the wise are negated by the words of the fools.

vs. 16-20 - A fourth illustration of the power of folly to spoil wisdom. Here, it is a foolish and childish ruler that brings destruction to the nation. A wise king would not waste resources and effort on a luxurious lifestyle as the foolish prince would. The state of a poorly run kingdom is described in vs. 18-20.

Chapter 11 Notes

In this chapter Solomon begins to give advice based on his observations.

vs. 1-5 – Solomon exhorts his hearers to be generous in their dealings and not worry about the possibilities against it. The phrase “cast thy bread upon the waters” in vs. 1 refers to the practice of sowing on ground recently flooded by the spring floods, as done in Egypt with the Nile. The meaning is to be sure and sow when the time is right. We do not fully understand how the wonders of God’s creation work, but we know enough to trust in them.

vs. 6-8 – We are exhorted to work at all times and in all seasons. Life is full of bright days but also dark nights. We must make the best of all of it.

vs. 9-10 – Solomon now addresses the youth. These are told to live life to the fullest but understanding all is done under God’s watchful eye. The days of youth are fleeting, so make the most of them.

Chapter 12 Notes

In this chapter Solomon presses the young to seek God.

vs. 1-8 – Solomon speaks as an old man with many regrets. He recalls the golden days at the beginning of his reign and gives the advice he would give to himself in his youth. He just stated in the previous chapter that youth was vanity. Dark days will come when there is no joy. Before the shadows came, a young man should seek the Lord. It is better to walk with the Lord into a storm than to search for Him while in it.

vs. 9-14 – After all of the wanderings of earthly reason, we now emerge from darkness to light. Considering the vanity of human existence, what can we do? The answer is vs. 13-14. Fear the Lord. Obey the Lord. Serve the Lord. This is the purpose of man. It is the only way to have meaning in our earthly life and comfort in the next.

Devotional Thoughts for Day 208

Our faith is a reasonable faith. Solomon, the wisest man who ever lived, surveys humanity and finds it empty with God. The modern skeptic will tell you it is illogical to believe in God and serve Him. The opposite is actually true. It simply makes sense that there is a God who created all things and cares for us. It is our duty to serve and honor Him.

Hymn for Day 208

Our hymn today is “Children, to your Creator, God” by Isaac Watts.

*Children to your Creator God,
your early Honours pay,
While Vanity and youthful Blood
would tempt your Thoughts astray.*

*The Memory of his mighty Name,
demands your first Regard;
Nor dare indulge a meaner Flame,
'till you have lov'd the Lord.*

*Be wise, and make his Favour sure,
before the mournful Days,
When Youth and Mirth are known no more,
and Life and Strength decays.*

*No more the Blessings of a feast
shall relish on the Tongue.
The heavy Ear forgets the Taste
and Pleasure of a Song.*

*Old Age, with all her dismal Train,
invades your golden Years
With Sighs and Groans, and raging Pain,
and Death that never spares.*

*What will you do when Light departs,
and leaves your withering Eyes,
Without one Beam to chear your Hearts,
from the superior Skies?*

*How will you meet God's frowning Brow,
or stand before his Seat,
While Nature's old Supporters bow,
nor bear their tott'ring Weight?*

*Can you expect your feeble Arms
shall make a strong Defence,
When Death with terrible Alarms,
summons the Pris'ner hence?*

*The silver Bands of Nature burst;
and let the Building fall;
The Flesh goes down to mix with Dust,
its vile Original.*

*Laden with Guilt, (a heavy Load)
uncleans'd and unforgiv'n,
The Soul returns t' an angry God,
to be shut out from Heav'n.*