

## Slow Food Bible Studies – Ecclesiastes (43 studies)

Slow Food studies, which are suitable for busy teachers and others, break down a passage of Scripture into short manageable sections with one leading question on each section. They are not designed, though they may be adapted, for detailed expository analysis. Cross-references (listed in Biblical order, normally restricted to three, and sometimes offering a longer passage for context) chase up ideas in the section. The first person singular is normally used, with a view to personal application; for group study it can be pluralised. Studies may be combined.

*Ecclesiastes* is a book apart. It is usually classed as Wisdom literature, though its date is a matter of debate. It has a certain affinity with Proverbs but presents a much more jaundiced view of life. The writer (who calls himself 'The Teacher' and at times takes on the persona of King Solomon) relentlessly exposes the hollowness of a life lived according to purely worldly wisdom. If God appears, as he does from time to time and particularly at the very end, he is a remote and impassive God of creation and judgment, rather than the incarnate God of love we have come to know in our Lord Jesus Christ. We may find we return from its generally bleak and pessimistic outlook with relief to the New Testament and even the Psalms. However, tackled with a commentary such as Derek Kidner *The Message of Ecclesiastes* (BST 1976) or Michael Eaton in the IVP *New Bible Commentary* (4<sup>th</sup> ed, 1994), it could provide a shrewd analysis of a post-modern or hedonistic age such as our own. It might be interesting to read it with a fair-minded non-believing friend, as the most 'neutral ground' to be found in the Bible.

1:1-2, 12; 7:27; 12:9-12 What led the author to write his book? *Prov 2:6; Rom 8:20; Col 2:2b-3.*

1:3-7 How do the Creatorhood and Fatherhood of God give purpose to the apparently futile cycle of nature? *Job 36:22-33; Mt 10:29-31.*

1:8-11 How does the Christian hope save tourism from being a weary trapeze round 'a botched civilisation ... two gross of broken statues' (Ezra Pound)? *Prov 27:20; Isa 65:17; Phil 4:8; Rev 21:4.*

1:12-18 If the work God has given us to do involves passing on understanding and skill to the next generation, is that task ultimately futile? *Job 28:12-28; 1 Cor 15:58; Gal 6:9.*

2:1-8 Aren't I allowed to enjoy myself? *Ps 37:4; Mt 6:33; Acts 14:17; 1 Tim 4:4-5.*

2:9-11 'I never said "no" to myself' (2:10, TM). Is my attitude essentially any different? What do I really want? *Ps 27:4; Lk 12:13-21; Heb 12:1-3.*

2:12-16 If death is the end of everything, does it matter what choices I make? *Ps 49:10, 15; Dan 12:2-3; 1 Cor 15:32b-34.*

2:17-21 The phrase 'under the sun' recurs like a tolling bell. What does it suggest about life and work in a world without God? *Gen 3:17-19; Eph 2:12; 4:17-21; 5:8-20.*

2:22-26 What saves the writer from being a complete cynic about the value of everyday work? *Ps 126:5-6; Ps 127:1-2; Ps 128:1-2.*

3:1-8 Are we the slaves or the masters of 'time'? What makes the difference? *Mt 6:25-34; Lk 10:38-42; Eph 5:15-16.*

3:9-15 Are we meant to find satisfaction in life without God? *Prov 19:23; Isa 55:1-2; Jn 4:13-14.*

3:16-22 Is there any difference between human beings and animals? In what sense are we put on earth to be 'tested' (v18)? *Job 7:17-18; 23:10; Ps 17:3; Ps 49:15, 20; Mal 3:3; Lk 22:31-32; Rev 2:10.*

4:1-3 What can I do today to show that God really does care for the weak and downtrodden? *Ps 46:7-9; Gal 6:2; Heb 13:3.*

4:4-8 Is it wrong to be ambitious and to want to achieve success? *Josh 1:7; Neh 1:11; Jer 45:5; Hab 2:4-5; Mk 4:18-19; 1 Jn 2:16.*

4:9-12 Do I realise the value of partnership, or am I determined to be independent? *Jer 38:7-13; Dan 2:17-19; Mt 26:36-39; 1 Cor 15:10.*

4:13-16 If I am in a position of leadership, am I pinning my hopes to any popularity I might have? *Lk 6:26; Jn 15:19; Jas 4:4.*

5:1-7 When I approach the Lord in prayer and worship, do I pass the time in gabbling and day-

dreaming, or do I seek to maximise his presence in my practical life? *Job 11; Mt 6:7-8; Jas 1:19-27.*

5:8-12 Would I be prepared to trample on another's rights, if it meant that I could enjoy personal success and satisfaction? *Dt 8:11-17; Lk 20:47; Jas 5:1-6.*

5:13-20 How can I find true contentment? *Jas 4:13-15; Phil 4:11-13; 1 Tim 6:6-10, 17-19.*

6:1-6 Do I regard death as the ultimate tragedy? *Ps 39:4-6; Jer 17:11; 2 Cor 5:1-5.*

6:7-12 If life has no purpose that I can discover, is it any more than 'a chasing after the wind'? *Ps 16:7-11; Ps 42:1-5; Jn 10:10; 1 Cor 13:12.*

7:1-6 How can I help those of my acquaintance who seem to live solely for pleasure? *Prov 10:22-24; Jer 6:10; Lk 8:14; Tit 3:3-7.*

7:7-12 Compare these remarks about wisdom to the wisdom that is in Christ. *1 Cor 1:18-2:16.*

7:13-18 Is the avoidance of extremes the main aim of the Christian life? *Prov 30:7-9; Phil 2:12-13; 3:12-16.*

7:19-22 How concerned should I be about what people say about me? *2 Cor 8:21; 1 Thess 2:3-6; 1 Pet 4:14-16.*

7:23-29 The writer's experience of relationships seems to have made him distrustful of most of his fellow human beings. What are the dangers of going overboard in either trust or suspicion? *Prov 31:10-11; Jn 2:23-25; 2 Cor 11:13-15.*

8:1-9 What is my attitude to those who have been set in authority over me? *Mk 12:17; Rom 13:1-7; 1 Pet 2:13-17.*

8:10-13 Do I have problems with God's apparent tolerance of 'the wicked'? *Ps 37; Ps 73.*

8:14-17 Is my life too complicated? What can I do about it? *Job 22:21-28; Ps 16; Heb 13:5-6.*

9:1-6 How does knowing God through Jesus Christ change my outlook on life and death? *Jn 17:3; Col 3:1-4; Phil 1:21-26.*

9:7-10 Why be cheerful? *Ps 32:1-2; Jn 15:11; Col 3:15-17; Jas 1:2-4.*

9:11-12 Am I helping the next generation to prepare for the uncertainties of life? *Job 1:21; Prov 23:4-5; Jn 9:4; Rom 8:38-39.*

9:13-18 If I consider that I haven't been given due credit for something, what should I do about it? *Prov 27:2; 1 Cor 4:5, 7; 2 Cor 10:17-18; 1 Pet 5:6.*

10:1-7 If I am (now or in the future) in the position of being a 'ruler', what do I need to be wise about? *Prov 14:29; 15:22; 16:32.*

10:8-11 Am I disaster-prone? What can I do about it? *Prov 11:5-6; Hab 3:17-19; 1 Cor 4:1-2.*

10:12-15 Am I careful enough about what I say? *Jas 3.*

10:16-20 In what areas of my life do I need wisdom? *Prov 20:1-5; 24:1-7; Jas 1:5.*

11:1-4 Am I prepared to take risks for Christ? *1 Chr 4:10; 2 Tim 2:6, 8-10; 4:1-5.*

11:5-8 What encouragements do we find for older Christians to continue working for the kingdom of God? *Ps 71:17-18; Ps 92:14; Isa 46:3-4; Philem 8-10.*

11:9-10 Is this the 'gospel' we should be preaching to young people? If not, what is? *Isa 53:6; Jer 17:9-10; Jn 10:10-11; Phil 4:4-9.*

12:1-8 Do I have a 'philosophy' to sustain me through the later years of my life? *Ps 23; Ps 90.*

12:9-12 How can I ensure that my instruction (whether as teacher or parent) is wise? *Job 12:7-12; Prov 1:1-7; 1 Tim 4:14-16; 2 Tim 2:15.*

12:13-14 Is life meaningless? *Eccl 1:2; Ps 34:8-14; Mic 6:8; Rom 14:7-12.*