

## Discussion Guide for Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs

### Ecclesiastes:

**Title:** In the Hebrew the title of the book is “Koheleth” which is usually translated “teacher” or “preacher.” The Greek word “Ecclesiastes” was used to translate this Hebrew word in the Septuagint. It was then carried over into the Latin and then the English. Both the Hebrew and the Greek include the idea of a person gathering an assembly and then speaking to them.

**Author:** “Son of David, king in Jerusalem.”(verse 1) This phrase would seem to indicate that the author was Solomon, but his name is never used in the book. Some have argued that it was a later king since “son of David” could mean any descendant. But the topics covered in the book, wisdom, building projects, women, and riches, are all things with which Solomon was well-acquainted.

Solomon reigned over Israel (the united kingdom) from 970-931 BC. We are familiar with the fact that God offered him anything he would ask and when he asked for the wisdom to rule God’s people properly, God granted him riches and fame as well. (**2 Chronicles 1:7-12**) God allowed Solomon (a son of David and Bathsheba) to be the one to build the temple David had wanted to build. But Solomon fell away from the Lord for a time. See **1 Kings 11:4-11**.

**Purpose:** Many believe that Ecclesiastes was written by a repentant Solomon nearing the end of his life, to warn his court, his family, and people of all time about the worthlessness of earthly things and the emptiness of a life without God.

An interesting side light is that Ecclesiastes was the Scripture that was appointed to be read for the Feast of Tabernacles. This feast was held at the time of the fruit harvest in Israel. During the celebration of the feast Israel was to live in “booths” or tents as a reminder that their forefathers had lived in tents for 40 years in the desert. The hard work of harvesting was done, the barns were full—living in booths and reading Ecclesiastes was a stark reminder that they should not put their trust in their labor or the things they had stored up for themselves. They were to put their trust in God. Without him everything is meaningless.

**Outline:** Eastern writers like Solomon and John, didn’t write the way we usually do. They didn’t have a Western style outline, I, A, B, C, etc. Their writing style was a lot more topical than our analytical style. Solomon seems to have two main topics, “Life under the sun”, and “Life under God.” He adds to these topics a prologue and a conclusion.

Prologue	(1:1-11)
Life Under the Sun	(1:12-6:12)
Life Under God	(7:1-12:8)
Conclusion	(12:9-14)

### Chapter 1:

- Meaningless. This word is used over 35 times in the book. Obviously Solomon uses this verse to set the theme for his book. The Hebrew word is “hevel” (הֶבֶל). It literally means “breath.” You breathe in air, exhale, and it’s gone.

- What is the implied answer that Solomon gives to his question, “what does man gain from all his labor . . . under the sun?”
- Why didn’t the pursuit of wisdom give Solomon satisfaction?

#### Chapter 2:

- In what kinds of things did Solomon seek to find pleasure? In what way were these things meaningless?
- Although he found that wisdom is better than folly what else did he come to realize?
- Why did Solomon find that hard work was meaningless?
- V. 24-26 hint at the real truth Solomon is presenting in this book. What is it?

#### Chapter 3:

- What is the result of the fact that God has set eternity in the heart of man?
- From human observation what do people and animals have in common? How only can we answer the question in v 21?

#### Chapter 4:

- What things in v 1 and v 4 contribute to a meaningless life?
- V 9-12 are sometimes used as a wedding text. Why?
- Solomon describes a rags to riches success story. What even makes this meaningless? V 16.

#### Chapter 5:

- What advice does Solomon have for our worship life?
- How much money is enough?
- Why might a rich man have difficulty sleeping while the poor laborer has no such trouble?
- What does Solomon see as a great gift of God?

#### Chapter 6:

- In what way is a still born child better off than the person Solomon is describing here?
- What goal do many people have when it comes to their children? What, however is the best thing we can give them?
- People will go to great lengths to try to know the future. Give some examples.
- What does God tell us about trying to know the future?

#### Chapter 7:

- In the first six verses Solomon contrasts mourning and feasting, sadness and laughter and says that sadness and mourning are better. Why?
- Why is it unwise to long for the “good ole days?”
- It’s easy to understand why it’s wrong to be overwicked; but what does it mean to be overrighteous? What’s wrong with that?
- Of what is v 20 a good reminder?
- What truth is presented in v 29?

#### Chapter 8:

- What are some things that cause a person to have a “hard appearance?” How can wisdom change this?
- What good advice does Solomon give us in dealing with the government?
- What truth did Solomon know (v 11) that we seem to have forgotten today?
- Since no one can comprehend all the whys and wherefores of life what two things should we do?

#### Chapter 9:

- We are in God's hands. Why does our sinful nature rebel against this? Why does our new man take comfort in it?
- How does the phrase "under the sun" help us understand what Solomon means in v 3-6?
- What are some examples of one sinner destroying much good?

#### Chapter 10:

- If a ruler/boss is angry at you why is leaving your post a bad choice? How can calmness allay great errors?
- What is the difference between the rulers in v 16 and 17?
- How is verse 20 especially true in our day of the internet and Email?

#### Chapter 11:

- In the first verses of this chapter Solomon encourages generosity. Why?
- Since we don't know what is going to happen tomorrow what should we do today? (v 3, 4, 6)
- Solomon encourages us to enjoy life, especially when we are young and able. But he gives one caution. What is it? (v 9)

#### Chapter 12:

- Why is it important not to put God off until we're "older"?
- What is the Biblical definition of death? How does this cause problems for us today?
- What has Solomon discovered about the meaning of life?

#### **Song of Songs:**

This book claims belong to Solomon (1:1), and would fit his vast knowledge of nature, having described "plant life from the cedar of Lebanon to the hyssop that grows out of walls. He also taught about animals and birds, reptiles and fish." (1 Kings 4)

Liturgical custom assigned this book to be read during the Passover. It is interesting to note that many of the parables Jesus spoke during Passover time had to do with marriage: The parable of the marriage feast, the 10 virgins waiting for the bridegroom, marriage and the resurrection, and "I am going to prepare a place".

We have no place assigned for this book in our liturgy. Might this be due to Victorian/Platonic ideas that all sexuality is bad? Some attribute it to the great lack of agreement on how this book is to be understood.

1: Literal – Solomon is simply describing the love between a man and a woman. Problem?

2: Typical – like the bronze snake or the High Priest, something in the song is a type of Christ. Problem?

3: Allegorical – like a parable, a spiritual meaning is read into what is actually said. There are many places where the Bible calls God/Jesus the Bridegroom and Israel/Church his bride. See Ephesians 5:22-32, esp. v 32

"Rather than trying to categorize it, it seems best to let the book speak for itself in the light of the rest of Scripture. The book speaks of love and marriage. At the same time it is impossible to speak of these subjects without reference to Christ, the heavenly bridegroom and his love for us. . . . Only where God and his forgiving love are present can marriage come close to what he intends it to be." (Ehlke)

## Outline:

The Springtime of Love (1:1 – 3:5)  
The Wedding (3:6 – 5:1)  
Separation and Reunion (5:2-8:4)  
Reminiscences (8:5-14)

### Chapter 1:

- The beloved longs to be with her lover. How does this apply to husband and wife? To us and Jesus?
- The beloved wonders why she is loved. She is self-conscious. (v 5-6) What causes us to feel this way in a relationship? In our relationship with God?
- How does the lover respond to the beloved's insecurities? How does God comfort us?

### Chapter 2:

- How do the beloved and the lover view each other? Apply this to husbands and wives.
- Apply v 16 to marriage; to our relationship with God.

### Chapter 3:

- This chapter pictures the bridegroom (lover) arriving for the wedding. How ought we remember our wedding day? (v 11)
- How does Jesus use the picture of the bridegroom arriving for the wedding?

### Chapter 4:

- The honeymoon. What keeps the honeymoon going?
- What keeps our relationship with God going?

### Chapter 5:

- This chapter seems to depict a problem in the relationship. Reading between the lines, what may have caused the problem? (the same things cause problems in our relationship with God)
- How do the friends help solve the problem? Apply this to marriage and then to our relationship with God.

### Chapter 6:1 – 7:9

- Here the couple seems to reminisce, repeating what they said on their wedding day, the lover expressing how he views his beloved, adding even more to what he had said on their wedding day. What is the most important thing to remember about our wedding day?
- What does the fact that the lover adds even more to the praise he had given his beloved on their wedding day indicate?
- Apply these thoughts to our relationship with God.

### Chapter 7:10 - 8:14

- Reconciled, what does the couple long to do? How does this picture our relationship with God?
- V 8-12 seem to talk about chastity before marriage and commitment after marriage. This is God's will for all time. Spiritually speaking, when God's people are unfaithful to him he often uses the picture of adultery to describe their unfaithfulness.

Conclude with Revelation 21:1-4