

Introduction to Ecclesiastes

Author

The author of [Ecclesiastes](#) calls himself “the Preacher” ([1:1](#)). Some interpreters have concluded that this was Solomon, while others think he was a writer later than Solomon. Either way, the book claims that its wisdom comes from the “one Shepherd” ([12:11](#)), the Lord himself.

The Gospel in Ecclesiastes

Jesus taught us to read our Bibles with him in mind—“everything written about *me* in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the [Psalms](#)” ([Luke 24:44](#)). Even “the [Psalms](#)” or “the Writings,” which include [Ecclesiastes](#), bear witness to him ([John 5:39](#)) and can “make [us] *wise* for salvation” ([2 Tim. 3:15](#)). For the Christian, what Jesus taught in [John 15:10-11](#) is an excellent summary of the wisdom of [Ecclesiastes](#): “If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father’s commandments and abide in his love. These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.”

Our search for eternal life, rest, joy, and justice moves us beyond the creation’s subjection to futility (the frequent subject of [Ecclesiastes](#)) *to Christ* ([Rom. 8:20](#)). The movement to Christ is not by direct statement but by the words of this “son of David” ([Eccles. 1:1](#)), revealing the futility of everything that is not of God. Throughout [Ecclesiastes](#) we are led forward to other answers, other solutions, and other wisdom than the world’s vain promises of satisfaction, happiness, and fulfillment. Our eyes are constantly taken heavenward for God’s ultimate and eternal provision of which Christ becomes the ultimate revelation ([2 Cor. 4:6](#); [Eph. 1:17](#)). He is the world’s supreme sage (e.g., [Matt. 7:24-27](#); [28:20a](#)) as well as the ultimate embodiment and demonstration of the “wisdom of God” ([1 Cor. 1:24, 30](#); [Col. 2:3](#)).

Outline

- Introduction and Theme ([1:1-3](#))
- First Catalog of “Vanities” ([1:4-2:26](#))
- Poem: A Time for Everything ([3:1-8](#))
- Fear God, the Sovereign One ([3:9-15](#))
- Second Catalog of “Vanities” ([3:16-4:16](#))
- Fear God, the Holy and Righteous One ([5:1-7](#))
- Life “Under the Sun” ([5:8-7:24](#))
- The Heart of the Problem: Sin ([7:25-29](#))
- More on Life “Under the Sun” ([8:1-12:7](#))
- Final Conclusion and Epilogue ([12:8-14](#))

Introduction to Job

Author and Date

The unknown author presents Job as a person living in Uz ([1:1](#)), location unknown. Job was a godly man who clearly knew the God of Israel ([1:21](#)). The events of the book seem to be set in the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

The Gospel in Job

The core complaint of “Everyman” Job is, “Why do the wicked prosper, and the righteous—like me!—suffer?” The book of [Job](#) attempts to help us understand the deficiencies of a worldview simply based upon the “merit,” or value, of good conduct, and the “*de-merit*,” or negative value, of bad conduct. Job engages in a passionate and persistent complaint, expressed both to God directly and also to his three friends, Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar. His complaint is that a world in which suffering could be visited on *him*, an innocent Everyman, rather than on heedless, ambitious people who seem to succeed at success, is either a meaningless world or a *malignant* world governed by a *malignant* God.

Job’s “world”—that is, his conception of the world—is a world based on a simplistic view of law: God rewards the innocent and punishes the guilty. Job is so attached to his “consequentialist” theory of reality, and especially of God’s reality, that it is impossible for him to see an eternal Reality *behind* his experienced reality of works and consequences.

Job’s three friends speak “‘peace, peace,’ when there is no peace” ([Jer. 6:14](#)). They try to refute Job’s complaint against the fairness of God either by *defending* God’s fairness in the face of an “unfair” reality, or by attempting to discover what bad thing Job has (unconsciously) done that would make Job’s suffering “fair,” or by lecturing Job for even wondering about his circumstances. Job’s indignant replies to his friends are justified. He accuses them of not taking his questions seriously enough, and rebukes them for not taking his suffering, and therefore human suffering in general, seriously enough. Job speaks rightly, we might say, *as far as he goes*. He lobbs verbal grenades back at his three accusing friends and appears to beat them at their own game, which is accusation, defense, and counter-accusation.

From a gospel point of view, both Job and his friends argue on the wrong basis. Job accuses God; his friends defend God. But all four of them are viewing God in action-consequence terms. The gospel teaches a different version of God: God loves his own with a love that operates apart from and beyond questions of merit. “God shows his love for us in that while we were still sinners, Christ died for us” ([Rom. 5:8](#)). The gospel insight, which emerges like a supernova in the appearance of Jesus Christ, puts a person’s moral standing before God on the basis of God’s grace alone. Job becomes able, before the book ends, to hear something of this. He hears it first

Weeks 6-7: March 7-19

Weekly Overview

from Elihu, who intervenes in the argumentative deadlock with which the first 31 chapters of Job conclude. According to Elihu, the whole world, the “guilty” as well as the “innocent,” are convicted before the Reality of God. “None is righteous, no, not one” ([Rom. 3:10](#); [Ps. 14:3](#)).

After Elihu speaks, for six full chapters without interruption, the Lord comes down! Answering Job “out of the whirlwind” ([Job 38:1](#)) and with the evidences of his greatness displayed in creation, the Lord embodies and declares the nature of his Reality, which is beyond what Job has conceived. The Lord concludes by describing at length a most unusual creature he has created—Leviathan. The incomparable majesty and marvel of God’s work stops Job in his tracks. He responds with newfound humility: “Therefore I despise myself, and repent in dust and ashes” ([42:6](#)).

Readers of Job can apply this book as a stunning corrective to ideas about God that conceive of him as operating according to human ideas of fairness and reward—that is, meritorious law. Moreover, God’s nature is revealed to be benign and compassionate rather than malignant and contemptuous. We read at the end of the book that “Job died, an old man, and full of days” ([42:17](#)), having seen his sons’ sons, down to four generations. The book of [Job](#) helps free us from believing in a “score-keeping” God. We are brought to see the God who is, who is all, and who is love.

Outline

- Narrative Introduction ([1:1-2:13](#))
- Job’s Complaint ([3:1-26](#))
- The Intervention of Eliphaz ([4:1-5:27](#))
- Job’s First Response to Eliphaz ([6:1-7:21](#))
- The Intervention of Bildad ([8:1-22](#))
- Job’s First Response to Bildad ([9:1-10:22](#))
- The Intervention of Zophar ([11:1-20](#))
- Job’s First Response to Zophar ([12:1-14:22](#))
- The Second Intervention of Eliphaz ([15:1-35](#))
- Job’s Second Response to Eliphaz ([16:1-17:16](#))
- The Second Intervention of Bildad ([18:1-21](#))
- Job’s Second Response to Bildad ([19:1-29](#))
- The Second Intervention of Zophar ([20:1-29](#))
- Job’s Second Response to Zophar ([21:1-34](#))
- The Third Intervention of Eliphaz ([22:1-30](#))
- Job’s Third Response to Eliphaz ([23:1-24:25](#))
- The Third Intervention of Bildad ([25:1-6](#))
- Job’s Third Response to Bildad ([26:1-14](#))



READ THE BIBLE IN 2 YEARS

Weeks 6-7: March 7-19 Weekly Overview

- Job's Parting Shot ([27:1-31:40](#))
- The Intervention of Elihu ([32:1-37:24](#))
- The Lord's Intervention ([38:1-41:34](#))
- Job's Response to the Lord ([42:1-6](#))
- The Lord Addresses Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar ([42:7-9](#))
- How Job's Life Turned Out ([42:10-17](#))