

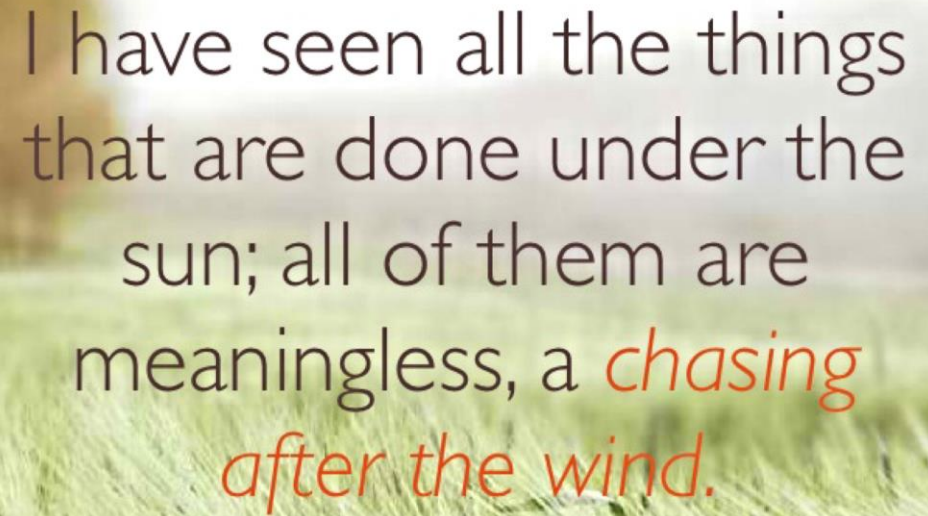
ROSMINI CENTRE 21 May
2019

Ecclesiastes is a very controversial book. Many people ask: Why is it in the Bible?

God is always in the background, what is **at the centre is the question about the meaning of human life, of human existence**: why toil all through life, when there seem to be no reward for the wise or for the fool, for the rich or for the poor, for the powerful or for the weak?

The answer is always the same: **“Vanity of vanities and a chasing after the wind”**.

It appears to be the most sceptical book in the Bible. And yet, many scholars find it a very modern book, which has much to say to the present generation.



I have seen all the things
that are done under the
sun; all of them are
meaningless, a *chasing*
after the wind.

Ecclesiastes 1:14

“Meaningless!
Meaningless!” Says
The Teacher. “Utterly
Meaningless! Everything
Is Meaningless.”

Ecclesiastes 1-2

BibleWordings.com

The author claims to be King SOLOMON, well known in Israel and beyond for his wisdom.

SOLOMON/ECCLESIASTES says that he has spent much time in investigating the true meaning of life. In particular, he mentions three stages of his life, during which he tried to achieve happiness, fulfilment (1,12 – 2,11)

1- The way of pleasure: he gave way to every desire in his heart, the joy for food, for drink, for women. The result: vanity of vanities!

2- The way of wealth and riches: he immersed himself in becoming rich, seeking gold and precious stones, building magnificent buildings: the Temple, palaces, fortresses. The result: vanity of vanities!

3- The way of power and influence: his kingdom was the most influential and powerful with all the nations surrounding Israel. The result: vanity of vanities!



Solomon's Prayer (1 Kings 3:5-9)

"Now, O LORD my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?"

It is surprising to discover that Solomon's temptations were similar to the temptations JESUS had:

- 1- Change stones into bread: satisfy all your material desires. Reckless pursuit of pleasure.
- 2- "I will give you all the kingdoms if you worship me": power, wealth, rule over people around us and beyond.
- 3- "Astonish people by the greatness of your works". Ambition, desire to climb, disregard for others.

All our temptations derive from the same sources: pleasure, power, wealth (Concupiscentia carnis, concupiscentia oculorum, superbia vitae).

The difference is that CHRIST has given us the means for overcoming each of the types of temptation, His grace.



**“God gave Solomon wisdom and understanding beyond measure, and eagerness of mind like the sand on the seashore, so that Solomon’s wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the people of the east, and all the wisdom of Egypt”
(1 Kings 4, 29-30)**

After the exile in Babylon, people felt a marked **need for wisdom**, and soon many schools of wisdom developed, attached to the new Temple. Wisdom books were popular in Egypt and in Mesopotamia, and there are many contacts between Jewish and other nations’ wisdom.

In the Bible we have **7 Wisdom books**: Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiasticus or Sirach, Ecclesiastes, Wisdom, Song of Songs, and some of the Psalms. The books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes are attributed to Solomon.

Proverbs is the most ancient of the Wisdom books and there may be collections of saying going back to Solomon; most of the book, however, dates from the time after the Babylonian Exile.

*... give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?”
The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this.*

*So God said to him, “Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, but for discernment in administering justice,
I will do what you have asked. I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be.*

Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for—both wealth and honor—so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings.

WISDOM BOOKS

- 1- **PROVERBS**: Some go back to Solomon himself
- 2- **ECCLESIASTICUS** or **SIRACH**: 190BC in Jerusalem and Alexandria
- 3- **JOB**: Why do innocent people suffer?
- 4- **ECCLESIASTES** or **QOHELETH**: What is the meaning of life?
- 5- **WISDOM**: Wisdom is personified, eternal, all knowing; Alexandria
- 6- **SONG OF SONGS**: The love story between Solomon and wife – God and Israel
- 7- **PSALMS**: Some of the Psalms are teaching Psalms and give advice

The Old Testament The 5 Books of Poetry.

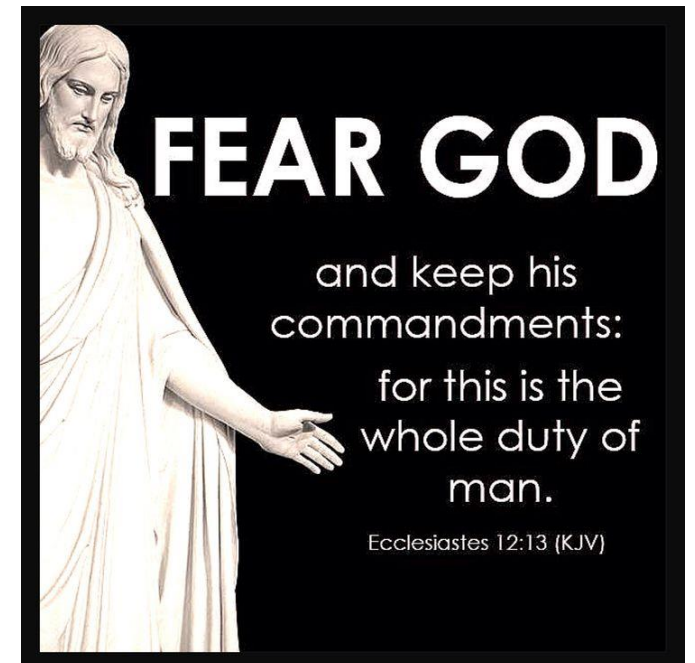
Job. The story of Job, a man who lived around the time of Abraham. The theme is the question of why righteous men suffer.

Psalms. The prayer and praise book of the Bible .

Proverbs. Divine wisdom for practical problems of everyday life.

Ecclesiastes.
A discussion of the futility of life apart from God.

Song Of Solomon.
The romance of Solomon and his Shulamite bride. The story represents God's love for Israel and of Christ for the church.



Ecclesiastes or Qoheleth belongs to the Wisdom literature. The name Qoheleth means **Preacher or Teacher**, someone who spoke in an assembly or in the Temple. Ecclesiastes is the Greek translation of the Hebrew Qoheleth.

There seem to be unanimous agreement that the author is not **“the son of David, king in Jerusalem”** – that is, Solomon: this name is used to give status and importance to the book. The dating of the book: 250 or 200 BC.

The book’s TWELVE chapters all deal with the same theme: the uselessness of human things, which it describes as “vanities of vanities” (1,2 and 12,8 beginning and end of the book). In Hebrew, the word “vanity” is “wind, puff, or vapour”; metaphorically, it indicates the barrenness, impermanence and illusory nature of things and, therefore, the way they deceive anyone who puts his trust in them. It does not say that things are bad, but that they cannot provide man/woman with the happiness they try to find in them.

- 1- The vanity of knowledge (1, 12-18). Even wisdom is in vain: “much wisdom, much grief”
- 2- The vanity of pleasure (2, 12-26)
- 3- The vanity of wisdom (2, 12-26)
- 4- The vanity of human striving (3, 1-22; 4,1 – 5,8): only God knows, we have no power over things
- 5- The vanity of riches (5,9 – 6, 12)
- 6- Wisdom has value (7, 1-2) but it cannot assure happiness (7, 13 – 9, 10)
- 7- Prosperity and adversity distributed with no regard to virtue or evil (9, 11-12; 11, 1-6)
- 8- The happiness of youth (11, 7 – 12, 8) comparing it with the failings of old age. God will judge the actions of young people.

The book ends with the solemn words:

“Fear God, keep his commandments, since this is the whole duty of man. For God will call all hidden things, good or bad, to judgment”

Meaning of life?

“There is no happiness for man but to eat and drink and to be content with his work. This, too, I see as something from God’s hand” (2, 24)

“This, then, is my conclusion: the right happiness for man is to eat and drink and be content with all the work he has to do under the sun, during the few days God has given him to live, since this is the lot assigned him” (5, 17)

“Joy, then, is the object of my praise, since under the sun there is no happiness for man except in eating, drinking and pleasure. This is his standby in his toil through the days of life God has given him under the sun” (8, 15)

“Go, eat your bread with joy and drink your wine with a glad heart; for what you do God has approved beforehand. Wear white all the time, do not stint your head of oil. Spend your life with the woman you love, through all the fleeting days of the life that God has given you under the sun; for this is the lot assigned to you in life. Whatever work you propose to do, do it while you can, for there is neither achievement, nor planning, nor knowledge, nor wisdom in Sheol where you are going” (9, 7-10)

The philosopher EPICURUS had said something similar: eat, drink, and be content – all in moderation, without denying anything to your desires. His principle was that the Gods had no interest on anyone but themselves, and had left mortals on their own.

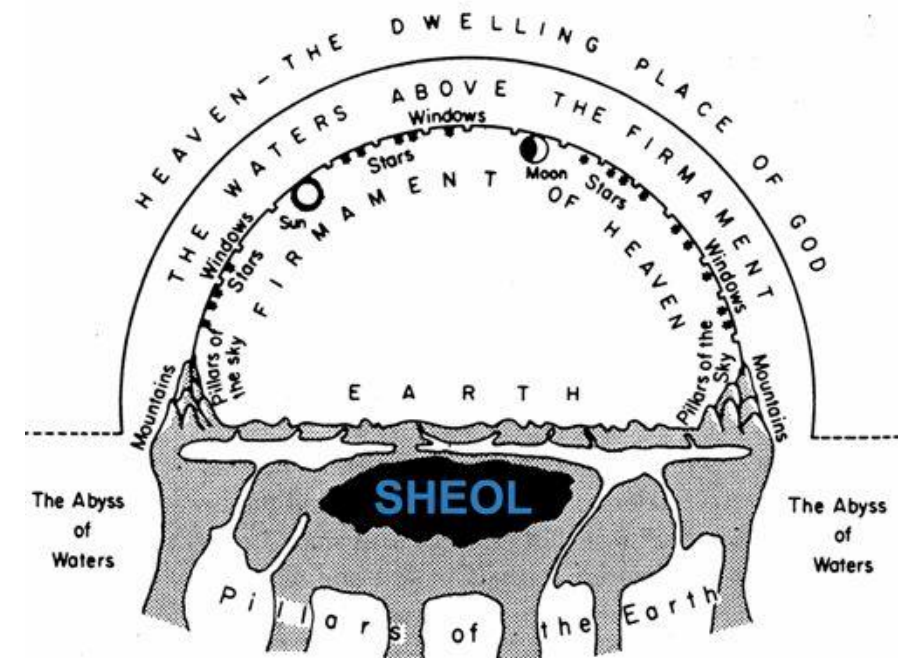
Qoheleth, however, does not share that view. It is God who grants to mortals the joy of the simple life, he says. He invites us to engage in work because from work comes also satisfaction. The commitment is good, the end results are “vanity of vanities”, just another toil under the sun.

For Qoheleth, God is present in our life, and we ought to acknowledge Him and obey Him. What is missing is the hope in an after-life which brings justice, sorting out the good from the bad. His view is that at the end of each person's life there is only the shadowy existence in Sheol, the underworld where there is no joy nor sorrow, no true life; moreover, the wise and the fool, the good and the bad, kings and slaves, they all share the same fate, without distinction. What is missing is hope, the belief in a world to come.



SHEOL IN THE OLD TESTAMENT

(Christian, 1994, p.512)



God's tender love that we find in Deuteronomy, or in Hosea, or in Jeremiah is missing from Qoheleth, and generally speaking, from Wisdom literature. Wisdom has more to do with the right ways of leading our life according to God's rules.

God, however, is at all times present: wisdom comes from Him, all good things in life come from Him, and He is our judge, rewarding or punishing us in this life.

We can detect a view of **Divine Providence**, of the God who feeds the birds of the air and who dresses the lilies of the field. For Qoheleth, in fact, wisdom is to accept the simple things in life which come to us according to God's infinite plan.

Wisdom is also to follow a **spirit of intelligence** in assessing what is happening around us without too much agitation and without fears. The whole world is in God's hands, and anything that happens around us follows the divine Will.

We can read in this book at least **three of Rosmini's Maxims, perhaps even four!**

Perfection consists in
doing the will of GOD,
not in understanding
his designs.

FR. JEAN-PIERRE DE CAUSSADE

From his book, *Adornment to Divine Providence*



ignatius press

[pinterest.com/ignatiuspress](https://www.pinterest.com/ignatiuspress)



DIVINE PROVIDENCE

It loved to happen.

MAXIMS

- 1- To desire only and without limits to please God, that is, to be just.
- 2- To direct all our thoughts and actions to the increase, and to the glory of the Church of JESUS Christ.
- 3- To remain perfectly at peace as to all that is ordained by God in regard to the Church.
- 4- To abandon ourselves completely to Divine Providence.
- 5- To acknowledge profoundly our own nothingness.
- 6- To regulate all the occupations of our life with a spirit of intelligence.

ECCLESIASTES

“Wisdom, knowledge, joy GOD gives to the man who pleases Him” (2, 23)

“Better two than one by himself, since then their work is really profitable... A threefold cord is not quickly broken – funiculus triplex difficile rumpitur” (4, 9)

“I know that what God does He does consistently. To this nothing can be added, nothing can be taken away” (3, 14)

“I find that God made man simple; man’s complex problems are of his own devising” (7, 29)

“The wisdom of a man lends brightness to his face; his face once grim, is altered” (8, 1)

“Fear God and keep His commandments: this is the whole duty of man” (12, 13)

"I AM the vine, you are the branches; cut off from Me you can do nothing"

"Vanity of vanities, all is vanity and chasing of the wind"

The profound message of Ecclesiastes is this: Man is wretched, but also great since this world is not worthy of him. It invites the reader to disinterested religion and to that kind of prayer in which a creature, aware of its nothingness, adores the mystery of God. See Psalm 39.

Moreover, natural religion has no power to save man. **JESUS went to SHEOL** to give the fulness of life to the holy souls of the Old Testament, both Jews and Pagans. They were indeed **condemned to exist like shadows without a "life"**. **CHRIST** alone gives eternal life and the blessedness of Heaven.

