

What Is Life About?

The wise person fears and obeys God.

ECCLESIASTES 12:1-14

MEMORY VERSE: ECCLESIASTES 12:13

STUDY Ecclesiastes 12:1-14, making a list of the descriptions of aging in verses 1-8. Paraphrase Solomon's concluding words in verses 9-14. Make note of the word *Shepherd* used in verse 11, and be prepared to make a New Testament connection to Jesus as our Shepherd.

CREATE a teaching plan for your group using the ideas on pages 140–142. Select several biographical books with pictures on the front that would be recognizable by your group. Be aware that this is an evangelistic lesson designed to lead people to understand that purpose in life is found through fearing and obeying God regardless of life stage.

GATHER the following items:

- Extra Personal Study Guides (PSGs)
- Paper and pencils for each individual

Prepare to Display:

- Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Job and Ecclesiastes*)
- Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Worthwhile Pursuits?*)

Make Copies of:

- Pack Item 14** (*Handout: Sun, Moon, and Stars in Wisdom Poetry*)

CONSULT the weekly Explore the Bible adult podcast to gain insights on the go about this week's study on Ministry Grid, Apple Podcasts, Stitcher, Spotify, LifeWay's Digital Pass, or at goExploreTheBible.com/adults-training.

REINFORCE the study by praying daily for individuals in the group who may not know Christ as their personal Shepherd and Lord.

KEY DOCTRINE

Last Things

Christ will judge all men in righteousness (2 Cor. 5:10).

FIRST THOUGHTS

Reading biographies and autobiographies gives us a glimpse into the thoughts and events that shaped a person. We discover why they did some of the things they did and how their experiences impacted the decisions they made in life. We also see ourselves in some of the stories. In many cases, we discover wisdom that helps us deal with life and gives us perspective. In Ecclesiastes 12, the Teacher looked back at life and emphasized the importance of finishing well, giving us wisdom that will help us live our lives well.

(In PSG, p. 118) **What biography or autobiography have you recently read? What insights did you gain about life in general from reading that book?**

BIBLE SKILL

Use a Bible concordance to gain understanding.

Using a Bible concordance, read references to the “fear of God” in Psalms, Proverbs, Job, and Ecclesiastes (biblical wisdom literature) and develop your own definition or understanding of this term. How does the fear of God relate to a person’s trust in God?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

ECCLESIASTES 12:1-14

The Book of Ecclesiastes teaches at least ten essential truths for living life “under the sun”:

1. Anything that does not have eternal value has really no significant value. Everything humans achieve appears and disappears like a breath on a cold morning. Only what God does is lasting (Eccl. 1:1-11).
2. The wise person will find meaning in life through faith in God. All other pursuits to discover meaning in life—such as education, wealth, recreation, work, and power—are dead ends (1:12–2:26; 5:10–7:6).
3. Time is a gift from God. Wise people use time as God made it to be used—doing the right things, at the right times, in the right ways (3:1-15).
4. Obedience to God is more important than religious expressions of devotion. What’s more, God expects His people to have integrity and keep their promises to Him as well as to others (4:13–5:7).
5. Wise people trust God and His sovereign will for their lives (7:11-14).
6. God is not impressed with human efforts to achieve righteousness; He is pleased with humble devotion to Him (7:15-18).
7. Wisdom involves recognizing one’s own sin and leads to having compassion on others who also are sinners (7:19-22).
8. Wise people live their lives with a proper perspective of their mortality. They realize life is precious and that their window of opportunity is short-lived (11:7–12:8).
9. Wise people enjoy the life and blessings God has given them (2:24-26; 3:12-13,22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:1-10; 11:7-9).

10. Wise people fear God and obey His Word, realizing they will give an account to Him for how they lived their lives (12:9-14). This was Solomon's final conclusion.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE TWILIGHT (ECCL. 12:1-8)

Verse 1

Solomon closed the book with a poem about the universal pattern of death that faces all mankind. The eventual return to the dust is the reason to grab hold of life while you can, while the opportunity exists. Notice that the Teacher did not say to remember God but **remember your Creator**. The word *Creator* reminds us of the One who gave us everything we have. Our Creator is the One who made us and gave us life. Our Creator made this marvelous creation for us to live in and manage. Our Creator gives us “wisdom, knowledge, and joy” (2:26). He gives us “riches and wealth” and enables us “to enjoy them” (5:19). To remember your Creator means to bring to mind daily what your Creator has done for you.

In the remainder of this passage, the Teacher hammered home that we have to remember our Creator before it is too late. He repeated the word **before** in verses 1, 2, and 6. Solomon implied that the days are coming when it will be difficult to remember your Creator. The **days of adversity** are the days of pain and suffering. For some of us, it is difficult to imagine what old age will be like. But the teacher helps us here; he helps us face the reality of mortality.

Verse 2

In verses 2-5, the Teacher used several metaphors to describe the deterioration of the body as old age approaches. In verse 2, Solomon pictured old age as a gathering storm. Old age can be a season of darkness. There is no break in the clouds to let sunlight through: **the clouds return after the rain**. Elderly people often receive one setback after another: they fall and break a hip, they get pneumonia, an old friend dies. Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before those days of gloom and darkness overtake you. It may be difficult to remember your Creator in those days of darkness.

Verses 3-5

The Teacher described the changes of old age like a crumbling house. The **guardians** of the house are the hands, and their trembling describes tremors that become more common with aging. The strong legs that once carried his body—the foundations—were now weak and feeble.

The **women who grind grain** are the teeth. Chewing food becomes more difficult as gums deteriorate and teeth are lost. The **ones who watch through the windows** are the eyes that fail to see as well as they once did. The **doors**

VERSE 1

¹ So remember your Creator in the days of your youth: Before the days of adversity come, and the years approach when you will say, “I have no delight in them”;

VERSE 2

² before the sun and the light are darkened, and the moon and the stars, and the clouds return after the rain;

VERSES 3-5

³ on the day when the guardians of the house tremble, and the strong men stoop, the women who grind grain cease because they are few, and the ones who watch through the windows see dimly, ⁴ the doors at the street are shut while the sound of the mill fades; when one rises at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song grow faint. ⁵ Also, they are afraid of heights and dangers on the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper loses its spring, and the caper berry has no effect; for the mere mortal is headed to his eternal home, and mourners will walk around in the street;

of his ears were now quiet. Rising to the **sound of a bird** is an accurate description of what many aged people experience—waking up earlier in the morning.

A fear of **heights and dangers on the road** points to a recognition of one's frailty and being at more risk of an accident. The blossoming of **the almond tree** refers to the whitening of the hair, like the almond tree's flowers turn white just before falling from the branches. The expression **the grasshopper loses its spring** most likely refers to one not having the energy and the strength to do what one once was able to do. In ancient societies, people believed **the caper berry** stimulated one's appetite. However, in Jewish tradition, the term referred to sexual desire, so this likely is a euphemism for a loss of sexual drive.

At the end of verse 5, the Teacher transitioned to metaphors describing what happens when we die. The **mere mortal** goes to **his eternal home**. *Eternal home* was a poetic way of referring to the grave, which seems eternal compared to one's short life on earth. It also emphasizes the finality of death. The universal nature of the statement is evidence it is not talking about heaven. Added to this picture are those who walk about in the street mourning, highlighting the loss and bereavement of death.

Verses 6-8

In these verses, the Teacher used several idioms or figures of speech to describe death. Each of the items in verse 6 has something happen to it suddenly, rendering it no longer functional and emphasizing the abruptness of death. Also, each of the items was valuable, emphasizing the great value of life. Silver and gold were precious metals. Both a **silver cord**, probably a necklace, and a **golden bowl** would have been rare, expensive, and extravagant luxuries.

Given water was the most important resource for life in the ancient Near East, a shattered bowl **at the spring** and a broken **wheel** that was part of the mechanism used to draw water from a **well** would have been serious matters. No water, no life.

In verse 7, the Teacher described death in terms more common to the Old Testament. The phrase **the dust returns to the earth** uses the language of Genesis 2–3, when Adam and Eve sinned and brought the curse of death on all of humanity. According to Genesis 2:7, “The LORD God formed the man out of the dust from the ground and breathed the breath of life into his nostrils, and the man became a living being.” Here the Teacher pictured death as the reversal of creation. The dust from which God made us returns to the earth: dust to dust. The breath of life which God breathed into us **returns to God who gave it**.

It is important to note that death is not a welcome visitor but an intruder in life as God originally designed it. From the New Testament we know that Jesus conquered death and that through Him there is life beyond death.

But the fact that there is life beyond death should not lead us to waste this present life on earth. The other implication of this passage is that we are to live for the glory of God before it is too late. We can finish well by continuing to focus on God even as we age. We should concentrate all the

more on rejoicing every day by remembering our Creator. This is why the theme of remembrance is so central in Scripture. In remembering, we anchor our lives in the truths that guide our steps.

One of the saddest medical conditions that comes with age is Alzheimer's. It is difficult for the patient, and it is difficult for the families. I once heard a pastor recount the last days of his grandfather. By the time his grandfather was in his early 90s, he found it hard to remember much of anything. Sometimes it was hard for him to even remember who he was. He would tell his family in a confused state, "I can't remember who I am!" But his family would comfort him and say, "That's OK. We know who you are, and we can take care of everything you need." There are many good reasons to remember your Creator. But one of the best reasons to remember the Creator is that the Creator remembers you. He knows who you are and what you need.

How does the limited time we are given help us focus our lives on stewarding our days well?

THE TRUTH (ECCL. 12:9-11)

Verses 9-11

While the Teacher struggled and wrestled with life under the sun, in the end he arrived at a conclusion that squared him with that of traditional biblical literature. He was a good teacher and shared his wisdom with others who struggle with the meaning of life. Moreover, like any good teacher, he also listened. That is, he made use of all the resources before him to build his curriculum. He worked hard at understanding, interpreting, and communicating what he had gathered on his journey. He has sought, found, and clearly passed on what he has learned.

For this reason, ***The sayings of the wise are like cattle prods.*** Ancient cattle prods or goads were large pointed sticks with which the shepherd would poke an animal to get it moving and turning in the right direction. Goads work because they can cause pain. Goads work by directing the animal. A good shepherd directs cattle for their protection, using goads to lead them cattle to sustenance. The sayings of the wise likewise can be painful, but they are painful directors that protect your life.

Verse 11 continues: ***those from masters of collections are like firmly embedded nails. The sayings are given by one Shepherd.*** The word *nails* is used to evoke the imagery of tent pegs. Tent pegs or stakes are firmly planted into the ground to keep the shepherd's tent stable—to keep it from blowing away in a storm. Therefore, their *collected sayings* give stability and security to one's life. Sustenance, stability, and security are gifts of wisdom coming from the hand of a loving shepherd.

VERSES 6-8

⁶ before the silver cord is snapped, and the gold bowl is broken, and the jar is shattered at the spring, and the wheel is broken into the well;
⁷ and the dust returns to the earth as it once was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.
⁸ "Absolute futility," says the Teacher. "Everything is futile."

VERSES 9-11

⁹ In addition to the Teacher being a wise man, he constantly taught the people knowledge; he weighed, explored, and arranged many proverbs. ¹⁰ The Teacher sought to find delightful sayings and write words of truth accurately. ¹¹ The sayings of the wise are like cattle prods, and those from masters of collections are like firmly embedded nails. The sayings are given by one Shepherd.

Solomon, identifying himself as *the Teacher*, explained that he taught others what he had discovered. He also recorded *sayings* to be shared. He emphasized that true wisdom comes from God. There is a real sense in which all Christians should follow in the pattern of Solomon here. After all, the people of God are called and charged to be people who, having themselves learned, now teach others what they have learned. One of the marks of a faithful Christian church is the evidence of a learning and teaching environment in which the passing on of what we learn becomes a regular part of our service to one another. Believers can pass on to others the truth and wisdom they have gained.

**Who in your life was the most influential Bible teacher or discipler?
What made their impact on you so profound?**

THE CONCLUSION (ECCL. 12:12-14)

Verses 12-14

We might be tempted to see life as only from the perspective of “under the sun.” The temptation is always great to forget the God who rules from the heavens and directs all activities under the sun. This is why it is important to fear the God who sovereignly rules over all things. The wisdom Book of Proverbs states: “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of wisdom. And the knowledge of the Holy One is understanding” (Prov. 9:10; see also 1:7). Again, the source of true wisdom is the fear of the Lord. That is where it begins, and from there it impacts all areas of life.

To fear God is to stand in awe of Him. God is the almighty Creator; we are mere creatures. God is eternal; we are a finite vapor. God is sovereign; we are dependent. God is holy; we are sinners. The attitude of fearing God leads to the action of keeping His commandments. If we acknowledge God as our King, we will naturally seek to do what He says.

***Fearing God is not just our duty;
it's our essence. God created us
to stand in awe of Him.***

Jesus said, “If you love me, you will keep my commands” (John 14:15). Solomon agreed and states that this is the whole duty of man or **for all humanity**. Interestingly enough, the Hebrew does not have the word “duty,” so it reads literally that fearing God and keeping His commandments “is the whole of everyone.” Fearing God is not just our duty; it's our essence. God created us to stand in awe of Him and keep His commandments.

VERSES 12-14

¹² But beyond these, my son, be warned: there is no end to the making of many books, and much study wearies the body.

¹³ When all has been heard, the conclusion of the matter is this: fear God and keep his commands, because this is for all humanity. ¹⁴ For God will bring every act to judgment, including every hidden thing, whether good or evil.

With that in mind, Solomon concluded the Book of Ecclesiastes by reminding us that God **will bring every act to judgment, including every hidden thing**. Nothing will be excluded. God will judge our every deed, our every word, even our every thought. Jesus said, “I tell you, on the day of judgment people will have to account for every careless word they speak. For by your words you will be acquitted, and by your words you will be condemned” (Matt. 12:36-37).

It’s important to remember that for Christians, God’s judgment is no longer a threat. His perfect love expressed in Jesus Christ casts out all fear of judgment. This is true because Jesus took on Himself the judgment that was due for us. We do not seek to keep God’s commandments because we dread the coming judgment. Rather, we seek to keep God’s commandments because we are grateful for His grace, for saving us from that judgment.

The purpose of life is found in fearing and obeying God.

This is **the conclusion of the matter**. John Newton, the famous writer who penned the hymn *Amazing Grace*, once said: “My memory is nearly gone; but I remember two things: That I am a great sinner, and that Christ is a great Saviour.”¹ The purpose of life is found in fearing and obeying God. The provision of Christ allows us to be free of the fear of condemnation. The Spirit of God empowers us to obey His commands. Thus, revering and obeying God starts with trusting Jesus, God’s Son, as Savior and Lord.

What are the areas of obedience that you struggle with the most? How can the fear of God influence your obedience in these areas?

1. William Jay, *The Autobiography of The Rev. William Jay*, eds. George Redford and John Angell James (London: Hamilton, Adams, & Co., 1854), 281.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION

PRIOR TO THE SESSION: Secure several biographies or autobiographies that would resonate with your group. You might choose books from the children's section that have a picture on the cover and can be quickly read. Display the books for easy identification as the group arrives.

INTRODUCE: Select one person from the biographies and share a little about his or her life. Indicate that most biographies begin with the birth of the person and continue to the person's death or the present time.

STATE: *Our own biographies are being written as we live each day. God's Word leaves no doubt that we will all face a physical death, so it is critical that we reflect on key events and stages as we move through life.*

QUERY: *What biography or autobiography have you recently read? What insights did you gain about life in general from reading that book?* (PSG, p. 118)

TRANSITION: *Later in his life, Solomon reflected on the meaning of life and what is worthwhile. In today's study, we will examine changes that occur as people age and the value of trusting God at a young age.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CONTEXTUALIZE: Utilizing **Pack Item 2** (*Outlines of Job and Ecclesiastes*) and **Pack Item 4** (*Poster: Worthwhile Pursuits?*), remind the group Solomon had already shared that pleasure, work, power, and wealth left him feeling everything was futile. Share with the group that Solomon summarized his musings on life in the concluding verses of Ecclesiastes.

STATE: *We will see his description of the aging process and what he considered the true meaning of life. He appeared to want to drive home a stark picture of death with the desire that people will see the importance of moving toward godly obedience now.*

DISTRIBUTE/EXPLAIN: Provide pencils and paper for each person. Direct the group to draw a line across the paper, labeling one end of the line *Young* and the other end *Old*. Relate that throughout the session there will be opportunity to record descriptions and insights related to both ends of the line.

READ: Direct a volunteer to read Ecclesiastes 12:1-8, as the group listens for an initial challenge and descriptors of the twilight years of life.

DISCUSS: *How would you communicate the importance of considering God when younger? Does a person's failure to consider God when younger disqualify them in the future? Explain.* (PSG, p. 121)

HIGHLIGHT: Using **Pack Item 14** (*Handout: Sun, Moon, and Stars in Wisdom Poetry*), discuss Solomon's previous uses of the sun, moon, and stars with his use here. Ask: *What seems to have been Solomon's intention with the imagery he used in verse 2?*

GUIDE: Call attention to the note-taking sheet. Direct the group to list the descriptions of aging on the side of the line titled *Old*. Be prepared to offer clarifications on specific verses as necessary. Direct the group to write the words *urgency* and *avoid dumb decisions* under the *Young* end of the line.

REREAD: Guide the group to reread Ecclesiastes 12:8, highlighting that once again Solomon shared the theme of the book.

ASK: *How should having a biblical understanding of mortality encourage people not to put off living life as God intended?*

READ: Direct the group to silently read Ecclesiastes 12:9-11 and look for what the Teacher (Solomon) determined was his role to the younger generation.

WRITE: Lead the group to record on the bottom of their note-taking sheet a response to why it is important for a person to pass down what they learn to the next generation. Encourage the group to also note what happens when insights fail to be passed to younger generations. Allow time for several individuals to share their responses.

DIRECT: Lead the group to mark an X where they would place themselves on the continuum from young to old.

RECORD: On the note-taking sheet under *Old*, guide the group to write the word *Hope*.

STATE: *In verse 11, we see the word “Shepherd.” We must remember that Jesus is our Shepherd, and through the empowering of the Holy Spirit believers find strength to fear God and keep His commandments.*

READ: Invite a volunteer to read Ecclesiastes 12:12-14, listening for Solomon’s concluding words.

EXPLAIN: *Solomon concluded that the only thing valuable in our temporary life is to fear God and keep His commandments.*

ASK: *Why do people, even some believers, seem to wince when hearing the words “fear and obey God”? Why do these common expressions in the Bible, “fear God” and “the fear of the Lord,” get ignored today?* (PSG, p. 125)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE

LIST: Lead the group to create a list of things that distract people from continuing to focus on God as they grow older. Then ask: *What actions can you take to minimize these distractions?* (PSG, p. 126)

EXAMINE: Guide the group to examine the ten essential truths of living life shared in Understand the Context (PSG, p. 119)

REFLECTION: *On a scale of 1 to 10, how would you rate your readiness to give an account to God for your life? What needs to change in order to increase your readiness?* (PSG, p. 126)

REVIEW: Lead the group to reflect on their study of the Book of Ecclesiastes. Ask: *What’s one thing you’ll use from our studies to help you stay focused on finding purpose in fearing and obeying God?*

PROVIDE: Distribute copies of the Fall 2021 *Personal Study Guides* (PSGs) to each person, encouraging them to begin reading Philippians 1:1-11 for the next group meeting.

PRAY: Close in prayer, asking the Lord to lead us to obey His wisdom, pass His wisdom to the next generation, and recognize that nothing is hidden from God.

OPTIONS

Use these options to supplement and enhance the group plans on the previous pages.

MUSIC

Secure a recording or a copy of the lyrics for “Find Us Faithful,” by Steve Green. Read or play the recording to summarize the concepts of the study of Ecclesiastes. As another option, enlist someone in the group to sing the song. Remind the group that God calls us to be faithful regardless of our stage of life.

PHYSICAL

Prior to the group time, label one side of your room *Agree*, and the other side *Disagree*. Guide the group to respond to the following statements by moving to the appropriate side of the room: (1) *Wisdom comes with aging.* (2) *Our culture values older adults.* (3) *Older adults frequently provide a picture of despair.* If preferred, the group could signal their response with a thumbs up or a thumbs down. Follow up the statements by studying Ecclesiastes 12:1-14.

CREATIVE WRITING

Gather pencils and paper.

Provide each person with paper and a pencil, directing them to reread Ecclesiastes 12:1-14 and visualize themselves listening to Solomon’s words. Guide them to respond to the following prompt as if they were writing in a diary: *I have discovered that meaning in life is found in . . .* Allow time for several people to share their diary thoughts.

DRAMA

Pre-enlist one person to present Ecclesiastes 12:1-14 as a monologue of Solomon speaking to a young man. Assure the person presenting the monologue that a paraphrase of the Scripture is appropriate. The monologue could be used to introduce the verses or as a conclusion to the session.

COMPARE/CONTRAST

Gather chart paper and markers.

After the group has examined Ecclesiastes 12:1-4, invite a volunteer to read Psalm 71. Create teams and provide each team with paper and markers. Direct them to compare and contrast how the two passages describe aging. Guide one team to share their conclusions as the other teams listen for things they would like to add to the discussion.

ILLUSTRATION

Gather colored pencils or pencils and paper.

Provide a piece of paper and pencils to each person in the group. Suggest that they use the paper and pencils to illustrate the memory verse (Eccl. 12:13).

LEADER PACK IDEAS

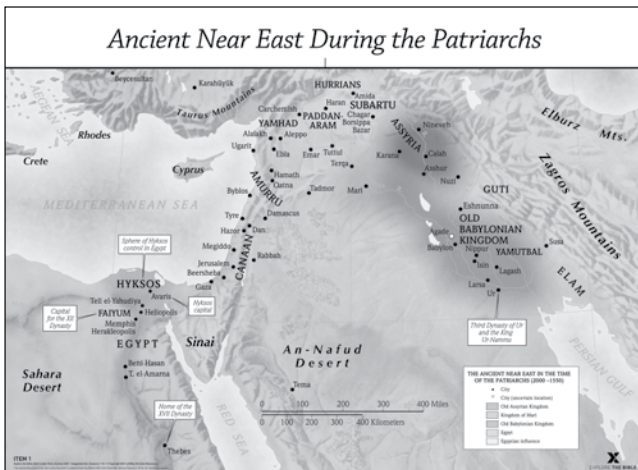
These items are available on the *Explore the Bible Leader Pack* digital download file as PDFs to create your own handouts or media presentations for your group. Items marked as handouts are also available as reproducible masters included in the *Explore the Bible Leader Pack* digital files.

PACK ITEM 1

Map: Ancient Near East During the Patriarchs

Sessions 1-13

Use the map on page 155 or locate a map in a Bible atlas that shows the layout of the city of Jerusalem in the first century BC.



PACK ITEM 2

Outlines of Job and Ecclesiastes

Sessions 1-13

Refer to the outline for Luke in the CSB Study Bible or on page 9 of the PSG.

PACK ITEM 3

Map: Solomon's Building Projects

Sessions 8-13

Locate a map in a Bible atlas that identifies the area around Israel during Solomon's time (see 1 Kings 6-7; 9:1-22; 2 Chron. 2-4; 8:1-12). Include the locations of Phoenicia, Jerusalem, Baalath-beer, and Ezion-geber.



PACK ITEM 4

Poster: Worthwhile Pursuits?

Sessions 8,9,10,12,13

Create a poster that highlights the major themes Solomon discussed in Ecclesiastes, including work, pleasure, wisdom, wealth, and power. Include Scripture references for each topic.

PACK ITEM 5

Poster: Job's Statements of Faith

Sessions 2,6-7

Use a Bible dictionary or commentary to create a list of Job's major statements of faith. Be sure to include Job 42:1-2.

PACK ITEM 6

Key Verses: Job 13:15-16

Sessions 2,7

Create a poster that lists Job 13:15-16: "Even if he kills me, I will hope in him. I will still defend my ways before him. Yes, this will result in my deliverance, for no godless person can appear before him."

PACK ITEM 7

Handout: Job Time Line

Session 1

Locate a study Bible with a time line of the major people and events leading up to and during the time of Job (from 2300 BC–2100 BC). Use it as a reference during the study of Job.

JOB TIME LINE				
2300-2100 BC	2100-2000 BC	2000-1900 BC	1900-1850 BC	1850-1100 BC
2107-1907 200 2205-2200 2064-1864 2095 2200-2050 2200	2166-1991 ADAMAM ISAAC 2095 2000	2056-1899 JACOB 2000	1915-1895 2009M 1900 2000	1826-1486 MOSES 1497-1387 JOSHUA 1850-1400 1790 1760 1740 1700 1290
Enochian, the daughter of Sages of Akkad, is the world's oldest known author whose works are written in cuneiform.	Death in combat of Ur-namma (King of Uruk, Ur, and Akkad), who standardized the weights and measures and formulated a system of law that tried to establish justice for the underprivileged.	The Protocols of the Elipser Dynasty, Egyptian parallel of Job.	Phoenician school introduced to Crete.	The Annals of Phoenician parallel of Job.
The Dispute Between a Man and His Be Egyptian parallel to Job.	Min and His God. Sumerian parallel to Job.	Min and His God. Sumerian parallel to Job.	Egyptian tomb of El-Lahun gives evidence of town planning with streets at right angles.	Levirial Marriage, Taberah, Babylonian parallel to Job.
The Great Sinner at Ur			Mesopotamian mathematicians discover what later came to be called the "Pythagorean theorem."	Epic of Gilgamesh, Mesopotamian epic (original date unknown).
			Multiplication tables appear in Mesopotamia.	I Will Build the Last of Wisdom, Mesopotamian.
			Rhombastep II, an architect of Pharaoh Ammenemhat II, develops hieroglyphs.	The Babylonian Talmud, Mesopotamian.

PACK ITEM 8

Handout: Ecclesiastes Time Line

Sessions 8,12

Locate a study Bible with a time line of the major people and events leading up to and during Solomon's life (from 1200 BC–800 BC). Use it as a reference during this study of Ecclesiastes.

PACK ITEM 9

Handout: Memory Verses Bookmark

Sessions 1-13

Make a list of these suggested memory verses to distribute to your group:

- Job 1:21
- Job 13:15
- Job 19:25
- Job 28:28
- Job 36:10
- Job 40:9
- Job 42:5
- Ecclesiastes 2:26
- Ecclesiastes 3:11
- Ecclesiastes 5:1
- Ecclesiastes 7:20
- Ecclesiastes 9:10
- Ecclesiastes 12:13

PACK ITEM 10

Handout: Friends of Job

Sessions 2,3,5

Use a Bible dictionary or commentary to create a handout that highlights Job’s friends and their actions and attitudes toward him. Include Eliphaz (Job 4–5; 15; and 22), Bildad (Job 8; 18), and Zophar (Job 11; 20).

PACK ITEM 11

Handout: “Vanity” and “Under the Sun” in Ecclesiastes

Sessions 8,10

Use a Bible concordance to create a handout highlighting the Bible passages that include the words “vanity” and “under the sun.”

"VANITY" AND "UNDER THE SUN" IN ECCLESIASTES			
VANITY (FUTILITY)		UNDER THE SUN	
Ecclesiastes 1:1	Ecclesiastes 5:10	Ecclesiastes 1:3	Ecclesiastes 6:12
Ecclesiastes 1:2	Ecclesiastes 6:2	Ecclesiastes 1:9	Ecclesiastes 6:9
Ecclesiastes 1:14	Ecclesiastes 6:4	Ecclesiastes 1:14	Ecclesiastes 6:15
Ecclesiastes 2:1	Ecclesiastes 6:9	Ecclesiastes 7:11	Ecclesiastes 6:17
Ecclesiastes 2:11	Ecclesiastes 6:11	Ecclesiastes 2:17	Ecclesiastes 9:2
Ecclesiastes 2:15	Ecclesiastes 7:6	Ecclesiastes 2:18	Ecclesiastes 9:8
Ecclesiastes 2:17	Ecclesiastes 7:15	Ecclesiastes 2:19	Ecclesiastes 9:9
Ecclesiastes 2:19	Ecclesiastes 8:10	Ecclesiastes 2:20	Ecclesiastes 9:11
Ecclesiastes 2:21	Ecclesiastes 8:14	Ecclesiastes 2:22	Ecclesiastes 9:13
Ecclesiastes 2:23	Ecclesiastes 11:8	Ecclesiastes 3:16	Ecclesiastes 10:5
Ecclesiastes 2:26	Ecclesiastes 12:8	Ecclesiastes 4:1	
Ecclesiastes 3:19		Ecclesiastes 4:3	
Ecclesiastes 4:4		Ecclesiastes 4:7	
Ecclesiastes 4:7		Ecclesiastes 4:15	
Ecclesiastes 4:8		Ecclesiastes 5:13	
Ecclesiastes 4:16		Ecclesiastes 5:18	
Ecclesiastes 5:7		Ecclesiastes 6:1	

ITEM 11
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PACK ITEM 12

Handout: Wisdom Poetry

Sessions 4,11

Use a Bible dictionary to create a handout that explains the meaning and use of wisdom poetry.

PACK ITEM 13

Handout: Redeemer in the Old Testament

Session 3

Use a Bible dictionary or commentary to create a handout that explains the meaning and use of *Redeemer* in the Old Testament. Be sure to include the meanings of *padah*, *kipper*, and *ga'al* in your handout. Also note Job 19:25-27 in your listing.

PACK ITEM 14

Handout: Sun, Moon, and Stars in Wisdom Poetry

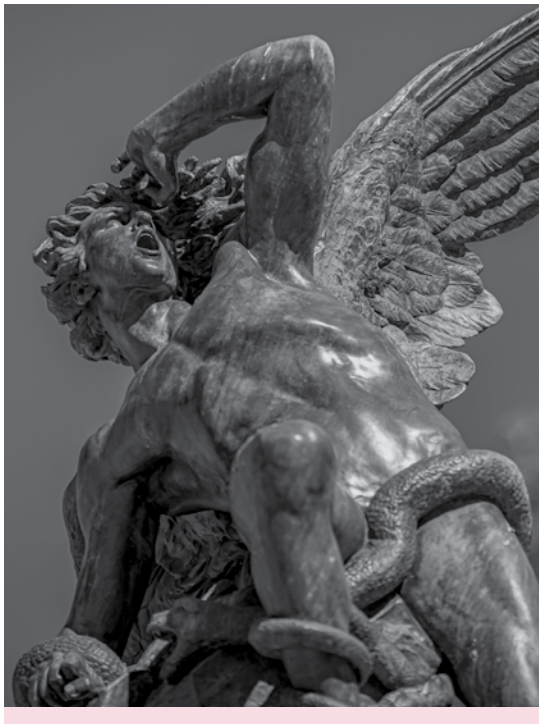
Session 13

Create a handout that highlights the Bible passages that include the words *sun*, *moon*, and *stars* in the following Bible books: Job; Psalms; Proverbs; Ecclesiastes; and Song of Songs.

Examples from *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*. The Pack is available for purchase at goExploreTheBible.com.

Who is Satan?

Lessons from Job



Fuente del Ángel Caído (Fountain of the Fallen Angel or Monument of the Fallen Angel) is a fountain located in the Buen Retiro Park in Madrid, Spain.

by Harry D. Champy III

People today seem to take two polar opposite approaches to the concept of Satan or the Devil: rejection or obsession. Some deny his existence or make him a fictional caricature. Others obsess with Satan and inflate him to a rival deity. For the Christian the Book of Job offers some helpful insight into the nature of Satan.

The Term

The Greek New Testament used the term *diabolos* (usually translated “Devil”) while the Old Testament preferred the Hebrew term *Satan*. *Diabolos* clearly indicates an accuser, but *Satan* seems to indicate a more general adversary. The verb form (“to accuse”) was used 6 times¹ while the noun (“adversary”) was used 27 times in 23 verses.²

“Satan” could be used for human or nonhuman adversaries. The Philistines were afraid that David would turn against them and become an adversary. Solomon conquered the adversaries all around Israel before God raised them up in punishment. The psalmist prayed that God would raise up an adversary against the wicked.

Scripture also uses the word of nonhuman adversaries. In the story of Balaam's donkey, the angel of the Lord was an adversary and blocked the donkey's path. An adversary provoked David to undertake a census of the people. Zechariah had a vision of the high priest Joshua with the angel of the Lord and Satan.

In Job, the word was used with the definite article, "the Satan/Adversary." This was not an ordinary adversary, but the ultimate adversary. The Hebrew word *satan* was used more in Job than all other Old Testament books combined.³ Therefore, the Book of Job offers the biggest glimpse into the nature of Satan in the Old Testament.

His Position

The Book of Job introduces Satan in the prose section in Job 1–2, the background for the conversations in the poetic heart of the book. After describing the exemplary nature of Job, the scene changed in 1:6. On a certain day, the angels gathered to present themselves before Yahweh. Literally, the text reads, "And it was the day, and the sons of God came." This was not an impromptu gathering; it was "the day." The image is of a king calling his courtiers into his presence. They do not come uninvited or of their own accord. They are summoned at the appointed time, "the day."

These courtiers, "the sons of God," are clearly angelic beings that God created. They came "to present themselves before Yahweh, and also the Satan came" (Job 1:6; writer's translation). Satan was among these beings.

Yahweh speaks first, questioning Satan about where he has come from. With such a courtly scene, one would rightly expect the superior to speak first, questioning his subject. The question does not reflect the superior's lack of knowledge, but his granting permission for the lesser being to speak.

The relative position of Satan is clear. He is a created being, subject to Yahweh. Even his presence and speaking is subjugated to God. Satan is not a rival deity; he is a created being, a mere angel.

His Purpose

As did the other angels, Satan came to present himself before Yahweh. In particular, he had come from roaming through the earth and going back and forth in it. Both Hebrew verbs denote continual action. While the first verb is often translated as a casual action, it instead describes a purposeful activity. This means Satan had intentionally and continually gone throughout the earth, searching.

The second verb is common and means "to walk." The Hebrew stem indicates intensive or reflexive action. Satan intensively conducted the task of walking to and fro himself. The action clearly reveals an area in which Satan is inferior to God; unlike Yahweh, Satan is not omnipresent.

Yahweh asked Satan specifically if he had "considered" (literally, "set his heart on") Yahweh's "servant" Job. After God praised Job, Satan questioned Job's motives: did Job fear God for nothing in return? The implication was that Job served God only for what he would receive in return, which was a hedge of protection and an increase in material blessing.

Based on these verses, Satan's general purpose was to search throughout the earth, to notice and examine its inhabitants. His specific purposes were to be Job's adversary, question his motives, and peel back any façade from his outward appearance and actions.

His Power

To prove Job's motives Satan challenged Job's righteousness (1:11). He challenged God to stretch out His hand and touch Job's

possessions, “all that (belongs) to him,” to see if Job would not curse Yahweh to His face. Yahweh accepted the challenge and allowed Satan to touch or take his possessions, but not to touch Job.

After Job passed the first challenge and test by maintaining his integrity, Satan suggested a second challenge (2:4-5). If Yahweh would touch Job’s skin, he would definitely curse God. Again, Yahweh agreed and allowed Satan to touch his body, but not to kill Job.

The unfolding story reveals Satan’s power. He is able to touch and destroy earthly things: Job’s oxen and donkeys, sheep, and camels. Even people around Job were killed: servants, sons, and daughters. Job’s own health was affected as he was stricken with painful sores over his entire body. Clearly, Satan has powers within the earthly, physical realm. He was able to destroy physical things.

The text clearly shows, however, that Satan was able to do only what God allowed. Satan’s power was limited by God and His will. Satan played his part as adversary, but his role was limited.

His Plot vs. God’s Plan

Satan had plotted to destroy Job and have him curse God. What happened though? After Yahweh Himself spoke to Job out of the whirlwind, Job responded; he had heard of God but now had actually seen Him with his own eyes (42:5). Previously, Job had a basic understanding of God but had gained a clearer vision and obtained a better, more intimate relationship with God. After hearing God speak, Job knew without a doubt that God was in control and that God loved him!

What does Job teach us about “the adversary”? Satan is not able to do anything beyond God’s will. His power is limited, and his defeat is definite! Job proclaimed this, and the rest of Scripture confirms this. Even

in this fallen world, we Christians can rest in this knowledge.

In Genesis 50:20, Joseph revealed to his brothers: “You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done” (NIV). Paul wrote in Romans 8:28 that “in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose” (NIV). Satan’s activity is limited by a God who is all-powerful (omnipotent), all-knowing (omniscient), and all-loving!

The Book of Job clearly describes Satan as a mere angel with limited power who sought to destroy Job’s spirit but who was unable to do anything to thwart God’s plan for Job. Satan, the adversary in Job, has not changed. He has used the same strategies since the garden of Eden and continues to prowl around today like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour (1 Pet 5:8), but he is still subject to God’s sovereignty.

1. Pss. 38:20; 71:13; 109:4,20,29; and Zech. 3:1.

2. Num. 22:22,32; 1 Sam. 29:4; 2 Sam. 19:22; 1 Kings 5:4; 11:14,23,25; 1 Chron. 21:1; Job 1:6,7(x2),8,9,12(x2); 2:1,2(x2),3,4,6,7; Ps. 109:6; and Zech. 3:1,2(x2).

3. Fourteen times in 11 verses.

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Job's Friends: Models of Compassion?

By J. Mark Terry

All of us have gone to visit a grieving friend and have wondered what to say. Sometimes we say nothing. Other times when we do talk, we later question whether we said the right thing. Job's friends came to see him as he grieved over the deaths of his children (Job 2:11). How effectively did they comfort their friend? A careful study of Job's three friends and their efforts will help us all become better comforters.

The Bible tells us Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar learned of Job's despair and agreed to meet and travel together to visit Job (v. 11). This demonstrates they knew each other and Job before the sad events transpired. Clearly, sincere concern prompted their visit, and they meant for their words to console Job in his loss and instruct him in righteousness.

When the three friends approached Job, grief overcame them, and they dramatically expressed their anguish. First, they wept loudly for their friend and his suffering. Second, they tore their robes. Third, they sprinkled dust on their heads. All of these actions expressed deep sorrow. Beyond these actions, they sat silently in Job's

presence for seven days and seven nights. This period of mourning was typical of mourning for a prominent person (Gen. 50:10). It showed their respect for Job and their identification with his sorrow. Who were these concerned friends?

Eliphaz

Eliphaz always spoke first. This indicates that he was the oldest and most prominent of the three men. He was the kindest of the three friends. Before coming to see Job, Eliphaz had a dream that affected him greatly (4:12-21) and likely set the tone for all three of his speeches. Eliphaz believed that all suffering was punishment for sin. Therefore, in Eliphaz's mind, because Job was suffering greatly, he must have sinned grievously against God.

Eliphaz made three speeches in the Book of Job (chaps. 4-5; 15; and 22). In his first speech, he reminded Job that sinful men suffer for their sins, and he promised Job forgiveness and restoration if only Job would repent. In his second speech Eliphaz used sharper words. He expressed shock at Job's defense of his actions. He called on



Job to repent and seek reconciliation with God—lest Job experience the terrible fate of the wicked. In his third speech Eliphaz cast off all restraint and accused Job of wickedness; nevertheless, Eliphaz ended his speech with praise for God’s mercy on those who repent.

Eliphaz was a good man, a man of upright character and sympathy. Were he not kind and sympathetic, he would not have traveled many miles to see his friend. Still, his narrow and limited understanding of human suffering led him to misdiagnose Job’s problem.

Bildad

Most Bible commentators believe Bildad was younger than Eliphaz, as it was customary for the oldest person to speak first. He expressed amazement that Job would question the traditional belief that suffering is the result of sin. The Book of Job includes three speeches by Bildad (chaps. 8; 18; and 25).

In his first speech he implied that Job’s sin may have contributed to his children’s deaths. In his second speech Bildad discussed the awful fate of the wicked, and in his third speech he extolled the power of God and the sinful nature of human beings. His last speech was quite brief (chap. 25), maybe an indicator that Bildad had grown tired of talking to someone who would not agree with him.

Zophar

The fact that Zophar spoke third suggests he was the youngest of the friends. Like his friends, Zophar focused on Job’s disobedience as the cause of his suffering.

The Book of Job records only two speeches by Zophar (chaps. 11; 20), though some commentators suggest that a portion of chapter 27 might be Zophar’s third speech.

Evaluation

The Bible says Eliphaz, Bildad, and Zophar came to comfort Job. How well did they do? Job gave them a bad evaluation. He declared that they were “miserable comforters” (16:2). Surely they meant well, but they made Job feel even worse than he did before their arrival.

Job’s friends did some things right, though. They did visit Job, which was good. Many persons will avoid those who are grieving. Second, they sat with Job in silence for seven days. Often silence is healing. Many times one’s presence is more helpful than one’s words. Third, they expressed their opinions to Job personally. They did not talk behind his back.

Still, they failed completely in their efforts to help Job. Why did they fail? They failed because they held these convictions: (1) All suffering is the result of sin. (2) God punishes each act of sin with a penalty that corresponds to the gravity of the sin. (3) Suffering is proof of personal guilt. These ideas prevented them from understanding Job and his problem.

Not surprisingly, the three friends struggled to understand suffering. Four thousand years later we still wrestle with this issue. Truly, some suffering is the result of sin, but in Job’s case the friends’ assumptions were wrong. The Book of Job presents a new understanding of suffering. Not all suffering is the result of sin. Sometimes the innocent do suffer in this life. However, “suffering may be used as a means of demonstrating the faith of the saints, strengthening the faith of the saints, and extending the influence of the saints.” That which can easily be overlooked may be one of the most hope-filled lessons from the book: “Suffering, faithfully endured, defeats Satan.”¹

1. J. W. Watts, *Old Testament Teaching* (Nashville: Broadman Press, 1967), 134.

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Vanity: A Word Study

by Duane A. Garrett

The Hebrew word *hebel* is found throughout the Old Testament, but it is a theme of Ecclesiastes, encapsulating the meaning of that book. It is translated “vanity” in the older versions but is typically rendered as “meaningless” or “futile” in more recent translations. The KJV of Ecclesiastes 1:2 opens with the words, “Vanity of vanities,” but the CSB translates the same phrase as “Absolute futility.” Both translate the term *hebel*, which at its most basic level means “a breath of air.” A single breath is lightweight, invisible, and transitory. The word *hebel* thus came to represent anything that is ephemeral and has little impact on its surroundings. From that, *hebel* took on the meaning “futile” or “pointless.” In some contexts, it can mean “absurd,” since focusing one’s life on something that has no lasting value is absurd behavior. It also refers to outcomes that are undesirable. By analogy, we sometimes use the words “waste” or “shame” to refer to a bad situation. We say, “What a waste” or “That’s a shame” to express dismay or sorrow.¹

We can see examples of all these uses in Ecclesiastes. In 8:14, the text states that sometimes the good get what the evil deserve and the evil get what the good deserve; the writer calls this *hebel* in the sense of a “waste” or a “shame.” The book observes in 5:10 that those who love money are never

satisfied with money, and it calls this *hebel*, meaning that their behavior is absurd, a waste of a life. The term, though, does not always imply moral disapproval. Ecclesiastes 9:9 encourages the reader to enjoy life with his wife for all of his “fleeting days.”² This is literally, “all the days of your life of *hebel*.” It does not imply that the life has been badly lived; it only means that life quickly passes. The word *hebel* has the same sense elsewhere, as in Psalm 144:4: “A human is like a breath [*hebel*]; his days are like a passing shadow.” Outside of Ecclesiastes, however, *hebel* sometimes refers to idols, things that are intrinsically worthless (Deut. 32:21; 1 Kings 16:13; Jer. 14:22). But in Ecclesiastes, *hebel* never means “idols.”

Why does Ecclesiastes refer to so much³ as *hebel*? The book has something of a fixation on death. The point is that we and all our works will perish. Just as the human body dies, our lofty buildings will crumble, our empires will fall, our great deeds will be forgotten, and our wealth will be frittered away. Nothing in this world is permanent; it is all *hebel*. We would be wise to take that into account.

Some readers are offended at the claim of 1:2 that “everything is futile (*hebel*),” thinking it implies that faith in God and service to Him is a waste of time. But in the Bible, the words “every” and “all” need

to be understood in context; they are rarely absolute. In Ecclesiastes, it is everything under the sun that is *hebel*. God and the things of God are not of this world; they are by nature eternal. As such, they are not *hebel*. Ecclesiastes 12:13 therefore instructs its readers to “fear God and keep his commands.” This behavior has eternal value.

At the same time, we must be careful to understand what Ecclesiastes is saying. Some readers think that when it says everything is *hebel* (as at 1:2), it is speaking only to unbelievers. They argue that when someone becomes a Christian, things cease to be *hebel*. This badly misinterprets the book, and it can cause Christian readers to miss its central message. For us, as for everyone else, life under the sun is brief and fleeting. We, too, can easily waste our lives by ascribing ultimate value to things that are only temporary. We can be so determined to achieve success in a given area that we forget what really matters. We can fail to see that the most precious things we have in this world are relationships with friends (4:9-12) and with our spouses (9:9). We can wrongly think our accomplishments validate our lives—not realizing that all we do, just like our physical lives, will pass away and be forgotten (1:11-14). We can wrongly suppose that by becoming wise and pious, we become invulnerable to life’s ills. In fact, we are also doomed to perish, no matter how wise we become (2:14-15). Ecclesiastes does not want us to waste our lives.

Understanding all of this, we can see why Ecclesiastes constantly encourages and instructs readers to enjoy their days under the sun. When it says, “There is nothing better for a person than to eat, drink, and enjoy his work” (2:24), it does not mean that we should give ourselves over to hedonism. It does, however, make the point that our days in this world are few, and that life is truly wasted if we do not take time to enjoy them. The Bible promises us resurrection and eternal life in Christ, and that is our hope and comfort.

Even so, our time in the adventure that is this life is brief, and we do not get a second chance. When Ecclesiastes calls the things of this world *hebel*, it does not mean they have no value whatsoever. Giving evidence of this, the book even has advice on investing, saying that we should diversify investments and not be overly cautious about business opportunities (11:1-6).⁴ Most people do need some measure of financial success to enjoy life. We must understand, however, that every worldly accomplishment—academic achievement, wealth, power, fame, honors, and so forth—is fleeting; and we should never think that these things can give us significance. We can enjoy them knowing that they do not define us, and that we will someday lose them all. Rather than embrace defeatism, believers can have hope. We are assured that our “boast”—our identity, joy, and sense of self-worth—is always in the cross of Christ (Gal. 6:14).

1. For further discussion, see Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Songs*, vol. 14, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: Broadman, 1993), 282–83.

2. All Scripture quotations are the writer’s translation.

3. See for instance, Eccl. 1:4; 2:16; 3:2,19; 5:15; 7:1,15,17,26; 8:8; 9:5-6; 12:1-7.

4. See Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 337–38.

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- Session 4* **Joy in Knowing Jesus** • Philippians 3:8-21
- Session 5* **Joy Through Peace** • Philippians 4:1-9
- Session 6* **Joy and Contentment** • Philippians 4:10-20
- Session 7* **The Gospel's Power** • Colossians 1:9-23
- Session 8* **The Gospel's Goal** • Colossians 1:24-2:3
- Session 9* **The Gospel's Forgiveness** • Colossians 2:4-15
- Session 10* **The Gospel's Freedom** • Colossians 2:16-23
- Session 11* **The Gospel Lived** • Colossians 3:1-17
- Session 12* **The Gospel and Relationships** • Colossians 3:18-4:6
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