

Ecclesiastes

*This is part of an ongoing series of short articles designed to help us understand what scripture is and what is **in** each book of scripture. Previous articles can be found at www.openarms-communityofchrist.org.*

Ecclesiastes is, in some ways, one of the more depressing books in the Hebrew canon. While there is acknowledgement of joy and pleasure to be found in life, the Teacher (the supposed author of the book) always returns to the fact that there is always death; therefore everything is futile or vain.

Traditionally the book has been attributed to Solomon, but scholars doubt this. The language and the mood of the work make it much more likely that it was written about 300 BC instead.

It is a short book—only 12 chapters. The “Teacher,” whoever he was, begins by pointing out that “all is vanity,” wondering what people gain from all the work they do. His perspective is that “there is nothing new under the sun” and so even though he has gained much wisdom, pleasure, power, he doesn’t see the point of it. Death will ultimately be the end of everything.

He points out that humans cannot understand divine generosity, and God’s work is mystery. For the Teacher, it is important to have reverence for God, despite everything else in life.

Perhaps the portion of this book that people are most familiar with is the beginning of the third chapter. Pete Seeger pulled the first eight verses of it into the song “Turn, Turn, Turn”—later made famous by The Byrds.

For everything there is a season, and a time for every matter under heaven:

a time to be born, and a time to die;

a time to plant, and a time to pluck up what is planted;

a time to kill, and a time to heal;

a time to break down, and a time to build up;

a time to weep, and a time to laugh;

a time to mourn, and a time to dance;

a time to throw away stones, and a time to gather stones together;

a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;

a time to seek, and a time to lose;

a time to keep, and a time to throw away;

a time to tear, and a time to sew;

a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;

a time to love, and a time to hate;

a time for war, and a time for peace.