

Dr. Al Fuhr, Ecclesiastes, Session 3, Stock Phrases—Under the Sun/Heaven, Gain/Good, Wisdom

Resources from NotebookLM

1) Abstract, 2) Audio podcast, 3) Study Guide, 4) Briefing Document, and 5) FAQs

1. Abstract of Fuhr, Ecclesiastes, Session 3, Stock Phrases—Under the Sun/Heaven, Gain/Good, Wisdom, Biblicalelearning.org, BeL

Dr. Al Fuhr's lecture on Ecclesiastes analyzes the recurring phrase "under the sun," arguing it represents a human perspective on life, not a rejection of God. He explains that the book's author, Kohelet, uses wisdom to observe life's complexities, finding it beneficial but ultimately limited in providing lasting solutions to the problem of life's fleeting nature. Fuhr emphasizes that Ecclesiastes, as wisdom literature, offers practical advice for navigating life's uncertainties and challenges rather than providing theological pronouncements or divine revelations. He illustrates this with examples of proverbs and observations from the text, showcasing Kohelet's exploration of wisdom's value and limitations. The lecture ultimately positions Ecclesiastes as a guide for living wisely in a world marked by uncertainty and the inevitability of death.

2. 13 - minute Audio Podcast Created on the basis of Dr. Fuhr, Ecclesiastes, Session 3 – Double click icon to play in Windows media player or go to the Biblicalelearning.org [BeL] Site and click the audio podcast link there (Old Testament → Psalms and Wisdom → Ecclesiastes).



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3. Briefing Document

Okay, here's a detailed briefing document summarizing the main themes and ideas from the provided excerpt of Dr. Al Fuhr's lecture on Ecclesiastes, Session 3:

Briefing Document: Dr. Al Fuhr on Ecclesiastes, Session 3

I. Overview

This session focuses on interpreting key themes in the Book of Ecclesiastes, particularly the phrases "under the sun" and "under the heavens," and the role of wisdom in Kohelet's (the Preacher's) quest for meaning. Dr. Fuhr challenges common misinterpretations and emphasizes the practical application of wisdom found within the book.

II. Key Themes & Concepts

- **"Under the Sun" (tahat ha-shemesh):**
- **Horizontal Perspective:** Dr. Fuhr argues that "under the sun" signifies a horizontal perspective of life, "looking at life from a limited perspective, from the perspective of man," rather than a divine or heavenly one. It is not meant to represent a backslidden, ungodly, or humanistic viewpoint, but simply a human perspective within the limitations of earthly existence.
- **Not a Negative Stance:** The "under the sun" view is not inherently negative; it's the lens through which Kohelet observes and experiences life, filtered through wisdom.
- **Frequency:** This phrase appears 29 times in Ecclesiastes, underscoring its importance to the book's perspective.
- **"Under the Heavens" (tahat ha-shemayim):**
- **Literary Alternative:** Dr. Fuhr asserts that "under the heavens" is simply a literary alternative to "under the sun," not a distinct theological perspective. There is "no theological division between the under the heavens and the under the sun perspective."

- **Contextual Meaning:** While some might interpret "under the heavens" as reflecting God's activity, Dr. Fuhr demonstrates how the usage within the book supports its role as a parallel to the "under the sun" perspective. For example, the phrase is used when discussing "what was worthwhile for men to do" (2:3), illustrating a human-centered focus.
- **The Role of Wisdom:**
 - **Lens of Inquiry:** Kohelet undertakes his journey through the lens of wisdom, "he observes and experiences life and he filters that through wisdom." This wisdom is God-centered, but it's not divinely revelatory.
 - **Quest for "Yitron":** Wisdom is employed as a tool in the search for *yitron* (gain, advantage, solution).
 - **Self-Affirmation of Wisdom:** Kohelet repeatedly affirms his own wisdom, as evidenced in passages like 1:12-17, 2:3, 2:9 and 12:9, where he states that he is well-equipped and wise for his quest.
 - Quote: "I thought to myself, look, I have grown and increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me. I've experienced much of wisdom and knowledge. And then in verse 17, then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom." (1:16-17)
 - **Value and Limitations:** Wisdom is beneficial and provides an advantage in navigating life, "It's better to be wise than to be a fool." However, it does not guarantee success or provide ultimate resolution to the *hevel* (vanity, futility) of life; "wisdom itself is ultimately unable to provide any lasting solutions." Wisdom cannot guarantee the future or prevent death, which levels all things.
 - Quote: "The wise man has eyes in his head, while the fool walks in darkness. But I came to realize that the same fate overtakes them both." (2:14)
 - Quote: "For the wise man, like the fool, will not long be remembered. In days to come, both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die." (2:16)
 - **Probabilistic Outcomes:** Kohelet acknowledges the limitations of wisdom in guaranteeing specific outcomes, emphasizing that life operates on probabilistic, not deterministic, principles.
 - Quote: "The wisdom of Ecclesiastes suggests that risk-taking is important. This is the application of probabilistic wisdom."

- **Providential Probabilities:** While individuals should use wisdom to make good choices and hedge their bets, outcomes are ultimately in God's hands: "In other words, you make all the right choices, but ultimately it's God who is going to bring about the outcome."
- **Ecclesiastes as Wisdom Literature:**
- **Genre and Interpretation:** Ecclesiastes should be approached as a wisdom text, not a narrative or prophetic one. This means looking for practical lessons, proverbs, and reflective speeches.
- **Practical Lessons:** Similar to the book of Proverbs, Ecclesiastes offers practical principles for navigating life, though "wisdom is ultimately not going to provide the solution, but it's nevertheless good."
- **Examples of Practical Wisdom:** Dr. Fuhr provides examples like:
 - The risks of life and importance of being prepared (10:8-10)
 - The flexibility and utility of money (10:19) - not as hedonism but as a practical provision.
 - The necessity of risk-taking and not waiting for perfect conditions (11:1-6).
 - Quote "It's not just a matter of working hard and taking risks, but also working smart and taking risks. In that, you will find success. As a matter of fact, the text here, again, it's an interpretive translation, which reads, That's the value of wisdom. It helps you succeed." (on 10:10).

III. Key Arguments

- **Rejection of Common Misinterpretations:** Dr. Fuhr strongly refutes the idea that the "under the sun" perspective signifies a backslidden or ungodly viewpoint. It's a human perspective, informed by wisdom.
- **Wisdom as a Tool, Not an End:** While Kohelet values wisdom and its advantages, he acknowledges its ultimate limitations. It is a tool for navigating life, not a solution for the *hevel* of life.
- **Practical Application:** Ecclesiastes is not just philosophical musing; it offers practical wisdom for living in a complex and uncertain world.
- **Balance of Human Effort and Divine Providence:** While taking wise action is crucial, Dr. Fuhr emphasizes that all outcomes are ultimately in God's hands.

IV. Conclusion

Dr. Fuhr's analysis provides a nuanced interpretation of the Book of Ecclesiastes, encouraging a reading that recognizes the human perspective, the importance of wisdom, and the limitations of human efforts, all within the context of God's providence. The lecture highlights that "wisdom provides that opportunity to better take advantage of the present" even if it doesn't guarantee a perfect outcome.

4. Fuhr, Ecclesiastes, Session 3, Stock Phrases—Under the Sun/Heaven, Gain/Good, Wisdom

Ecclesiastes Study Guide: Session 3

Quiz

Instructions: Answer the following questions in 2-3 sentences each.

1. What does the phrase "under the sun" (*tahat ha-shemesh*) mean in the context of Ecclesiastes, according to the lecture?
2. According to Dr. Fuhr, how is the "under the sun" perspective different from a "backslidden" or "ungodly" viewpoint?
3. What is the significance of the phrase "under the heavens" (*tahat ha-shemayim*) in Ecclesiastes, and how does it relate to the "under the sun" perspective?
4. How does the Kohelet approach his quest for *yitron* in Ecclesiastes? What tool or perspective does he use?
5. How does the lecture characterize the wisdom that Kohelet uses? Is it humanistic or God-centered?
6. What are some of the ways in which Kohelet applies wisdom in his pursuit of *yitron*, according to the lecture?
7. What does Kohelet discover about wisdom's limitations in the search for meaning and a resolution to the problem of *hevel*?
8. How does the lecture describe "providential probabilities," and how do they relate to the book of Ecclesiastes?
9. What is the significance of the practical side of the lessons in Ecclesiastes, and how should we, as readers, approach those lessons?
10. Explain the wisdom lesson behind Ecclesiastes 10:19, "A feast is made for laughter, and wine makes life merry, but money is the answer for everything," according to the lecture.

Answer Key

1. The phrase "under the sun" signifies a horizontal perspective, observing life from within the world, as opposed to a vertical view from heaven. It is the vantage point from which Kohelet undertakes his quest to find *yitron* in a *hevel* world.

2. The "under the sun" perspective is not presented as backslidden or ungodly. Rather, it is a limited but wise perspective, derived from observing life on this planet.
3. The phrase "under the heavens" is a literary alternative to "under the sun," and there is no theological difference between the two perspectives. Both represent a wise man's view of life in this fallen world.
4. Kohelet approaches his quest through the lens of wisdom, observing and experiencing life. He applies this wisdom to explore the world and search for a solution to the dilemma of *hevel*.
5. The wisdom that Kohelet uses is characterized as God-centered but not divinely revealed; it is a practical kind of wisdom that comes from observing life and applying reasoning in a way that is consistent with God's will.
6. Kohelet applies wisdom by studying and exploring all that is done under heaven and by seeking understanding. He uses his mind and intellect to guide his investigation. He also seeks understanding by exploring other avenues, such as folly, but always through the lens of wisdom.
7. Kohelet discovers that while wisdom is profitable and provides an advantage in the world, it is limited in its capacity to ultimately bring a resolution to the problem of *hevel*. The wise and the fool are both subject to death.
8. "Providential probabilities" refer to the concept that while a wise person takes risks and makes good choices, it is ultimately God who determines the outcome. All things are within God's hands, but we are still called to act and use wisdom.
9. The practical side of the lessons is very important. As with Proverbs, readers of Ecclesiastes should look for practical principles that they can apply to their own lives.
10. The wisdom lesson behind Ecclesiastes 10:19 is that money is a versatile resource with practical value in an uncertain world. Kohelet acknowledges the limited pleasures of feasts and wine but emphasizes the pragmatic utility of money as a solution for various needs and emergencies.

Essay Questions

Instructions: Develop a well-organized essay for each of the following prompts.

1. Discuss the significance of the "under the sun" perspective in Ecclesiastes, and how it shapes Kohelet's exploration of life. What does this limited point of view reveal about the human experience?
2. Analyze the role of wisdom in the book of Ecclesiastes. How does Kohelet use wisdom to navigate the challenges of a world characterized by *hevel*, and what does he learn about its limitations?
3. Compare and contrast the perspectives of "under the sun" and "under the heavens" in Ecclesiastes. Is there a significant difference, or are they essentially variations on the same theme?
4. Examine the concept of "providential probabilities" in Ecclesiastes, explaining how it fits within the context of wisdom and the uncertainties of life. How does this concept help readers understand God's role in a *hevel* world?
5. Explore the practical implications of Ecclesiastes for contemporary life, and discuss how the book's wisdom can guide individuals as they face challenges and seek meaning in their own situations.

Glossary of Key Terms

- **Hevel (הֶבֶל):** A Hebrew word often translated as "vanity," "meaningless," or "absurdity." It refers to the fleeting, unsubstantial, and ultimately unsatisfactory nature of life and its pursuits.
- **Yitron (יִתְרוֹן):** A Hebrew term meaning "profit," "advantage," or "surplus." In the context of Ecclesiastes, it represents the solution or gain that Kohelet seeks in response to the problem of *hevel*.
- **Kohelet (קֹהֵלֶת):** The Hebrew name for the author of Ecclesiastes, traditionally associated with King Solomon. The term likely means "assembler" or "preacher."
- **Under the sun (tahat ha-shemesh תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ):** A phrase representing a horizontal, earthly perspective, viewing life from the vantage point of human experience, as opposed to a divine viewpoint.
- **Under the heavens (tahat ha-shamayim תַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם):** A phrase that is a literary alternative to "under the sun," and it represents the same wise, earthly perspective on life.
- **Wisdom Literature:** A genre of writing common in the Old Testament that explores practical principles for living a good and successful life.
- **Providential Probabilities:** The understanding that while wisdom leads to good choices, the outcome of human actions is ultimately in God's hands.

5. FAQs on Fuhr, Ecclesiastes, Session 3, Stock Phrases—Under the Sun/Heaven, Good/gain, Wisdom, Biblicalelearning.org (BeL)

Frequently Asked Questions about Ecclesiastes

1. **What does the phrase "under the sun" signify in Ecclesiastes, and how should it be interpreted?** The phrase "under the sun" (tahat ha-shemesh) represents the perspective from which the author, Kohelet, observes life. It is a horizontal perspective, meaning a view of life solely from the vantage point of someone living on earth, rather than a divine or heavenly view. This perspective is not meant to be interpreted as backslidden, ungodly, or purely humanistic. It is simply

the lens through which Kohelet undertakes his journey to understand the meaning of life, using his wisdom and observations of the world. It's the view of someone experiencing life on this planet, acknowledging human limitations and the realities of a fallen world.

2. **How does the phrase "under heaven" relate to "under the sun," and are they theologically distinct?** The phrase "under heaven" (tahat ha-shemayim) is a literary alternative to "under the sun," and they are not theologically distinct. The author uses both phrases to describe the human experience on earth, and both are from a limited perspective. There is no suggestion that the activities done "under heaven" are inherently more divine or revelatory than those "under the sun." Both perspectives are used to examine life within this earthly realm, viewed from a human perspective rather than a divine one.
3. **What role does wisdom play in Kohelet's exploration of life in Ecclesiastes?** Wisdom is central to Kohelet's exploration in Ecclesiastes. He embarks on his quest to understand life's meaning and find a solution to the "hevel" (vanity) dilemma through the lens of wisdom. He uses his own wisdom to study, observe, and reflect upon the world. The author's wisdom is not viewed as a purely human achievement, but as a God-centered wisdom through which he evaluates life. Although he seeks wisdom, he acknowledges that even great wisdom cannot provide guaranteed outcomes or solve the fundamental issues of mortality and randomness in life.

4. **How does Kohelet portray the value and limitations of wisdom?** Kohelet recognizes that wisdom is beneficial and provides an advantage in the world. He uses the term "tov" (good) to describe its value. Wisdom helps navigate life and make better decisions. However, he also acknowledges that it has limitations; it does not guarantee a longer life or protect against tragedy. Ultimately, wisdom cannot solve the problem of "hevel," as the wise and the foolish both face death. While wisdom allows individuals to make better choices and find some success in life, it does not offer ultimate control or a guaranteed positive outcome.
5. **Can wisdom, according to Kohelet, guarantee a successful or problem-free life?** No, Kohelet does not believe that wisdom guarantees a successful or problem-free life. He consistently points out that unexpected events and tragedies can occur even when someone has made wise decisions. Wisdom provides the best odds of success based on observation and experience but it does not provide guarantees because even those with the best wisdom are still subject to the limitations of a fallen world. The application of wisdom gives people an advantage, and leads to a more profitable outcome, but ultimate outcomes are not in man's hands.
6. **What is the concept of 'providential probabilities' in Ecclesiastes and how does it relate to wisdom?** 'Providential probabilities' suggests that while people should apply wisdom in making choices and taking action, the ultimate outcome is in God's hands. It means understanding that applying wisdom increases the likelihood of a favorable outcome, but does not guarantee it. It emphasizes the importance of actively participating in life, making the best choices one can, and understanding that all things are ultimately within God's providence. The wise should hedge their bets, take calculated risks, and understand that success is not just a matter of their wisdom, but also God's hand in their lives.
7. **How does the wisdom literature genre influence the way Ecclesiastes should be interpreted?** As a work of wisdom literature, Ecclesiastes should not be read as a narrative or prophetic text. It's full of proverbs and reflective speeches rather than direct pronouncements from God. We are not meant to find a clear "thus saith the Lord" in the book. The focus is on extracting practical lessons and principles applicable to everyday life. Therefore the reader needs to look for practical applications of wisdom, rather than an absolute guarantee of outcomes. The author is not aiming to deliver a revelatory message, but to explore the complexities of life from a grounded, wisdom-based perspective.

8. **What are some practical lessons from Ecclesiastes that apply to navigating life in an uncertain world?** Ecclesiastes offers several practical lessons. It suggests that risk-taking is essential but must be done smartly using wisdom and taking risks that are aligned to the situation. One should not wait for perfect conditions, but should still take action. The book encourages a balanced approach to life, enjoying the present moments and not putting too much stock in pursuits that are unable to solve the underlying problems of life. We should be aware of our limitations but still use our wisdom to make good decisions, recognizing God's hand in both our opportunities and their outcomes.