

## KEY WORDS & PHRASES - Ecclesiastes

Before attempting to explain the theme and purpose of any Biblical writing, the student should first consider recurring words and phrases. The book of Ecclesiastes, fortunately, is replete with such repetitions. Consider the following words and the number of occurrences, whether occurring as verbs or in related forms:<sup>1</sup>

- a. “Do, make, fashion, accomplish” (הַשֵּׁעַ, *a'sah* – occurs 64 times)<sup>2</sup>
- b. “Wise” (חִכְמָה, *chokmah* – occurs 53 times)<sup>3</sup>
- c. “Good/better” (טוֹב, *tob* – occurs 52 times)<sup>4</sup>
- d. “See” (רָאָה, *ra'ah* – occurs 50 times)<sup>5</sup>
- e. “Know/knowledge” (יָדָעַת, *yadah* – occurs 44 times)<sup>6</sup>
- f. “Heart” (לֵב, *leb* – occurs 41 times)<sup>7</sup>
- g. “God” (אֱלֹהִים, *Elohim* – occurs 41 times)<sup>8</sup>
- h. “Time” (עַתָּה, *et* – occurs 40 times)<sup>9</sup>
- i. “Vanity” (הֶבֶל, *hebel* – occurs 38 times)<sup>10</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> These numbers come from: LOGOS Bible Software, root searches; O. Lortez, *Qohelet und der Alte Orient*. Freiburg: Herder, 1964), 167-80; George V. Wigram, *The Englishman's Hebrew Concordance of the Old Testament* (Peabody: Hendrickson Publishers, 2001), and my own counts from the Hebrew Text of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia* (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 1984).

<sup>2</sup> Found in 45 verses (therefore it is repeated in some verses): Ecclesiastes 1:9, 13, 14; 2:2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 11, 12, 17; 3:9, 11, 12, 14, 17, 22; 4:1, 3, 4; 5:1, 6; 6:12; 7:13, 14, 20, 29; 8:3, 4, 9, 10, 11, 12, 14, 16, 17; 9:3, 6, 7, 10; 10:19; 11:5; 12:12, 14.

<sup>3</sup> Found in 44 verses: Ecclesiastes 1:13, 16, 17, 18; 2:3, 9, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 19, 21, 26; 4:13; 6:8; 7:4, 5, 7, 10, 11, 12, 16, 18, 23, 25; 8:1, 5, 16, 17; 9:1, 10, 11, 13, 15, 16, 17, 18; 10:1, 2, 10, 12; 12:9, 11.

<sup>4</sup> Found in 41 verses: Ecclesiastes 2:1, 3, 24, 26; 3:12, 13, 22; 4:3, 6, 8, 9, 13; 5:5, 11, 18; 6:3, 6, 9, 12; 7:1, 2, 3, 5, 8, 10, 11, 14, 18, 20, 26; 8:12, 13, 15; 9:2, 4, 7, 16, 18; 11:6, 7; 12:14.

<sup>5</sup> Found in 46 verses: Ecclesiastes 1:8, 10, 14, 16; 2:1, 3, 12, 13, 24; 3:10, 13, 16, 18, 22; 4:1, 3, 4, 7, 15; 5:8, 11, 13, 18; 6:1, 5, 6, 9; 7:11, 13, 14, 15, 27, 29; 8:9, 10, 16, 17; 9:9, 11, 13; 10:5, 7; 11:4, 7, 9; 12:3.

<sup>6</sup> Found in 38 verses: Ecclesiastes 1:16, 17, 18; 2:14, 19, 21, 26; 3:12, 14, 21; 4:13; 5:1; 6:5, 8, 10, 12; 7:12, 22, 25; 8:1, 5, 7, 12, 16, 17; 9:1, 5, 10, 11, 12; 10:14, 15, 20; 11:2, 5, 6, 9; 12:9.

<sup>7</sup> Found in 34 verses: Ecclesiastes 1:13, 16, 17; 2:1, 3, 10, 15, 20, 22, 23; 3:11, 17, 18; 5:2, 20; 7:2, 3, 4, 7, 21, 22, 25, 26; 8:5, 9, 11, 16; 9:1, 3, 7; 10:2, 3; 11:9, 10.

<sup>8</sup> Found in 37 verses: Ecclesiastes 1:12, 13; 2:24, 26; 3:10, 11, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18; 5:1, 2, 4, 6, 7, 18, 19, 20; 6:2; 7:13, 14, 18, 26, 29; 8:2, 12, 13, 15, 17; 9:1, 7; 11:5, 9; 12:7, 13, 14.

<sup>9</sup> Found in 18 verses: Ecclesiastes 3:1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 11, 17, 17; 7:17; 8:5, 6, 9; 9:8, 11, 12; 10:17.

<sup>10</sup> Found in 30 verses: Ecclesiastes 1:2, 14; 2:1, 11, 15, 17, 19, 21, 23, 26; 3:19; 4:4, 7, 8, 16; 5:7, 10; 6:2, 4, 9, 11, 12; 7:6, 15; 8:10, 14; 9:9; 11:8, 10; 12:8.

- j. “Sun” (שֶׁמֶשׁ, *semes* – occurs 33 times)<sup>11</sup>
- k. “Evil/bad” (רַע, *rah* - occurs 32 times)<sup>12</sup>
- l. “Wind/spirit” (רוּחַ- *ruach* - occurs 24 times)<sup>13</sup>
- m. “Fool/stupid/insolent” (בְּסִיל, *kesil* – occurs 18 times)<sup>14</sup>
- n. “Profit, gain, advantage” (יֵטְרוֹן, *yitron* – occurs 18 times)<sup>15</sup>
- o. “Joy” (שִׂמְחָה, *simcah* – occurs 17 times)<sup>16</sup>
- p. “There is” (יֵשׁ, *yesh* – occurs 16 times)<sup>17</sup>
- q. “Eat” (אָכַל, *akal* – occurs 15 times)<sup>18</sup>

These are the most significant words. In a book this size, there are obviously numerous additional words that occur with some frequency. Here are some other significant words that are found in the book:

- r. “Fool/foolly” (lko, *sacal* – occurs 13 times)<sup>19</sup>
- s. “Die” (twm, *mut* – occurs 15 times)<sup>20</sup>
- t. “Wicked/evil” (evr, *rasha* – occurs 12 times)<sup>21</sup>
- u. “Righteous/Righteousness/Just” (qdu, *tsadek* – occurs 11 times)<sup>22</sup>
- v. “Trouble/task/effort” (hne, *anah* – occurs 11 times)<sup>23</sup>
- w. “Chase/striving” (Nwyer/twer, *ra’yon/ra’oth* - occurs 10 times)<sup>24</sup>

<sup>11</sup>Found in 32 verses: Ecclesiastes 1:3, 5, 9, 14; 2:11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22; 3:16; 4:1, 3, 7, 15; 5:13, 18; 6:1, 5, 12; 7:11; 8:9, 15, 17; 9:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 10:5; 11:7; 12:2.

<sup>12</sup> Found in 28 verses: Ecclesiastes 1:13; 2:17, 21; 4:3, 8; 5:1, 13, 14, 16; 6:1, 2; 7:3, 14, 15; 8:3, 5, 6, 9, 11, 12; 9:3, 12; 10:5, 13; 11:2, 10; 12:1, 14.

<sup>13</sup>Found in 20 verses: Ecclesiastes 1:6, 14, 17; 2:11, 17, 26; 3:19, 21; 4:4, 6, 16; 5:16; 6:9; 7:8, 9; 8:8; 10:4; 11:4, 5; 12:7.

<sup>14</sup> Found in 17 verses: Ecclesiastes 2:14, 15, 16; 4:5, 13; 5:1, 3, 4; 6:8; 7:4, 5, 6, 9; 9:17; 10:2, 12, 15.

<sup>15</sup>Found in 17 verses: Ecclesiastes 1:3; 2:11, 13, 15; 3:9, 19; 5:9, 16; 6:8, 11; 7:11, 12, 16; 10:10, 11; 12:9, 12.

<sup>16</sup>Found in 15 verses: Ecclesiastes 2:1, 2, 10, 26; 3:12, 22; 4:16; 5:19, 20; 7:4; 8:15; 9:7; 10:19; 11:8, 9.

<sup>17</sup>Found in 13 verses: Ecclesiastes 1:10; 2:13, 21; 4:8, 9; 5:13; 6:1, 11; 7:15; 8:6, 14; 9:4; 10:5.

<sup>18</sup>Found in 14 verses: Ecclesiastes 2:24, 25; 3:13; 4:5; 5:11, 12, 17, 18, 19; 6:2; 8:15; 9:7; 10:16, 17.

<sup>19</sup> Found in 12 verses: Ecclesiastes 1:17; 2:3, 12, 13, 19; 7:17, 25; 10:1, 3[2], 6, 13, 14

<sup>20</sup> Found in 12 verses: Ecclesiastes 2:16; 3:2, 19[2]; 4:2[2]; 7:1, 17, 26; 8:8; 9:3, 4, 5[2]; 10:1

<sup>21</sup> Found in 10 verses: Ecclesiastes 3:16[2], 17; 7:15, 17, 25; 8:8, 10, 13, 14[2]; 9:2

<sup>22</sup> Found in 9 verses: Ecclesiastes 3:16, 17; 5:8; 7:15[2], 16, 20; 8:14[2]; 9:1, 2

<sup>23</sup> Found in 9 verses: Ecclesiastes 1:13[2]; 2:23, 26; 3:10[2]; 4:8; 5:3, 14, 20; 8:16

<sup>24</sup> Found in 10 verses: Ecclesiastes 1:14, 17; 2:11, 17, 22, 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9

- x. “Power” (jlv, *shalet* – occurs 9 times)<sup>25</sup>
- y. “Remember” (rkz, *zacar* – occurs 8 times)<sup>26</sup>
- z. “Portion/reward/share” (qlx, *chalaq* – occurs 8 times)<sup>27</sup>
- aa. “Toil” (lme, *amal* – occurs 8 times)<sup>28</sup>
- bb. “Vexation” (oek, *ca’as* – occurs 7 times)<sup>29</sup>
- cc. “Affair/matter/event” (Upx, *chaphetz* – occurs 8 times)<sup>30</sup>
- dd. “Folly/madness” (llh, *halel* – occurs 7 times)<sup>31</sup>
- ee. “Succeed/skill/advantage” (rvk, *casher* – occurs 5 times)<sup>32</sup>

In addition, the text also includes the following recurring phrases:

- 1) Eat and drink (5 times) – 2:24; 3:13; 5:18; 8:15; 9:7
- 2) Under the sun (29 times)<sup>33</sup>
- 3) Striving after wind (9 times) – 1:14, 17; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 6, 16; 6:9
- 4) Who knows? (4 times) – 2:19; 3:21; 6:12; 8:1.

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<sup>25</sup> Found in 8 verses: Ecclesiastes 2:19; 5:19; 6:2; 7:19; 8:4, 8[2], 9; 10:5

<sup>26</sup> Found in 7 verses: Ecclesiastes 1:11[2]; 2:16; 5:20; 9:5, 15; 11:8; 12:1

<sup>27</sup> Found in 8 verses: Ecclesiastes 2:10, 21; 3:22; 5:18, 19; 9:6, 9; 11:2

<sup>28</sup> Found in 8 verses: Ecclesiastes 1:3; 2:11, 19, 20, 21; 5:16, 18; 8:17

<sup>29</sup> Found in 6 verses: Ecclesiastes 1:18; 2:23; 5:17; 7:3, 9[2]; 11:10

<sup>30</sup> Found in 8 verses: Ecclesiastes 3:1, 17; 5:4, 8; 8:3, 6; 12:1, 10

<sup>31</sup> Found in 7 verses: Ecclesiastes 1:17; 2:2, 12; 7:7, 25; 9:3; 10:13

<sup>32</sup> Found in 5 verses: Ecclesiastes 2:21; 4:4; 5:11; 10:10; 11:6

<sup>33</sup> Found in 27 verses: Ecclesiastes 1:3, 9, 14; 2:11, 17, 18, 19, 20, 22; 3:16; 4:1, 3, 7, 15; 5:13, 18; 6:1, 12; 8:9, 15, 17; 9:3, 6, 9, 11, 13; 10:5.