

Ecclesiastes **(A Search For Purpose)**

The Relation Of The Poetical Books To Each Other:

The Book of Job-Blessing Through Suffering.
The Psalms-Praise Through Prayer.
The Proverbs-Prudence Through Precept.
Ecclesiastes-Truth Through Vanity.
Song of Solomon-Blessings Through Union.

Author:

There are two lines of evidence (external and internal) that point to Solomon as the author of Ecclesiastes. For the external evidence, the Jewish tradition attributes the book to Solomon. Internally, a number of lines of evidence show that Solomon was surely the author. First, the author identifies himself as “the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (1:1). Then, references in the book to the author’s unrivaled wisdom (1:16), extreme wealth (2:7), opportunities for pleasure (2:3), and extensive building activities (2:4-6) all suggest Solomon as the author. There is simply no other descendant of David who measured up to these descriptions.

Date: 931 B.C.

According to Jewish tradition, Solomon wrote the Song in his early years, expressing a young man’s love. He wrote the Proverbs in his mature years, manifesting a middle-aged man’s wisdom. He reportedly wrote Ecclesiastes in his declining years, revealing an old man’s sorrow (cf. 12:1). Perhaps Ecclesiastes is the record of Solomon’s regret for and repentance from his grave moral lapses recorded in 1 Kings 11. The Book of Ecclesiastes, then, would have been written just before Solomon’s death and subsequent division of his kingdom that occurred in 931 B.C.

Title Of The Book:

The name Ecclesiastes stems from the title given in the Greek translation, the Septuagint. Greek term, *Ecclesiastes*, means “assembly” and is derived from the word EKKLESIA, “assembly, church.” “The Hebrew title is QOHELETH, which means “one who convenes and speaks at an assembly,” or “an Ecclesiastes” or “preacher.”

Theme And Purpose:

The basic theme is the futility of life apart from God. In the development of this theme, four key purposes emerge.

First, in seeking to demonstrate that life without God has no meaning, Solomon is seeking to demolish confidence in man-based achievements and wisdom; he shows that all of man's goals or the "way that seems right to man" must of necessity lead to dissatisfaction and emptiness." Solomon recorded the futility and emptiness of his own experiences to make his readers desperate for God. He sought to show that their quest for happiness cannot be fulfilled by man himself in the pursuits of this life.

Second, Solomon affirms the fact that much in life cannot be fully understood, which means we must live by faith, not by sight. Life is full of unexplained enigmas, unresolved anomalies, and uncorrected injustices. There is much in life that man cannot comprehend nor control, but by faith, we can rest in the sovereign wisdom and work of God. Much like the Book of Job, Ecclesiastes not only affirms that man is finite, but that he must learn to live with mystery. Life down here on earth, "life under the sun," cannot provide the key to life itself for our world fallen, bankrupt. In view of this, man must have more than a horizontal outlook; he must have the upward look to God, fearing and trusting Him. Enigmas and injustices must be left in His hands to resolve.

Third, Ecclesiastes presents a realistic view of life that counterbalances the optimism of Proverbs. It shows there are exceptions to the laws and promises of proverbs, at least from the standpoint of this life. Proverbs 10:16 affirms that justice is meted to the righteous and the wicked, but Ecclesiastes 8:14 observes that this is not always the case, at least not in this life. Are these contradictions? No, because Proverbs is noting the general laws of God without noting the exceptions that occur because we live in a fallen, sin-ridden world. Ecclesiastes points out that while a righteous order exists, as affirmed in Proverbs, it is not always evident to man as he views life "under the sun" from his finite perspective.

Fourth, Solomon showed that man, left to his own strategies will always find life empty, frustrating, and mysterious. The book, however, does not mean that life has no answers, that life is totally useless or meaningless. Meaning and significance can be found, he explained, in fearing God. Frustrations can thus be replaced with contentment through fellowship with God.

Christ As Seen In Ecclesiastes:

Since Christ alone is man's means to God where man finds wholeness and satisfaction, or life and life more abundantly (John 10:10; 7:37-38), the futility and perplexity experienced in life can only be removed through a personal relationship with the Lord Jesus. Man's aspiration for significance and satisfaction are found only in the Savior.

Outline:

- I. **Futility:**
 - A. **The Problem Stated (1:1-2)**
 - B. **The Problem Demonstrated (1:3-2:26)**
 - 1. **The Futility of the Cycles of Life (1:4-11)**

2. The Futility of Human Wisdom (1:12-18)
 3. The Futility of Pleasure and Wealth (2:1-11)
 4. The Futility of Materialism (2:12-23)
 5. Conclusion: Enjoy and Be Content with the Providences of God (2:24-26)
- II. God's Immutable Plan for Life (3:1-22)
 - A. He Predetermines the Events of Life (3:1-11)
 - B. He Is The Judge (3:14-22)
 - III. The Futility of the Circumstances of Life (4:1-5:20)
 - A. Evil Oppression (4:1-3)
 - B. The Emptiness of Hard Work (4:4-12)
 - C. The Emptiness of Political Success (4:13-16)
 - D. The Emptiness of Human Religion (5:1-7)
 - E. The Emptiness of Human Riches (5:8-17)
 - F. Conclusion (5:18-20)
 - IV. The Futility of Life as a Whole (6:1-1)
 - A. Wealth And Children Cannot Satisfy (6:1-2)
 - B. Labor Cannot Satisfy (6:7-12)
 - V. Counsel for Living With Vanity (7:1-12:8)
 - A. Counsel in View of Man's Wickedness (7:1-29)
 - B. Counsel in View of God's Inscrutable Providences (8:1-9:18)
 - C. Counsel in View of the Uncertainties of Life (10:1-20)
 - D. Counsel in View of the Aging Processes of Life (11:1-12:8)
 - VI. Conclusion (12:9-14)

Ecclesiastes 1:1-18

QOHELETH

- I. Futility:
 - A. The Problem Stated (1:1-2)
 1. The Writer-Solomon.
 - 1 The words of the Preacher (QOHELETH), the son of David (BENEY DAVID), king (MELEK) in Jerusalem.
 2. The Premise.
 - 2 "*Vanity* of *vanities*," (HaBEL, HaBALIYM = 73x; 38x in this book; a lack of value or purpose, empty, vain) says the Preacher, "*Vanity* of *vanities*! All (HAKOL = the all, everything) is *vanity*."

Summary:

1. Job is the first to speak of vanity. Job 7:16; 9:29; 21:34
2. Simply speaking it refers to having a soul that is empty of divine values and full of worldly ones.

I. **Futility:**

A. **The Problem Stated (1:1-2)**

B. **The Problem Demonstrated (1:3-2:26)**

1. **The Futility of the Cycles of Life (1:4-11)**

a. **The Question.**

3 What advantage (**YITRON = 10x; all in Eccl; has a sense of true profit**) does man have in all his work, Which he does under the sun? (**what good is labor?**)

b. **Analysis Of The Earth.**

4 A generation (**DOR**) goes and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. (**evaluation of life cycles with eternity**)

c. **Analysis Of The Sun.**

5 Also, the sun rises and the sun sets; and hastening to its place it rises there again. (**evaluation of repetition**)

d. **Analysis Of The Wind.**

6 Blowing toward the south, then turning toward the north, the wind continues swirling along; and on its circular courses the wind returns. (**evaluation of weather cycles**)

e. **Analysis of the Rivers.**

7 All the rivers flow into the sea, yet the sea is not full. To the place where the rivers flow, there they flow again. (**why does the sea not fill up?**)

f. **Analysis Of Sight And Hearing.**

8 All things are wearisome; Man is not able to tell it. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor is the ear filled with hearing. (**humanity is never satisfied with what it sees or hears**)

g. **Conclusion.**

9 That which has been is that which will be, and that which has been done is that which will be done. So, there is nothing new under the sun. (**conclusion from worldly viewpoint. Repetition leads one to believe that there is nothing new. Cf Rev 21:5**)

h. **A New Question And Answer.**

10 Is there anything of which one might say, "See this, it is new"? Already it has existed for ages which were before us. (**This is Solomon's observation from 930 B.C. from a worldly viewpoint.**)

i. **New Conclusion.**

11 There is no remembrance of earlier things; and also of the later things which will occur, there will be for them no remembrance among those who will come later still. (**Since there are no good memories, so what?**)

Summary:

1. **Solomon is giving an observational analysis of the things of his life.**
2. **It is an evaluation of life without divine viewpoint about the creation and sustenance of God.**
3. **He is following an evolutionary view of thinking. See F2**

I. **Futility:**

- A. **The Problem Stated (1:1-2)**
 - B. **The Problem Demonstrated (1:3-2:26)**
 - 1. **The Futility of the Cycles of Life (1:4-11)**
 - 2. **The Futility of Human Wisdom (1:12-18)**
 - a. **The Quest for Human Wisdom. 1:12-15**
 - 1). **Solomon's Position.**
- 12 I, the Preacher (**QOHELETH**), have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.
- 2). **Solomon's First Quest.**
- 13 And I set (**NATHAN = gave; i.e. by choice**) my mind (**heart**) to seek and explore (**look thoroughly**) by wisdom (**CHAKMAH**) concerning all that has been done under heaven. It is a grievous task which God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with. (**had God given this? The attempt to determine the meaning of life.**)
- 3). **Solomon's Conclusion.**
- 14 I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is **vanity** and striving after wind. (**An exaggeration.**)
- 4). **Solomon's Proof.**
- 15 What is crooked cannot be straightened, and what is lacking cannot be counted. (**But can it?**)
- b. **Human Wisdom And Knowledge Lack. 1:16-18**
 - 1). **Solomon's Experience.**
- 16 I (**the Preacher**) said to myself, "Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge." (**true statement. Cf 1 Cor 8:1**)
- 2). **Solomon's Second Quest.**
- 17 And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after wind. (**opposites**)
- 3). **Solomon's Grief And Pain.**
- 18 Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge results in increasing pain.

Summary:

- 1. **Solomon desires to gain more wisdom.**
- 2. **He does so by exploring the opposites of wisdom.**
- 3. **His conclusion is that more knowledge leads to more grief, which leads to more pain.**