

The Book of Ecclesiastes

I. Background on Ecclesiastes

A. The original Hebrew title of the book of Ecclesiastes is "Qoheleth" which means "Preacher", or "Teacher".

B. To say that the authorship of the book has been hotly debated is an understatement. However, all provable evidence points to Solomon as being the author, given that all other suggestions to the contrary face extreme hardships in proving that Solomon is not the author. There have been those that have questioned its authorship by suggesting it was written in the post-exilic period. Yet, how could the author claim to have been David's son, a king in Jerusalem (1:1)? There have been others who have questioned the authorship by suggesting that it was written in the third person showing the author was not, in fact, the Teacher. "The use of the name "the Teacher" indicates that the author is distancing himself from his role as absolute monarch and taking on the mantle of the sage. Both the name "the Teacher" and the use of third person...allow him to do this...What emerges from Ecclesiastes is not a royal pronouncement but the reflection of a wise man who "has been" king. As we read the book, we are more and more absorbed in the word, not of "King Solomon" but, of "Solomon-become-the-Teacher". (Garrett, Duane A.; The New American Commentary: Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs; pg. 264)

II. Ecclesiastes in the rest of the Bible

A. None

III. The Purpose of the book

A. While Proverbs contains aspects of wisdom that starts from present day in life and looks forward, Ecclesiastes contains aspects of wisdom that look backward on lessons learned. While many read Ecclesiastes and find pessimism, the actual purpose of the book is, in fact, realistic and places emphasis on priorities. "The Teacher tells his readers how to live in the world as it really is instead of living in a world of false hope. In short, Ecclesiastes urges its readers to recognize that they are mortal. They must abandon all illusions of self-importance, face death and life squarely, and accept with fear and trembling their dependence on God...Ecclesiastes tells how persons now made weak and mortal should live." (Ibid...pg. 278, 279)

IV. Some lessons to be learned:

A. **All pretense of pride must be abandoned** – Solomon makes the case how that each generation comes and does not regard the generation that came before it (1:4, 9-11) In the end, we will not make a lasting impact on our generation, and nothing we do physically in this world will stand the test of time. Therefore, while we can take a level of personal pride in accomplishments (3:22), we should understand that in the long run, they are not important.

B. **Life should be enjoyed for what it is—a gift of God** – While pleasure is not a goal unto itself, man should value the fleeting joys that life provides, all while serving the Lord. The temptation of the pleasures of life does not encourage moderation, or self-control. Yet, Solomon reminds us that we should enjoy life and understand that the joys of life are gifts from God. This is, of course, not justification to do what we want. (12:13-14)

C. **We must revere God** – To refuse to revere God is to ignore His power, His judgment, and our dependency on Him. As we consider the "vanity" of life, our respect and reverence for God comes to the forefront, realizing that He, alone, is our hope for a future after this life.

V. Brief Outline of Ecclesiastes

A. **Introduction: 1:1-11**

1. Author: Solomon – 1:1
2. Thesis: The vanity of all earthly things – 1:2
3. Explanation – 1:3-11
 - a) Man cannot show a profit of all his labor under the sun – 1:3
 - b) Compared with the world, man is temporary and all his efforts are futile – 1:4-8

c) History repeats itself and man forgets what has gone before – 1:9-11

B. A man of wisdom works in harmony with God’s providential blessings; otherwise, he discovers all his work is vanity: 1:12-6:12

1. Experiments of the wise man and his conclusions – 1:12-2:26
 - a) Experiments – 1:12-2:11
 - (1) Unlimited resources for enjoying all the pleasures of life – 1:12
 - (2) Wisdom is used in exploring all that is done under heaven – 1:13-18
 - (3) Wisdom is used in the exploration of sensuous pleasure – 2:1-11
 - b) Conclusions – 2:12-26
 - (1) Value of this wisdom and pleasure stop at the grave – 2:12-17
 - (2) The legacy of one’s labor is often lost to fools when one dies – 2:18-23
 - (3) Labor is good only when it is acknowledged as from the hand of God – 2:24-26
2. Acknowledgments that we must work under the rule of God’s Providence – 3:1-22
 - a) A man should adjust to living his life within the framework of God’s Providence – 3:1-8
 - b) Working outside the framework of God’s Providence results in frustration and defeat – 3:9-22
 - (1) A man should work with an awareness of God – 3:9-11
 - (2) The ability to enjoy the fruit of one’s labor is a precious gift from God – 3:12-15
 - (3) God will judge all things according to His purpose – 3:16-17
 - (4) God tests man to show him that he is only temporary and should trust in God – 3:18-22
3. The “vanities” under the sun – 4:1-16
 - a) Oppression and wickedness – 4:1-3
 - b) Being envied because of what a man does or has – 4:4-6
 - c) The sorrow of being alone – 4:7-12
 - d) The knowledge that the prestigious and popular will be forgotten – 4:13-16
4. Guidelines for worshipping God – 5:1-9
 - a) Watch your step in God’s house – be respectful – 5:1a
 - b) Refrain from making sacrifices and vows that fools make – 5:1b-7
 - c) Recognize that God is the Ruler of all – 5:8-9
5. Admonitions concerning the futility of riches – 5:10-6:12
 - a) Riches by themselves are vain – 5:10-17
 - b) Enjoy the riches that God gives you, recognizing from Whom they come, and that they are only temporary – 5:18-20
 - c) It is possible to possess riches which cannot, or will not, be enjoyed. This is also vanity – 6:1-12

C. A man of wisdom who works in harmony with God reaps benefits regardless of circumstances – 7:1-12:8

1. Adverse circumstances can teach worthwhile lessons – 7:1-29
2. Admonitions to use wisdom in the work of solving problems in life, valuable life lessons that wisdom teaches – 8:1-9:18
3. Illustrations of those who lack wisdom vs. the need to work in harmony with Wisdom – 10:1-12:8

D. Conclusion

1. Man is encouraged to work in harmony with God through the words of one Shepherd – 12:9-12
2. Man is encouraged to fear God and keep His commandments – 12:13
3. Man is encouraged to remember why God is greatly to be feared, and why He is deserving of respect, reverence, and obedience – 12:14