

Ecclesiastes

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Introduction to Ecclesiastes

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The name of the book

In the Hebrew Bible this book is classified as one of the "Writings" and titled "Koheleth."

The name is probably a personification of wisdom. Wisdom is not presented in an abstract form such as doctrine or teaching, but it is presented as a person. A definition of personification is: "the representation of an abstract quality in human form.". Consider Proverbs 8:

- Doth not wisdom CRY? and understanding put forth HER VOICE? v.1
- She STANDETH in the top of high places, v.2
- the opening of MY LIPS shall be right things. v.6 ...
- Ultimately, the personification of wisdom paints a picture of Christ.

1 Corinthians 1:24 —

1 Corinthians 1:30 — But of him are ye in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption:

Colossians 2:2-3 —

James 1:5 — If any of you lack wisdom, let him ask of God, that giveth to all men liberally, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him.

It isn't completely clear what the exact translation of "ecclesiastes" should be, but it is rendered in English as "preacher" or "one who addresses an assembly."

The Hebrew word *q?helet* is the Qal feminine singular participle of the verb *q?hal*, meaning "to call," "to assemble." Thus the nickname may allude to one who gathers an assembly to address it or to one who gathers words for instruction. The feminine participle is used elsewhere in the OT to refer to particular offices or occupations (Ezra 2:55; Neh. 7:57, 59).

The English title derives from the Septuagint (*ekkl?siast?s*) via the Latin Vulgate (*Liber Ecclesiastes*). The Septuagint translator(s) interpreted *q?helet* to refer to a citizen of the assembly or *ekkl?sia*. English translations have traditionally translated *q?helet* as "Preacher" (KJV, RSV), which goes back to Luther's translation of *q?helet* as "der Prediger." [3] This translation is somewhat anachronistic, with its overtones of the NT concept of the *ekkl?sia* as the church. Qohelet's "office" is clearly identified in the epilogue (12:8–14) as that of a wise man, but "preacher" is helpful in that it alerts us to the fact that Qohelet was wise and taught the people knowledge (12:10).

Baker Commentary, p. 20

What is the message? Why is this negative book in the canon?

Abraham asserts that “to have a canon of Scripture is to have a sophisticated means of grace which is related to formation in holy living in a host of ways. On this . . . reading, Scripture functions to bring one to faith, to make one wise unto salvation, to force one to wrestle with awkward questions about violence and the poor, to comfort those in sorrow, and to nourish hope for the redemption of the world.”[18] This is helpful to remember in terms of the canonicity of Ecclesiastes. Thiselton notes, “Such texts as Job, Ecclesiastes, and the parables do not function primarily as raw-material for Christian doctrine. . . . Their primary function is to invite or to provoke the reader to wrestle actively with the issues, in ways that may involve adopting a series of comparative angles of vision.”[19] Ecclesiastes is one of those books that force us to wrestle with very difficult questions that are pursued relentlessly. In the process it leads us back to the starting point of faith, but this time to know it more fully. Faith, we might remind ourselves, is a gift, but Ecclesiastes reminds us that it is not cheap.
Baker, p. 23

Rashbam locates the essence of the argument of Ecclesiastes in 1:2–11. Ecclesiastes here contrasts the transience of human life with the permanence of nature, thus showing the latter’s advantage. None of the experiments in Ecclesiastes is successful in dispelling this melancholy; the only adequate response is to live in conformity to traditional values, to enjoy life calmly while resigned to providence. Present mysteries will be rectified in the future life.
Baker, p. 27

Nathan Rosenthal in his work on Ecclesiastes (1858) still maintains Solomonic authorship.[45] In his view, Solomon wrote the book to demonstrate that wisdom is only useful when combined with the fear of God and the keeping of his commands. Baker, p. 28

Contra Jerome, Luther, Melancthon, and Brenz insist that Ecclesiastes is fundamentally positive about civic life even as it wrestles with the difficulties of poor leadership, a problem with which the Reformers were only too familiar. Luther read Ecclesiastes as a book about politics and the family, about human existence in the context of creation order. He envisaged Solomon not as a solitary but as a political figure deeply concerned about social life. In contrast to Jerome’s allegorical and christological exegesis of 4:4–12, Luther read this text as a strong affirmation of communal and civic life. Baker, p. 38

Qoheleth demonstrates the futility of trying to find meaning in a fallen world apart from remembering one’s creator and starting with the fear of the LORD, but he also affirms life, and this tension is resolved at the conclusion of his journey precisely through his exhortation to remember one’s creator. Thus the futility Ecclesiastes exposes is that of trying to find meaning while embracing human autonomy in a world which depends at every point upon its creator. Bartholomew, C. G. (2014). *The Intertextuality of Ecclesiastes and the New Testament*. In C. V. Camp, A. Mein, W. Kynes, & K. Dell (Eds.), *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually* (Vol. 587, p. 232). London; New Delhi; New York; Sydney: Bloomsbury.

Remembering his creator is the solid ground to which Qoheleth finally returns and which enables him to affirm life—thereby granting the *carpe diem* passages the final say—without detracting from the brokenness of life as evident in the threefold “before” in 12:1–7. Bartholomew, C. G. (2014). *The Intertextuality of Ecclesiastes and the*

New Testament. In C. V. Camp, A. Mein, W. Kynes, & K. Dell (Eds.), *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually* (Vol. 587, p. 233). London; New Delhi; New York; Sydney: Bloomsbury.

In my reading of Ecclesiastes, resolution comes through remembering your creator before ... before ... before ... The decentering of the ego evoked by such remembrance puts one in a position of creature before the Creator and thus in a position to receive instruction and to obey, rather than relying on reason, experience and observation as the royal route to truth. Bartholomew, C. G. (2014). *The Intertextuality of Ecclesiastes and the New Testament*. In C. V. Camp, A. Mein, W. Kynes, & K. Dell (Eds.), *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually* (Vol. 587, p. 235). London; New Delhi; New York; Sydney: Bloomsbury.

The *carpe diem* passages in Ecclesiastes affirm feasting but within the context of a hallowing of the ordinary. They are not, in my view, a representation of despairing hedonism but a typically Israelite affirmation of created life, an affirmation of the ordinary we might say, evoking Charles Taylor's use of the term in his *Sources of the Self*. Bartholomew, C. G. (2014). *The Intertextuality of Ecclesiastes and the New Testament*. In C. V. Camp, A. Mein, W. Kynes, & K. Dell (Eds.), *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually* (Vol. 587, p. 236). London; New Delhi; New York; Sydney: Bloomsbury.

Ecclesiastes, I have argued, provides an important witness to the richness of ordinary, created life. Bartholomew, C. G. (2014). *The Intertextuality of Ecclesiastes and the New Testament*. In C. V. Camp, A. Mein, W. Kynes, & K. Dell (Eds.), *Reading Ecclesiastes Intertextually* (Vol. 587, p. 236). London; New Delhi; New York; Sydney: Bloomsbury.

Authorship

Possibly Solomon?

Authorship of Ecclesiastes is often ascribed to Solomon.

Ecclesiastes 1:1 — The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

Jewish and early Christian tradition attribute the book to Solomon. The author identifies himself as "the son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1). He also refers to himself as "the Preacher" (1:1,2,12; 7:27; 12:8,9,10). Many of the experiences spoken of in Ecclesiastes correspond quite well with what we know about Solomon's life. Internal evidences point to Solomon. Note the references to:

- His wisdom (1:16; cf. 1 Ki 3:12)
- His building activities (2:4-6; cf. 1 Ki 7:1-12)
- His wealth (2:7-9; cf. 2 Chr 9:13-28 - all the things he built would require the wealth of an exceptionally wealthy king)
- His activities after writing this book (12:9-10; cf. 1 Ki 4:30-34)

According to rabbinic tradition, Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon in his old age and possibly edited under Hezekiah. If Solomon is indeed the author, then the date the book was written would be around 945 B.C.

Doubtfully Solomon?

Critical scholars have long rejected the idea of Solomon having written this book before the Babylonian exile. Part of the argument is that the presence of Persian "loan-words" and Aramaic figures of speech, point to a date sometime after the exile.

Some question whether certain conditions described in the book (3:16; 4:13-16; 5:8) existed during the reign of Solomon. But these conditions could have been noted by Solomon in neighboring countries, or in lower-level positions of his administration.

Frame narrator

A breakthrough for literal interpretation came with Rashbam (1085–1155). He interprets according to the principle that the text has only one meaning. Rashbam displays great sensitivity to the literary nature of Ecclesiastes and was the first to realize that Qohelet was set within a framework; 1:1–2 and the last seven verses were written by those who edited the book. Baker, p. 27

Key Verse

Ecclesiastes 12:13 — Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man.

Key Words

Occurring more than 25 times:

- vanity
- under the sun

Life lived without good results, no matter how lived, is a waste and vain. "All is vanity" (1:2). This theme is repeated by the Preacher time and again:

- Prior to describing his search for meaning (1:14)
- Pleasure is vain (2:1)
- Labor is vain (2:11,22-23; 4:4)
- Human wisdom is vain (2:15)
- All life is vain (2:17)
- Leaving an inheritance is vain (2:18-21)
- Earthly existence is vain (3:19-21)
- Acquiring riches over family is vain (4:7-8)
- Political popularity is vain (4:16)
- Many dreams and many words is vain (5:7)
- Loving abundance is vain (5:10)
- Wealth without the gift of God to enjoy it is vain (6:2)
- Wandering desire is vain (6:9)
- Foolish laughter is vain (7:6)
- Injustice in this life is vain (8:14)
- The days of darkness is vain (11:8)
- Childhood and youth is vain (11:10)
- At the conclusion of the book (12:8)

Indeed, the key word in this book is "vanity." It occurs 35 times in 29 verses. It means "futility, uselessness, nothingness." But a key phrase to be noted is "under the sun." It is found 29 times in 27 verses. It suggests that this message of vanity is true when one looks at life purely from an earthly perspective. Leave God and eternity out of the equation, and life is truly vanity!

Contents

The 12 Chapters of this book contains the reflections and experiences of someone whose mind is in conflict over the problems of life. What value or purpose is there for living?

After speaking of his disillusionments, he presents a materialistic view of life where there is nothing better than the carnal enjoyment of the pleasures of life.

Throughout the book the writer is struggling with this as though he would utter profound truths, he would often return to the materialistic theme. Koheleth is in conflict in his own mind throughout the book that thought he speaks great truths at time, he'll revisit the value of materialism and pleasure. He is struggling and confused himself until the final conclusion in 12:13. We live in an age of confusion. We must have our answer ready.

- Our witness must be consistent and clear.
- They are confused as they do not live for God.
- Solomon was confused when he left off God's Word.
- The majority of our witness will be in flashes ... Just a word here or a smile there ... Rare are occasions to admonish for hours at a time ... More often will be the stressful moments and timely questions
- Not memorizing the answers but having an experience. (Like when taking a test in school and then the teacher randomizes or shuffles the test questions.)
- Our testimony should be outflow of our experience. Walking with Jesus. His person.

The book concludes with the author apparently emerging from his doubts and reaching the noble conclusion in 12:13. Therefore another message in this book is the importance of serving God throughout life. This is the message the Preacher would leave with the young (11:9-12:1), and is stated in his final words:

Epicureanism and other philosophies in Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes prods us to consider our presentation of the Gospel. It is common for the upright to become flabbergasted by the logical gymnastics and deceptions used to justify sin, denial of God and explain life. The contrast of light and darkness is great and our thoughts may be "that's just stupid", but our Gospel presentation must be more evangelistic than that.

Paul probably was dumbfounded internally by what he found at Athens, but his chosen action was a clear presentation of the Gospel.

Acts 17:23 — For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you.

The author of Ecclesiastes does this well as he suggests to the reader, "Ok, let us consider to the end what you have concluded about life." Does life have a point? If so, what is the point? How can we make sense of being here?

Ecclesiastes does not teach epicureanism or any of the several other philosophies suggested in it. Ecclesiastes is a mirror held up to humanity. This book is a self-look and inspection of the human condition and some common conclusions. Koheleth helps us consider who we are and why we are under the sun by walking down the different avenues common to man.

One example of the philosophies considered in Ecclesiastes is epicureanism:

"Epicureanism is an ancient school of philosophy founded in Athens by Epicurus. It rejects determinism and advocated hedonism (pleasure as the highest good), but of a restrained kind: mental pleasure was regarded more highly than physical, and the ultimate pleasure was held to be freedom from anxiety and mental pain, especially that arising from needless fear of death and of the gods."

Ecclesiastes 2:24 — There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God.

Ecclesiastes 3:12,13 — I know that there is no good in them, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life. 13 And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.

The conclusion to epicureanism or any of the other human philosophies void of the one true God, is that these "streets" are "dead end streets." Knowing this from the beginning, we must be more prepared to reach out to the lost and better explain the gospel than just resorting to "bullying" and "manipulative" tactics.

How ready is our answer for those caught in the snare of the enemy? Some absurdities when humanity looks for fulfillment and meaning while shutting God out concern:

- Gender (Genesis 1:27)
- Marriage (Matthew 19:5,6)
- Truth is relative (John 18:37,38; John 14:6; 1 John 5:20)
- Do what feels good (Psalm 16:11; Proverbs 21:17; Galatians 5:19-21)
- Hypocrisy in religion (Matthew 7:5; James 1:26)
- Religion and violence (James 1:27)

Quotable Book

- There is nothing new under the sun (1:9)
- To everything there is a season (3:1)
- Two are better than one (4:9)
- Eat, drink, and be merry (8:15)
- Time and chance happen to them all (9:11)
- He who digs a pit will fall into it (10:8)
- Money answers everything (10:19)

Ecclesiastes is one of the more quotable books of the Bible. But, should we? How should we interpret and use this book? Like the book of Job, the best counsel can be found at the end of the book. The advice in-between must be taken with caution.

Throughout the book, we will find what Koholeth later describes as "goats" and "nails."

Ecclesiastes 12:11 — The words of the wise are as goats, and as nails fastened by the masters of assemblies, which are given from one shepherd.

These are wise sayings that will "prod" our thinking, and exhortations that will provide stability and direction for living. Ecclesiastes is certainly a book worthy of careful study!

The organization of our study

- Chapters 1 & 2 (Introduction, the search, and conclusions)
- Chapter 3 (The natural man's view of the weary round of life.)
- Chapter 4 (The study of the social evils apart from faith)
- Chapter 5 (Religious duties, riches, and a conclusion.)
- Chapter 6 (The vanity of long life.)
- Chapter 7 (Series of wise sayings and evil woman.)

- Chapter 8 (Civil duties, uncertainty of life, certainty of divine judgment and injustices of life, epicureanism, the work of God and man)
- Chapter 9 (Like things happen to the righteous and the wicked, wisdom is preeminent and often unappreciated)
- Chapter 10 (Various wise sayings and the contrast between wisdom and folly)
- Chapter 11 (Benevolences and advice to the young.)
- Chapter 12 (Description of old age and conclusion concerning the highest duty of man.)

Ecclesiastes 1 and 2

Ecclesiastes

Under the sun (chapters 1–2)

In these two chapters, we have an introduction, the search for meaning in life, and some conclusions made from the search.

Introduction by narrator (1:1–2)

Examples of futility (1:4–11)

These are reflections on the monotonous routines of life. Life under the sun is meaningless, and the writer gives some examples of futility.

Passing of generations (1:4)

Is man born only so he can later cease to exist?

Cycles of nature (1:5–7)

Nature is always repeating itself. There is no real, lasting change.

Curiosity of man (1:8)

With the curiosity of man and all his efforts, the more he learns the more questions he raises.

Absence of newness (1:9–11)

What a desire to find something new!

Philosophies of futility

Man has created philosophies of life to help him live/cope with this conclusion. The answer is not "there is no answer."

Those spiritually minded do not settle for "life is vain" but they search for meaning **beyond** this life. If the answer is not found beneath the sun, then it is found above the sun, beyond ourselves.

For every need of man there is a corresponding satisfaction (hunger—food, etc.). If we find a desire for which nothing in this world can satisfy, it is logical to assume we are made for another world.

The Christian says, 'Creatures are not born with desires unless satisfaction for those desires exists. A baby feels hunger: well, there is such a thing as food. A duckling wants to swim: well, there is such a thing as water. Men feel sexual desire: well, there is such a thing as sex. If I find in myself a desire which no experience in this world can satisfy, the most probable explanation is that I was made for another world. If none of my earthly pleasures satisfy it,

that does not prove that the universe is a fraud. Probably earthly pleasures were never meant to satisfy it, but only to arouse it, to suggest the real thing.
—C. S. Lewis

The search for meaning (1:12–2:23)

Acquiring wisdom and knowledge (1:12–18)

The search of the natural man for satisfaction and happiness. Qoholeth explains how he reached the conclusions stated in 1:12–13. Qoholeth also expresses what he had learned in his searching:

1. All lifestyles are meaningless (1:14)
2. Nothing can be changed (1:15)
3. Knowledge is useless (1:16–17)

What profit is there in the mere accumulation of knowledge?

4. Desire for knowledge brings much pain (1:18)

The current generation is a prime example of the vanity of just "more knowledge." People say, "I've got all this knowledge and now I feel worse." Why? You can't know what you need to know in order to produce peace, contentment, joy, etc. People say, "Let's build high, let's fly to the moon, to Mars, etc." What have we discovered? More information on the **parts** and not explanation of the **whole**. Qoholeth is not anti-knowledge, but he is concluding rightly that human knowledge without reference to God is **never satisfying**.

Worldly pleasure (2:1–3)

Art or agriculture (2:4–6)

Ecclesiastes 2:4-6 — I made me great works; I builded me houses; I planted me vineyards: 5 I made me gardens and orchards, and I planted trees in them of all kind of fruits: 6 I made me pools of water, to water therewith the wood that bringeth forth trees:

Great possessions (2:7–11)

Ecclesiastes 2:7-11 — I got me servants and maidens, and had servants born in my house; also I had great possessions of great and small cattle above all that were in Jerusalem before me: 8 I gathered me also silver and gold, and the peculiar treasure of kings and of the provinces: I gat me men singers and women singers, and the delights of the sons of men, as musical instruments, and that of all sorts. 9 So I was great, and increased more than all that were before me in Jerusalem: also my wisdom remained with me. 10 And whatsoever mine eyes desired I kept not from them, I withheld not my heart from any joy; for my heart rejoiced in all my labour: and this was my portion of all my labour. 11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had wrought, and on the labour that I had laboured to do: and, behold, all was vanity and vexation of spirit, and there was no profit under the sun.

Conclusions

A wise man is superior to the fool (2:12–21)

Ecclesiastes 2:12-21 — And I turned myself to behold wisdom, and madness, and folly: for what can the man do that cometh after the king? even that which hath been already done. 13 Then I saw that wisdom excelleth folly, as far as light excelleth darkness. 14 The wise man's eyes are in his head; but the fool walketh in darkness: and I myself perceived also that one event happeneth to them all. 15 Then said I in my heart, As it happeneth to the fool, so it happeneth even to me; and why was I then more wise? Then I said in my heart, that this also is vanity. 16 For there is no remembrance of the wise more than of the fool for ever; seeing that which now is in the days to come shall all be forgotten. And how dieth the wise man? as the fool. 17 Therefore I hated life; because the work that is wrought under the sun is grievous unto me: for all is vanity and vexation of spirit. 18 Yea, I hated all my labour which I had taken under the sun: because I should leave it unto the man that shall be after me. 19 And who knoweth whether he shall be a wise man or a fool? yet shall he have rule over all my labour wherein I have laboured, and wherein I have shewed myself wise under the sun. This is also vanity. 20 Therefore I went about to cause my heart to despair of all the labour which I took under the sun. 21 For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil.

"nothing better than to eat and drink and enjoy life" (2:24–26)

Ecclesiastes 2:22-26 — For what hath man of all his labour, and of the vexation of his heart, wherein he hath laboured under the sun? 23 For all his days are sorrows, and his travail grief; yea, his heart taketh not rest in the night. This is also vanity. 24 There is nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour. This also I saw, that it was from the hand of God. 25 For who can eat, or who else can hasten hereunto, more than I? 26 For God giveth to a man that is good in his sight wisdom, and knowledge, and joy: but to the sinner he giveth travail, to gather and to heap up, that he may give to him that is good before God. This also is vanity and vexation of spirit.

The main thought is that some answers will not be found here on earth. They answers are found "beyond the sun" and are spiritual in nature. Under the sun, you will not find the answer why you are under the sun. The answer is **beyond** the sun.

Ecclesiastes 3

The vanity of life from the naturalist's perspective (chapter 3)

Introduction

This chapter is the natural man's view of the weary round of life. Naturalism is the "idea or belief that only natural (as opposed to supernatural or spiritual) laws and forces operate in the world."

There is a time for everything (v. 1–8)

The natural man says, "It is just life. Things happen to us. There is no purpose or design in it. It is all chance."

But we know from other Scriptures that God is in control, and that He has a plan (Jer.29:11; Dan. 2:21; Amos 3:6; Job 1:10; Rom. 8:28; Matt. 5:45–48).

Man's God-given task (v. 9–15)

God has created humanity and the world. He has given us work to do. We are to do that work, rejoice, do good, eat, drink, and enjoy the results of our labor.

The conclusion of the materialist (v. 16–22)

Qoholeth is discouraged because everywhere he looks he sees wickedness. But he knows that there is a season for everything, and though the wicked may have a season of prosperity, there will come a season of judgment.

Ecclesiastes 4

The problems of social evils (chapter 4)

Oppression (v. 1–3)

Qohelet notices that those that are in power use that power to oppress others. These verses are used by some to show that Qohelet is likely not Solomon, because Solomon had power to stop oppression, but here Qohelet cannot.

As Christians, we know that power and authority does not always have to result in oppression (2 Cor. 1:24; 4:5; 1 Peter 5:3).

Envy as motivation for work (v. 4–6)

We see here the observation that people will work hard because of envy. We see what other people have, and we want those things, too. We know that we can only have them if we work for them.

In verse 5, we see similarities with how the fool is described in Proverbs (Prov. 6:10; 24:33).

Loneliness (v. 7–12)

Loneliness is not something that God wants for man (Gen. 2:18), and He promised Israel that He would not leave them alone (Is. 41:10).

Government problems (v. 13–16)

Kings may be willing to listen when they are young, but when they are old, they no longer seek advice.

Ecclesiastes 5

Chapter 5: Worship and Wealth

When You Go to God's House, vs. 1-8

- Spiritual activity
- Attending the temple
- Solomon's Watching people going to the temple
- What am I doing?

1. Be Careful

1 Keep thy foot when thou goest to the house of God,

with care Watch your step ... Be aware Traps to fall in mechanics and formalism ... prepare before going "prudent" .. ready to hear
keep God actively involved in our lives ... Go to the house if God ... Are we actively submitted to God? Going to church is a part of this submission

2. Be Ready to Hear

and be more ready to hear,

3. Do Not Sacrifice like Fools

than to give the sacrifice of fools: for they consider not that they do evil.

Qohelet warns about making the "sacrifice of fools." "The sacrifice of the fools should be thought of not as a denial of the value of sacrifice per se but as a critique of superficial religion that goes through the rituals with many words but no awareness of God." [1] There are other warnings in the Old Testament about offering vain sacrifices to God, such as 1 Samuel 15:22-23, Psalm 40:6, and Isaiah 1:11. These verses combined show us that God is not pleased with sacrifices if the heart of the giver was unclean.

4. Do Not be Hasty with Your Words

2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. 3 For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words.

- Much Speaking
- Do we really think God is impressed?
- Not impress, but “pour out your heart to God”.
- Elijah's prayer on Mt. Carmel versus false prophets

In verse 1, there is instruction that those that go to the temple should be ready to listen. The idea is continued through verse 7. It is instruction to listen more than we talk, and specifically to listen more to God than we talk to Him. The principles of listening to instruction and controlling how much we talk are found often in the book of Proverbs (Prov. 2:2; 4:20; 5:1; 15:31; 18:15; 21:13; 22:17; 23:12; 25:12; 28:9). There is considerable similarities with Ecclesiastes 5:3b, which says, "a fool's voice is known by multitude of words" and Proverbs 17:28, which says, "Even a fool, when he holdeth his peace, is counted wise." Jesus also warned against praying with "vain repetitions" and thinking that your prayer will be heard because you use many words (Matt. 6:7).

5. Do not be Hasty with Your Vows

4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. 5 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

- Vows are not required here, but God is listening when we make them.

6. Do not be Dishonest with Your Vows

6 Suffer not thy mouth to cause thy flesh to sin; neither say thou before the angel, that it was an error: wherefore should God be angry at thy voice, and destroy the work of thine hands? 7a For in the multitude of dreams and many words there are also divers vanities: ...

- “angel”: messenger; priest, preacher
- “it was an error”: it was a mistake; I should not have made this vow in the first place and therefore should not keep it
- dishonesty; mockery of God

Galatians 6:7 — Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap.

Qohelet continues the idea of being careful with our words by giving advice on making vows to God. He said that it is better to not make a vow than to make a vow and break it. Jesus went farther with this teaching, and He said that we shouldn't make any vows at all (Matt. 5:33–37).

7. Fear God Above All

7b ... but fear thou God. 8 If thou seest the oppression of the poor, and violent perverting of judgment and justice in a province, marvel not at the matter: for he that is higher than the highest regardeth; and there be higher than they.

- We are to keep down the fear of man. Set God before us

- Is Worship and specifically church attendance all about me and my felt need? We should come for HIM! Fear God and reverence Him. Hold in high regard. The unrighteous:

Romans 3:18 — There is no fear of God before their eyes.

The Vanity of Riches, v. 9-17

- Wealth never satisfies (v. 10)
- When you have more wealth, you have more problems (v. 11)
- Wealth can cause anxiety, which robs you of sleep (v. 12)
- We cannot take wealth with us to death (v. 13–17)

1. Love Silver = Not Satisfied with Silver

9 Moreover the profit of the earth is for all: the king himself is served by the field. 10 He that loveth silver shall not be satisfied with silver; nor he that loveth abundance with increase: this is also vanity.

MHC “The king needs the common things of life, and the poor share them; they relish their morsel better than he does his luxuries.”“

2. What Good is Beholding?

11 When goods increase, they are increased that eat them: and what good is there to the owners thereof, saving the beholding of them with their eyes?

- Counting Money

3. Sweet Sleep

12 The sleep of a labouring man is sweet, whether he eat little or much: but the abundance of the rich will not suffer him to sleep.

- The sleep of the labourer is sweet, not only because he is tired, but because he has little care to break his sleep.
- Adding and Borrowing Trouble

4. Where is the Profit? (naked shall he return, you can't take it with you.)

13 There is a sore evil which I have seen under the sun, namely, riches kept for the owners thereof to their hurt. 14 But those riches perish by evil travail: and he begetteth a son, and there is nothing in his hand. 15 As he came forth of his mother's womb, naked shall he return to go as he came, and shall take nothing of his labour, which he may carry away in his hand. 16 And this also is a sore evil, that in all points as he came, so shall he go: and what profit hath he that hath laboured for the wind? 17 All his days also he eateth in darkness, and he hath much sorrow and wrath with his sickness.

The Conclusion to Increase, vs. 18-20

18 Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion. 19 Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God. 20 For he shall not much remember the days of his life; because God answereth him in the joy of his heart.

- Eat, Drink and Enjoy Life.

Wealth may not satisfy, but God does give blessings to every person. They can eat, drink and enjoy life. This is similar to statements in 2:24–26 and 9:7–10.

- “that which I have seen...”, (inferred “under the sun”): You worked for it, enjoy it -
- Do we have a problem when someone that has worked hard, enjoys the fruit of his labor? Do we begrudge him? “amiable”, “looks good in the eyes of men.” Good and comely; good or comfortable to man’s self, and comely or amiable in the eyes of other men, as penuriousness is base and dishonourable.
- We must not view our calling as a drudgery, thankful enjoyment
- “this is the gift of God”: Riches ought to be received of God and to be used for His glory.
- “It is his portion” – for the FAITHFUL BELIEVER, he has a much greater portion: in Heaven!

Rewards of the Faithful Believer

What is Our Portion?

Ecclesiastes 2:21 For there is a man whose labour is in wisdom, and in knowledge, and in equity; yet to a man that hath not laboured therein shall he leave it for his portion. This also is vanity and a great evil.

Ecclesiastes 3:22 Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?

Ecclesiastes 5:18 Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion.

Ecclesiastes 5:19 Every man also to whom God hath given riches and wealth, and hath given him power to eat thereof, and to take his portion, and to rejoice in his labour; this is the gift of God.

The Unfaithful

Revelation 22:12 — And, behold, I come quickly; and my reward is with me, to give every man according as his work shall be.

BLESSING

Happy; enjoying spiritual happiness and the favor of God; enjoying heavenly felicity; Spiritually Prosperous, Having God's Favor; consecrating by prayer; a wish of happiness pronounced; a prayer imploring happiness upon another. The divine favor is the greatest blessing.

Psalms 2:12 — Kiss the Son, lest he be angry, and ye perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all they that put their trust in him.

Psalms 84:4 Blessed are they that dwell in thy house: they will be still praising thee. Selah. Psalms 106:3 Blessed are they that keep judgment, and he that doeth righteousness at all times. Psalms 119:1 Blessed are the undefiled in the way, who walk in the law of the LORD. Psalms 119:2 Blessed are they that keep his testimonies, and that seek him with the whole heart.

1. Heaven, Comfort, Authority, Satisfaction, Mercy, See God, Be the Children of God, What is Christ's is Ours, Honor (Matthew 5:1-12)

When we pray for blessing for each other we are saying Biblically:

“Let them be poor in spirit, mourning, meek, hungering and thirsting for righteousness, merciful, pure, peacemakers and persecuted.”

- We can never be happy living self-centered lives.
- What is Christ's is ours

Numbers 18:20 — And the LORD spake unto Aaron, Thou shalt have no inheritance in their land, neither shalt thou have any part among them: I am thy part and thine inheritance among the children of Israel.

2. Revealed Truth

Matthew 13:16 But blessed are your eyes, for they see: and your ears, for they hear. Luke 10:23 And he turned him unto his disciples, and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things that ye see:

3. The Best is Yet to Come

Luke 6:21 Blessed are ye that hunger now: for ye shall be filled. Blessed are ye that weep now: for ye shall laugh.

4. Serving God is its Own Reward

Luke 11:28 But he said, Yea rather, blessed are they that hear the word of God, and keep it.

5. Fed and Served by the Master

Luke 12:37 Blessed are those servants, whom the lord when he cometh shall find watching: verily I say unto you, that he shall gird himself, and make them to sit down to meat, and will come forth and serve them.

Revelation 19:9 And he saith unto me, Write, Blessed are they which are called unto the marriage supper of the Lamb. And he saith unto me, These are the true sayings of God.

6. Forgiven

Romans 4:7 Saying, Blessed are they whose iniquities are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.

Revelation 14:13 And I heard a voice from heaven saying unto me, Write, Blessed are the dead which die in the Lord from henceforth: Yea, saith the Spirit, that they may rest from their labours; and their works do follow them.

7. Eternal Life

Revelation 22:14 Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

Some More Blessings

One morning R. C. Chapman, a devout Christian, was asked how he was feeling. "I'm burdened this morning!" was his reply. But his happy countenance contradicted his words. So the questioner exclaimed in surprise, "Are you really burdened, Mr. Chapman?" "Yes, but it's a wonderful burden; it's an overabundance of blessings for which I cannot find enough time or words to express my gratitude!" Seeing the puzzled look on the face of his friend, Chapman added with a smile, "I am referring to Psalm 68:19, which fully describes my condition. In that verse the Father in heaven reminds us that He daily loads us with benefits."^[1]

Psalm 68:19 — Blessed be the Lord, who daily loadeth us with benefits, even the God of our salvation. Selah.

F. E. Marsh has enumerated some of these blessings:

1. An acceptance that can never be questioned. (Eph. 1:6).
2. An inheritance that can never be lost (I Peter 1:3-5).
3. A deliverance that can never be excelled (2 Cor. 1:10).
4. A grace that can never be limited (2 Cor. 12:9).
5. A hope that can never be disappointed. (Heb. 6:18, 19).
6. A bounty that can never be withdrawn. (1 Col. 3:21-23).
7. A joy that need never be diminished (John 15:11).
8. A nearness to God that can never be reversed (Eph. 2:13).
9. A peace that can never be disturbed (John 14:27).
10. A righteousness that can never be tarnished (2 Cor. 5:21).
11. A salvation that can never be canceled (Heb. 5:9).

[1] Baker, p. 267

Ecclesiastes 6

The vanity of long life (chapter 6)

Some cannot enjoy their profit (v. 1–2)

Qohelet now continues his observations on wealth. He talks about an "evil" thing, that is, that man works hard and gets wealth, but he cannot enjoy it. We do not know what the circumstances are that prevent him from enjoying his wealth, but we know that for some reason it is given to another to enjoy.

Long life does not guarantee happiness (v. 3–6)

Long life (Prov. 3:2) and many children (Psalm 127:4) were considered great blessings in ancient Israel, but Qohelet says that even these cannot bring rest to a weary life. He says that the stillborn baby who has never known life is better than the person who has long life. He says this because the stillborn does not have to face the troubles of life.

Appetite is never satisfied (v. 7)

We work hard for food, and then we eat it. Afterward we are hungry again.

Wisdom is better than foolishness (v. 8–9)

Conclusion to the search for meaning (v. 10–12)

These verses conclude Qohelet's search for meaning. "Here he leaves his explicit search for meaning and in the second half of the book focuses on advice and commentary about the future." [1] Verse 10 says "that which hath been is named already," and it is repeating the idea that there is nothing new under the sun (3:15).

[1] Longman, T. (1998). The Book of Ecclesiastes (p. 176). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Ecclesiastes 7

Better and balanced living (chapter 7)

Introduction to Chapter 7

In the remaining six chapters are a mixture of proverbs and narration designed to make the most of life "under the sun." In other words, while life under the sun is "vanity," how then should we live? Human Wisdom is limited in providing answers. Notice how skewed and limited wisdom is when God is not included in the equation.

Proverbs on better living (v. 1–13)

"These proverbs are full of irony, and Qohelet often starts off sounding very much like Proverbs but then gives the proverb an ironic twist." [1] An example would be verse 1, which starts off by saying, "A good name is better than precious ointment." This is very similar to Proverbs 22:1, which says, "A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches." But the next line in Ecclesiastes 7:1 is very different from anything in Proverbs. It says, "and the day of death than the day of one's birth." Why does Qohelet say this? "Even if parallels to this proverb might be found in the broader wisdom literature, the appearance of it here, in light of Qohelet's general teaching about death (3:18–21 and 12:1–7), supports an interpretation that this proverb indicates Qohelet's world-weariness." [2] "Qohelet attempts to answer the question as to the nature of the good life by looking again at traditional wisdom. Not surprisingly, therefore, the dominant form is that of the proverb. He starts with traditional wisdom and then problematizes this each time, so that we are left with no clear answer as to what constitutes the good life. The sort of wisdom that Proverbs offers would appear to be deeply problematic and to offer no secure place to stand." [3] Two themes that are prominent in this section are death (v. 1b, 2, 4, and perhaps 8) and wisdom and folly (v. 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, 11, 12). [4]

He concludes this section in verse 13 by saying that the world is bent and broken, but he cannot see any further than that. "It is as though his world is confined to that ushered in by Gen. 3, the fall. It is true, as Qohelet finds again and again, that an empirical approach to our present fallen world makes life appear utterly enigmatic. But the larger context of Gen. 3, of creation and redemption through the line of Abraham, alerts us that God is at work making straight what has been bent and broken." [5]

Counsel for balanced living (v. 14–29)

The second half of the chapter offers "counsel for balanced living." These are challenging and difficult statements which should be understood in their context, and in the context of the Bible as a whole. It appears Qohelet is mainly warning against extremism and against the presumption that one can find the answer to every question in life.

Moderation in wisdom and folly (v. 14–22)

In these verses Qohelet comes to the conclusion that it is not good to be too wise or too righteous. He says this because he sees the righteous, the wicked, the wise, and the fool all meeting the same end. "The two case studies present us with a paradox, and Qohelet surely wanted his listener/reader to be shocked by what he said. He saw the righteous perishing and the wicked living long. This is the polar opposite of what some strands of biblical teaching indicate. For instance, certain legal portions of the Bible teach that observation of the law prolongs life (Exod. 20:12; Deut. 4:40), and the wisdom teachers instructed that righteousness led to life (Prov. 3:1–2), while the wicked suffered and died early (Ps. 1)." [6] "What could it possibly mean to be moderately righteous and moderately wicked?" [7] There are two ways of interpreting this:

1. Qohelet warns against seeking righteousness and wisdom with too much fervor
2. he guards against false pretense in righteousness and wisdom. [8]

Qohelet's Reflection on His Journey and the Inaccessibility of Wisdom (v. 23–29)

[1] Baker, p. 322

[2] Longman, T. (1998). The Book of Ecclesiastes (p. 182). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

[3] Baker, p. 329

- [4] Longman, T. (1998). The Book of Ecclesiastes (p. 179). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- [5] Baker, p. 329
- [6] Longman, T. (1998). The Book of Ecclesiastes (p. 194). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.
- [7] Baker, p. 338
- [8] Longman, T. (1998). The Book of Ecclesiastes (p. 195). Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.

Ecclesiastes 8

Civil duties, certainty of just judgment, and the inability of wisdom (chapter 8)

Civil duties (v. 1–9)

Verse one asks, "Who is like a wise man?" Qohelet searched for a wise man, who knew the interpretation of a thing. Qohelet knew that wisdom makes a man happier. "The shining face generally speaks of favour. Here it speaks of the wise man who is visibly gracious in his demeanour, and (as the next phrase says) whose gentleness is obvious in his facial expression." [1] Compare to Numbers 6:25.

In verse two, Qohelet advises to obey the command of the king. In Romans 13, Paul gives similar command to obey the government. Primarily, we honor government authority as part of our obedience to God. "It appears that the Jewish princes and chiefs took an oath of fidelity to their kings. This appears to have been done to David, 2 Samuel 5:1–3; to Joash, 2 Kings 11:17; and to Solomon, 1 Chronicles 29:24." [2] We can agree with Qohelet's advice here, from both an Old Testament and New Testament perspective. Yet one must say that it sounds self-serving if Qohelet was Solomon, who was a king himself.

We also recognize that we are always to obey God rather than man if the two contradict (Acts 4:19). "Many passages in the Old Testament witness to the limits which loyalty to God must set on courtly tact and submissiveness." [3]

If the lack of wisdom discouraged Qohelet in Ecclesiastes 8:6–7, he found the powerlessness of man in the face of death to be yet more despairing. Under the sun, he saw that death allows no winners, and there is no release from that war. He knew that part of man's misery on this earth was to be ruled by others oppressively.

The certainty of just judgment (v. 10–13)

Qohelet saw that the wicked die, and their evil is soon forgotten. With his *under the sun* thinking, Qohelet despaired that the wicked are not punished after death.

In verse 12–13 Qohelet says that it will be well with the righteous and not well with the wicked.

The inability of wisdom (v. 14–17)

[1] Eaton
[2] Clarke
[3] Kidner

Ecclesiastes 9

Death, life, and evil times (chapter 9)

The despair of death (v. 1-6)

The righteous, and the wise, and their works, are **in the hand of God**. Qohelet observes that **all people** die, no matter who they are or what they have done. "To all appearances, God is just not interested. The things that are supposed to matter most to Him turn out to make no difference—or none that anyone can see—to the way we are disposed of in the end. Moral or immoral, religious or profane, we are all mown down alike."^[1]

The hope of life (v. 7-10)

He then says that we may all die, but we should still enjoy life while we have it. He also says that we should work hard. "Man was not created to be idle, he was not elected to be idle, he was not redeemed to be idle, he was not quickened to be idle, and he is not sanctified by God's grace to be idle."^[2]

The mystery of time and chance (v. 11-18)

Taken in an evil time (v. 11-12)

No amount of wisdom or skill appears to prevent the evil time. Bad things happen as a result of humanity's choices; as a result of sin and forsaking God. But none of them happen "accidentally" or apart from God's will.

Wisdom is better, but it is often wasted (v. 13-18)

Qohelet tells the story of a wise man that saved his city, but was soon forgotten. He says that wisdom is better than many things, but it is not always beneficial because it is not heard.

^[1] Kidner

^[2] Spurgeon

Ecclesiastes 10

Folly and wisdom (chapter 10)

Folly disgraces (v. 1–7)

Folly disgraces a wise man's honor (v. 1)

This is an obvious statement: dead flies spoils the perfume. Compare it with 9:18, which says "...one sinner destroyeth much good." So does a little folly to one respected for wisdom and honor.

Folly disgraces the fool by revealing itself (v. 2–3)

The right hand was regarded as the side of strength, skill, good and favor and the left hand was regarded as weak and bad. "To have one's heart at his left side is to have the 'springs of life' (Proverbs 4:23) located in the realm of practical and spiritual incompetence." [1] He shows everyone that he is a fool.

Folly disgraces in high places (v. 4–7)

Folly is set in great dignity. Some lowly men are unwisely exalted (servants on horses). Foolish men are promoted or accepted to positions of great leadership, while some noblemen are humbled (princes walk on the ground like servants).

Evidence of folly and wisdom (v. 8–20)

Foolishness in action (v. 8–10)

The fool doesn't wisely consider the future, but wise use of one's time in the present can make for a much better future.

The babbling talk of the foolish (v. 11–14)

The fool is known by his many words, and by his presumption about the future when no man knows what is to be. Previously Qohelet had confidently stated that there is nothing beyond this life, and that this life should be lived with an under the sun premise. He now casts more doubt upon that premise.

The fool at work (v. 15)

Fools have no desire to work, or when they do work they quickly become wearied. They can't see that it is wise to work now in order to prepare for the future. The fool works hard to get out of work.

They do not even know how to go to the city! The fool has no sense of direction or goal. They live their life as if it were meaningless, directionless. "In a fine note of sarcasm, this proverb says that a person may be so involved in arguing about the universe that he misses what the ordinary person is concerned about, namely, finding the way home." [2]

How foolishness corrupts a nation (v. 16–20)

Qohelet understood that a land was blessed by good, faithful leaders, but cursed under wicked and incompetent leaders. If Ecclesiastes 10:18 symbolizes the fall of a nation, then the following reasons give the reason for the fall: leaders who are foolish, selfish, and concerned only for their own pleasure and good. "They do nothing in order; turn night into day, and day into night; sleep when they should wake, and wake when they should sleep; attending more to chamberings and banquetings, than to the concerns of the state." [3]

[1] Eaton

Ecclesiastes 11

Prudence (chapter 11)

Prudence is the skill and good judgment in the use of resources.

The prudent person invests (v. 1, 2, 6)

The counsel is "do not hoard what you have, but sow so that you can get more." It is about careful investment. See also Matthew 13:24.

The prudent person wisely uses opportunity (v. 3)

The prudent person sees opposition correctly (v. 4)

The prudent person recognizes the sovereignty of God (v. 5)

The prudent person prepares for his old age (v. 7–10)

Ecclesiastes 12

Description of old age and the conclusion (chapter 12)

Description of old age (v. 1-7)

Conclusion of the whole matter (v. 8-14)

Addendum

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