

Ecclesiastes

Introduction

1. Name

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

1. Authorship

a. Possibly Solomon?

Jewish and early Christian tradition attribute the book to Solomon. The author identifies himself as “the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (Ecc 1:1). He also refers to himself as “the Preacher” (Ecc 1:1,2,12; 7:27; 12:8,9,10). Internal evidences point to Solomon. Note the references to:

Many of the experiences spoken of in Ecclesiastes correspond quite well with what we know about Solomon’s life. His wisdom - Ecc 1:16; cf. 1 Ki 3:12 His building activities - Ecc 2:4-6; cf. 1 Ki 7:1-12 His wealth - Ecc 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 - Ecc 12:9-10; cf. 1 Ki 4:30-34

Authorship of Ecclesiastes is often ascribed to Solomon.

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

According to rabbinic tradition, Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon in his old age and possibly edited under Hezekiah.

The evidence is simply not compelling enough to reject the view of Solomon as the author. 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 (Ecc 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.

1. 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.

1. 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” (Ecc 1:2). This theme is repeated by the Preacher time and again:

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

- At the conclusion of the book - Ecc 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!

1. 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?

The preacher, Not just Solomon but us as well, has a responsibility to communicate the path and meaning of life.

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 though he speaks great truths at times, 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 (Ecc 11:9-12:1), and is stated in his final words:

1. Quotable Book

Ecclesiastes is one of the more quotable books of the Bible. But, should we?

- 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)

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 the Preacher later describes as “goads” and “nails”.

Ecclesiastes 12:11 — The words of the wise are as goads, 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!