

# ECCLESIASTES

## I. Introduction:

A. The Title : The title Ecclesiastes is a Greek translation of the Hebrew title which means "preacher"

1. It is the same word that is found in verse 1.

Ecclesiastes 1:1 (ESV) The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

2. Literally it means one who speaks to a congregation or gathered assembly. Solomon at times would fulfill that role.

1 Kings 8:54 (ESV) Now as Solomon finished offering all this prayer and plea to the LORD, he arose from before the altar of the LORD, where he had knelt with hands outstretched toward heaven.

1 Kings 8:55 (ESV) And he stood and blessed all the assembly of Israel with a loud voice, saying,

1 Kings 8:56 (ESV) "Blessed be the LORD who has given rest to his people Israel, according to all that he promised. Not one word has failed of all his good promise, which he spoke by Moses his servant.

B. The Author: Solomon

1. "Strictly speaking, then, the book is anonymous, given that no personal name is attached to it. Nevertheless, traditional Jewish and Christian scholarship has often ascribed authorship to Solomon (10th century B.C.),:

Crossway Bibles. The ESV Study Bible. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008. Print.

"The predominant opinion of the past is that in Ecclesiastes an old and repentant Solomon looks back over his life, particularly the period after his apostasy from the Lord, which is recorded in 1 Kings 11:1–13.3"

Longman, Tremper. The Book of Ecclesiastes. Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1998. Print. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament.

2. Today it is widely held that the book of Solomon was written later by someone other than Solomon. The primary reason for that is because of the difficulty of the Hebrew.

“The distinctive nature of the Hebrew language used in the book is widely believed to be indicative of a date much later than the 10th century B.C.”

Crossway Bibles. The ESV Study Bible. Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2008. Print.

“A single argument left in favor of a post, or non-Solomonic origin for Ecclesiastes is the character of its language. On this basis, even such conservative scholars as Hengstenberg, Delitzsch, Leupold, and E. J. Young felt compelled to date the book in the fifth century B.C., and others placed it in the Greek period from the third century B.C. to the time of Herod the Great.”

“Here again, however, the linguistic evidence does not support the conclusion reached. There is first of all the matter of the complete absence of any Hebrew consonants used as vowels or helping letters, which absence points to an exceptionally early composition of the book. Final vowel letters (matres lectionis) first appeared in the late eighth century B.C. and medial, or middle, vowel letters came into vogue at the end of the seventh or early sixth century B.C., all of which are missing here. 23

“Furthermore, many of the sometimes cited twenty-nine alleged Aramaisms (which normally occur from the fifth century B.C. down to 200 B.C.) are actually of Canaanite-Phoenician vintage, according to Mitchell Dahood,<sup>24</sup> and therefore of much earlier usage. In fact, it is almost impossible to avoid the conviction that Ecclesiastes is of such a unique and special genre that it currently fits into no known period of the history of the Hebrew language. Archer and Dahood both repeat Jastrow’s and Margoliouth’s judgment that it is impossible to explain the peculiarities of Qoheleth’s grammar, syntax, and orthography on the basis that it is late Mishnaic Hebrew or late Aramaic.”

KAISER, WALTER C., JR. Coping with Change - Ecclesiastes. Scotland, UK: Christian Focus, 2013. Print.

To which I would reply that we should not be surprised that the wisest man who ever lived would use language that was very uncommon, difficult and utilizes idioms that come from other nations.

3. While Solomon is not mentioned by name in the book of Ecclesiastes, he is the only one who fits the biographical allusions.

a. The writer is referred to as the son of David.

Ecclesiastes 1:1 (ESV) The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

(1) It should be noted that the word “son” in Hebrew could have the simple meaning of descendant and not necessarily mean the immediate son.

(2) However, the word also does mean “son” in the traditional sense.

b. The writer is referred to as king of Israel.

Ecclesiastes 1:12 (ESV) I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.

(1) After Solomon the kingdom was divided.

(a) The Southern kingdom, Judah, had a capital in Jerusalem.

(b) The Northern kingdom, Israel, had a capital first in Shechem then in Tirza and finally in Samaria.

1 Kings 16:23 (ESV) In the thirty-first year of Asa king of Judah, Omri began to reign over Israel, and he reigned for twelve years; six years he reigned in Tirzah.

1 Kings 16:24 (ESV) He bought the hill of Samaria from Shemer for two talents of silver, and he fortified the hill and called the name of the city that he built Samaria, after the name of Shemer, the owner of the hill.

- (2) Thus, the book was written by the king of Israel before the kingdom was divided. That would mean it would have to have been written by Solomon.

c. The depiction of the writer fits Solomon.

- (1) First we have the depiction of his wisdom.

Ecclesiastes 1:16 (ESV) I said in my heart, "I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge."

1 Kings 3:12 (ESV) behold, I now do according to your word. Behold, I give you a wise and discerning mind, so that none like you has been before you and none like you shall arise after you.

- (2) Second the depiction of his great wealth could only be applicable to Solomon.

Ecclesiastes 2:8 (ESV) I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I got singers, both men and women, and many concubines, the delight of the sons of man.

Ecclesiastes 2:9 (ESV) So I became great and surpassed all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me.

1 Kings 10:16 (ESV) King Solomon made 200 large shields of beaten gold; 600 shekels of gold went into each shield.

1 Kings 10:17 (ESV) And he made 300 shields of beaten gold; three minas of gold went into each shield. And the king put them in the House of the Forest of Lebanon.

1 Kings 10:18 (ESV) The king also made a great ivory throne and overlaid it with the finest gold.

1 Kings 10:19 (ESV) The throne had six steps, and the throne had a round top, and on each side of the seat were armrests and two lions standing beside the armrests,

1 Kings 10:20 (ESV) while twelve lions stood there, one on each end of a step on the six steps. The like of it was never made in any kingdom.

1 Kings 10:21 (ESV) All King Solomon's drinking vessels were of gold, and all the vessels of the House of the Forest of Lebanon were of pure gold. None were of silver; silver was not considered as anything in the days of Solomon.

1 Kings 10:22 (ESV) For the king had a fleet of ships of Tarshish at sea with the fleet of Hiram. Once every three years the fleet of ships of Tarshish used to come bringing gold, silver, ivory, apes, and peacocks.

- (3) The depiction of his teaching many proverbs is consistent with Solomon.

Ecclesiastes 12:9 (ESV) Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care.

1 Kings 4:32 (ESV) He also spoke 3,000 proverbs, and his songs were 1,005.

4. The book of Ecclesiastes is a dramatic autobiography of the king's life and experiences when, in a backsliding state, he sought meaning and pleasure apart from God.

Ecclesiastes 2:10 (ESV) And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil, and this was my reward for all my toil.

5. The musings of a man that apparently had all that a person could want only to find he was not satisfied with all that he obtained or fulfilled by all that he had done.

C. Overview:

1. The book of Ecclesiastes is a collection of remarks by the preacher.

Ecclesiastes 1:1 (ESV) The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

2. The theme of the book of Ecclesiastes is that life is meaningless apart from God.

Ecclesiastes 1:2 (ESV) Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

Ecc 1:2 (NIV) "Meaningless! Meaningless!" says the Teacher. "Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless."

3. The 5 fold repetition of the word "vanity" shows the intensity or emphasis of the thought. In other words, it can not be stressed enough - all is vanity.

4. The Hebrew word "Hebel" translated vanity, can mean breath, vapor, fleeting, not enduring, or having no lasting value or worth

You have made my days a mere handbreadth;  
the span of my years is as nothing before you.  
Each man's life is but a breath [hebel]. (Ps. 39:5)

Man is like a breath [hebel];  
his days are like a fleeting shadow. (Ps. 144:4)

Charm is deceptive, and beauty is fleeting [hebel];  
but a woman who fears the Lord is to be praised. (Prov. 31:30)

5. The proposition in the book of Ecclesiastes comes in the form of a question. What benefit is there in all of mankind's striving?

Ecclesiastes 1:3 (ESV) What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?

- a. When all is said and done what difference does our life really make?

- b. What is its lasting effect in the brief time we have on this earth?
6. The key phrases in the book of Ecclesiastes.
- a. "Vanity of Vanities all is Vanity" occurs 37 times. It refers to life's lack of meaning or purpose.
  - b. "Under the Sun " is used 27 times in the book. It is referring to an earthly perspective apart from God.
  - c. "Under heaven" is used 3 times in the book. It is referring to viewing life from a godly perspective.
  - d. Thus, the predominant amount of Ecclesiastes is showing us what life looks like when you take God out of the picture.
7. Conclusion:
- a. Apart from God, life has no meaning or purpose.
  - b. Solomon's search for happiness and meaning in life ends in finding purpose in God.
- Ecclesiastes 12:13 (ESV) The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.
- Ecclesiastes 12:14 (ESV) For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.
8. Application:
- a. The value of the book of Ecclesiastes is the consideration of experiences and thoughts that to a greater or lesser degree we all wrestle with.
  - b. The value of the book of Ecclesiastes is dependant upon our ability to learn from the mistakes and insights of others.
  - c. The value of the book of Ecclesiastes is to see where our thoughts left unchecked may lead.
  - d. The value of the book of Ecclesiastes is in helping us to identify the source of frustrations with various aspects of life.

- e. The value of the book of Ecclesiastes is in providing us with a different perspective in viewing our frustrations.
- f. The value of the book of Ecclesiastes is in understanding the repetitive nature of life.

9. Takeaway

- a. Wisdom and/or knowledge alone is no guarantee of spiritual faithfulness. One must guard one's heart.
- b. There is much in life that can easily distract us from keeping God clearly in view.