

Introduction to Ecclesiastes *

Author

Anonymous, although traditional Jewish and Christian scholarship ascribe authorship to Solomon.

Pros for Solomon:

- (1) "son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:10); (2) "great wisdom" and prosperous reign (1:16; 2:1-9)

Cons against Solomon:

- (1) "son of David" can be any Davidic descendant; (2) Hebrew language used is much later than Solomon's 10th century; (3) many kings have preceded him (1:16; 2:7,9), but only David was before him; (4) injustice and oppression during Solomon's reign? (3:16-17; 4:1-3); (5) firsthand foolishness (4:13-16) and abuse of power (8:2-9) by kings

Title

Comes from the the Latin Vulgate heading, *Liber Ecclesiastes*.

Qoheleth: writer calls himself this word, translated as *ekklēsiastēs* in the Greek Septuagint. *qoheleth* related to the Hebrew word *qahal*, which means assembly. So it is the title of one who leads or addresses the assembly of the people. Hence, the writer is often called "Preacher" or "Teacher."

Date

Unknown. If Solomon is author, about 1000 B.C. Some say during or after the exile, 6th-5th cent. B.C.

Main Theme and Key Themes

Main Theme: "the necessity of fearing God in a fallen ... world."

Key Themes:

1. The tragic reality of the fall. "subjected to futility" (Rom 8:20), *mataiotes*, is used 38 times in the Greek LXX of Ecclesiastes for "vanity" (Heb. *hebel*). The fall has disastrous effects.

2. The "vanity" of life "under the sun." Begins and ends with "*Vanity of vanities! All is vanity*" (1:2; 12:8). The Hebrew *hebel* is difficult to translate. Literally means "vapor" or "breeze" so something very fleeting, disappearing very quickly. It could mean fleeting pleasures of life (1 Cor 7:31); an expression of frustration, anger, or sorrow; something hard to understand in life (1:14-15). "*Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless*" (NIV). "**under the sun**" used 29 times. Elsewhere: "*under heaven*," "*on earth*."

3. Sin and death. The writer knows well the reality of sin and its effects (7:20; 2:14-17).

4. The joy and frustration of work. The writer knows well both the value and pain of toil. (2:10, 24; 2:18-23).

5. The grateful enjoyment of God's good gifts. The beauty of creation (3:11), the pleasures of relationships, food and drink, and fulfilling work (2:24-26; 3:12-13; 5:18-20; 7:14; 8:15; 9:7,9).

6. The fear of God. Since "all is vanity" should drive people to the "fear" of God (3:14; 5:7; 12:13-14).

Conclusions: (1) Not all is meaningless and hopeless. "*The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man*" (12:13). (2) There is a day of judgment: *For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.*

In the Context of Salvation History

Believers who fear God also trust that God will fulfill his sovereign plan, because no one knows his decrees. By "fearing God and keeping his commandments" (12:13), he can be part of God's will.

Analogies between the Preacher and Jesus Christ:

- (1) the "Son of David" (Matt. 1:1)
- (2) king (Matt. 2:2; Acts 17:7; Rev. 17:14; 19:16)
- (3) "wisdom from God" (1 Cor. 1:24, 30)
- (4) "one Shepherd" (Ezek. 34:23; 37:24; John 10:11, 16)
- (5) Christ was "something greater than Solomon" (if author was Solomon) (Luke 11:31)

* Sources:

Crossway Bibles, *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).

J.V. Fesko, *Where Wisdom is Found: Christ in Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage, 2010)

Tremper Longman III, *The Book of Ecclesiastes*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998)