

## I. Ecclesiastes

- a. Purpose: In this session we want to survey the book of Ecclesiastes by discussing the title, authorship, purpose and structure of the book of Ecclesiastes in addition to a closer look at the book and how it relates the rest of the Bible.
- b. Title
  - i. How we got our English title "Ecclesiastes" is from the Greek translation of the Bible (Septuagint) title of the book using *Ekklēsiastēs*, which is derived from *ekklēsia*, "assembly, congregation, church."<sup>1</sup>
  - ii. *Ekklēsiastēs* is a Greek attempt to capture the Hebrew *Qoheleth*, a term that occurs only in Ecclesiastes (1:1-2, 1:12, 7:27; 12:8-10).<sup>2</sup>
  - iii. *Qoheleth* root meaning "to assemble," and may have the idea of "preacher."
- c. Authorship
  - i. Some commentators doubt the author is Solomon.
  - ii. Why we think it is Solomon (5 Reasons)
    1. Reason #1: The introduction: "*The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.*" (Solomon 1:1)
      - a. The content of the words is from "*the son of David*"
      - b. This son was also a "*king in Jerusalem*"
      - c. While there are many descendants of David there's further additional reason to see this is Solomon.
    2. Reason #2: The writer's great wisdom: "*I said to myself, "Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge"* (Solomon 1:16)
      - a. Note the writer saying he has "*magnified and increased wisdom*"
      - b. He compares his wisdom as being greater than others: "*more than all who were over Jerusalem before me*"
      - c. And again he said "*and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge*"
      - d. This matches the incomparable wisdom of Solomon that God gave him according to 1 Kings 4:29-34.
    3. Reason #3: The writer's great riches: "*I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. 8 Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines. 9 Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me. 10 All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my*

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Rooker, "The Book of Ecclesiastes" in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, B&H Publishing), Kindle Locations 18697-18699.

<sup>2</sup> Mark Rooker, "The Book of Ecclesiastes" in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, B&H Publishing), Kindle Locations 18694-18695.

*heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor.” (Solomon 2:7-10)*

- a. Solomon’s activities here include:
  - i. Purchasing slaves (v.7a)
  - ii. Possessing large flocks and herds (v.7b)
  - iii. Possessing precious metals and treasures (v.8a)
  - iv. Able to provide entertainers: singers and concubines (v.8b)
  - v. Anything he wanted he did not hold back from acquiring which presupposes a lot of wealth (v.10)
- b. This accumulation of wealth was greater than others; note the phrases of comparison:
  - i. *“than all who preceded me in Jerusalem.” (v.7b)*
  - ii. *“Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem” (v.9a)*
- c. This matches the incomparable wealth of Solomon that God gave him according to **2 Chronicles 1:12b**: *“And I will give you riches and wealth and honor, such as none of the kings who were before you has possessed nor those who will come after you.”*

4. Reason #4: The writer’s great building projects: *“I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself; 5 I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees; 6 I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees.” (Solomon 2:4-6)*

- a. This would presuppose the great wealth mentioned in reason number 3 of why we believe this is Solomon.
- b. This matches the long amount of time took to build his house according to **2 Chronicles 1:12b**: *“Now Solomon was building his own house thirteen years, and he finished all his house.”*

5. Reason #5: The writer’s grievous pursuit of pleasure: *“I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.” And behold, it too was futility. 2 I said of laughter, “It is madness,” and of pleasure, “What does it accomplish?” 3 I explored with my mind how to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding me wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives.” (Solomon 2:1-3)*

- a. Again this would presuppose the great wealth mentioned in reason number 3 of why we believe this is Solomon.
- b. This matches the way that Solomon strayed from obedience to God by pursuing women according to **2 Kings 11:1-8**.

d. Purpose

- i. For many readers the first time reading Ecclesiastes can seem confusing if not even contradicting the rest of God’s Word. Thus the purpose of the book can be hard to discern.
- ii. What helps to discern the purpose of the book is to look at what repeats often in the book.
  1. “*fear of the Lord*”
    - a. Seven times the phrase “*fear of the Lord*” appears: **Ecclesiastes 3:14, 5:7, 7:18, 8:12, 8:13, 12:13.**<sup>3</sup>
    - b. Thus we shouldn’t see this book is about being cynical, fatalistic, nihilistic, etc.
  2. “*hebel*”
    - a. This Hebrew word appears 38 times in the book.
    - b. This is more than half of the total occurrences of the word in the Old Testament.<sup>4</sup>
    - c. Literally the word means “breath” or “vapor.”
    - d. “The meaning of “transitory” or “unable to be controlled” seem to be the most dominant nuance (**1:15; 2:11, 17, 26; 4:4, 16; 6:9**).”<sup>5</sup>
- iii. What also helps to discern the purpose of the book is to consider the conclusion of the book: “*The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. 14 For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.*” (**Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**)
  1. Note again the theme of the fear of the Lord.
  2. This interpretation of life also considers God’s judgment which shapes all that one do in life.
- iv. In light of the recurring theme of the fear of the Lord and this being the climatic conclusion the best way we understand the focus of “*hebel*” is that this book surveys the various pursuit of life without God is ultimately something one cannot control, have for long or is meaningful.
- v. What others say
  1. According to Richard Mayhue **Proverbs** is about “Life Lived Apart from God Is Futile Emptiness.”<sup>6</sup>
  2. According to Mark Rooker: “The author encourages his readers to exercise faith in God as the only possible basis for meaning and significance in a life lived under the sun. Life without God has no meaning.”<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Walter Kaiser, *The Promise-Plan of God* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 138.

<sup>4</sup> Mark Rooker, “The Book of Ecclesiastes” in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, B&H Publishing), Kindle Location 18737.

<sup>5</sup> Mark Rooker, “The Book of Ecclesiastes” in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, B&H Publishing), Kindle Locations 18740-18741.

<sup>6</sup> Richard Mayhue, *Ordination Practicum Syllabus* (Sun Valley, California: Self-Published for The Master’s Seminary), 73.

<sup>7</sup> Mark Rooker, “The Book of Proverbs” in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, B&H Publishing), Kindle Locations 18744-18645.

3. According to John Walton: “The message of Ecclesiastes is that the course of life to be pursued is a God-centered life. The pleasures of life are not intrinsically fulfilling and cannot offer lasting satisfaction, but they can be enjoyed as gifts from God.”<sup>8</sup>
- e. Structure
- i. Mayhue’s outline<sup>9</sup>
    1. The Problem that "All is Vanity" (1:1-11)
      - a. Introduction of Vanity (1:1-3)
      - b. Illustration of Vanity (1:4-11)
    2. The Proof that "All is Vanity" (1:12-6)
      - a. Proof from Experience (1:12-2)
      - b. Proof from Observation (3-6)
    3. The Prescription for Living with Vanity (7-12)
      - a. Coping in a wicked world (7-9)
      - b. Counsel for the Uncertainties of Life (10-12:8)
      - c. Conclusion (12:9-14)
  - ii. A four part outline<sup>10</sup>
    1. Superscription (1:1)
    2. Theme (1:2-11)
    3. Quest for the Meaning of Life (1:12-6:9)
      - a. Everything Is Temporary (1:12-4:16)
      - b. Coping with Uncertainty (5:1-6:9)
    4. Wisdom Admonitions (6:10-12:8)
      - a. Earthly Goods Do Not Satisfy (6:10-8:17)
      - b. God Will Deal with Injustices (9:1-12:8)
    5. Epilogues (12:9-14)
- f. Closer Look at Ecclesiastes
- i. We interpret the details in light of the purpose of the book.
  - ii. What does not bring meaning in life? The following when it is without God:
    1. Carnal pleasure (2:1-11)
    2. Wisdom and toil (2:12-27)
    3. Wealth (2:18-26)
    4. Toil and time (3:1-4:6)
    5. Friendship (4:7-16)
  - iii. LEFT OFF
  - iv. “A” (A)
  - v. “A” (A)

<sup>8</sup> John Walton, “Ecclesiastes” in *A Survey of the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan), 460.

<sup>9</sup> Richard Mayhue, *Ordination Practicum Syllabus* (Sun Valley, California: Self-Published for The Master’s Seminary), 73.

<sup>10</sup> Mark Rooker, “The Book of Proverbs” in *The World and the Word: An Introduction to the Old Testament* (Nashville, B&H Publishing), Kindle Locations 18776-18783.

