

NAME

The Hebrew: קהלת (koheleth) means “master of assemblies” or one who addresses an assembly. The English title comes from the Latin form of the LXX title ἐκκλησιαστής (ekklesiastes), meaning “preacher.” The idea is of an assembler or convener - a person who gather people together for the purpose of instruction.

AUTHOR

The Talmud says it was one of the books coming from the college of scribes of Hezekiah.

Mitchell and WCBS Notes:

Since Luther denied Solomonic authorship, most scholars (including conservative) have denied it also. The reasons given: 1) historic conditions described in the book; 2) the post-exilic style; and 3) the late character of the language.

Most commentators, however, recognize the figure described as being Solomon, but see him impersonated by a later author (perhaps in the time of Malachi - after the return).

Indications of Solomonic authorship: 1) initial superscription strongly suggests it (1:1,12); 2) the book assumes Solomonic autobiographical form; and 3) Jewish traditions ascribe it to Solomon.

Certainly no more qualified person than Solomon could be found to write such a book as this. Solomon had wisdom, wealth, and power. He had everything this world had to offer and could run the gamut of experimentation. There is nothing he couldn't buy and nothing he couldn't do. A poor person could never carry out the extensive investigations described in this book. It is partially biographical or autobiographical - whether of Solomon or impersonating him.

Canonicity is not affected either way any more than with other anonymous books such as Joshua, etc. Few books, however, have been so assailed by the critics as to canonicity. The agnostic strains have drawn fire. This follows from failure to perceive the purpose of the book in presenting the musings of man “*under the sun.*”

DATE

Solomon possibly wrote this in his period of backsliding after his pagan wives had led him astray. (970 to 930 B.C.)

THEME

Type of Literature: Poetry

WCBS Notes:

The literary character is partly poetry and partly prose. The presentation is that of a sermon (as from a preacher). It has a text, and introduction, a thesis, a development of the thesis, a conclusion, and the application.

Halley page 43: “*Vanity of Earthly Life*”

Mitchell: *"The futile thinking and living of the natural man."*

The writer searches for the ultimate meaning in life apart from Divine revelation (cf. 1 Corinthians 2:14) - *"Under the sun"* (used 29 times). From the perspective of the natural man he discovers that *"all is vanity and vexation of spirit"* (37 times in the book). This book is designed to show the complete emptiness of life apart from God and His purposes. Today the skeptic says, *"There is no God."* This book reveals the inevitable consequences of such thinking. The viewpoint moves from the futility of man under the sun to the responsibility of man to look to God for direction and ultimate meaning in His law.

WCBS Notes:

The viewpoint of key thought is significant to interpretation. It presents the search of the natural man "under the sun" for ultimate meaning in life apart from divine revelation and final judgment. The viewpoint moves from the futility of man under the sun to the responsibility of man to look to God for direction and ultimate meaning in His law.

The purpose of the writer is to present a scientific and philosophic display of the inadequacy and dissatisfaction of man in life without God. He runs the gamut of man's search for the satisfaction of the deepest and truest longings of the human heart. The presentation shows the inability of human wisdom and the necessity of faith in God and submission to His law.

In Job, God showed Job, a seemingly righteous man, that his righteousness did not commend him to God. In Ecclesiastes God showed Solomon, the wisest of men, that his wisdom could not bring him to God.

The futility of seeking meaning in life without God and the satisfaction of living life with God. Nothing except the eternal God satisfies - nothing in life even comes close.

Key Word (Nelson's): Vanity - The word vanity appears 37 times to express the many things that cannot be understood about life. All earthly goals and ambitions lead to dissatisfaction and frustration when pursued as ends in themselves apart from God.

Key Verses (Nelson's):

"There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, from the hand of God" (Ecclesiastes 2:24)

"My son, beware of anything beyond these. Of making many books there is no end, and much study is wariness of the flesh. The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man" (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14).

Key Chapter (Nelson's): 12 - Only when the Preacher views his life from God's perspective "above the sun" does it take on meaning as a precious gift *"from the hand of God"* (Ecclesiastes 2:24). Chapter 12 resolves the book's extensive inquiry into the meaning of life with the single conclusion, *"Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man"* (Ecclesiastes 12:13).

Outline:

- I. The Problem (the prologue) 1:1-3
 - The preacher's identity
 - The preacher's thesis: "Life is empty" or futile
 - Point: Life defies rational explanation by human logic
 - Purpose: To emphasize the futility of life without God and the felicity of life with God

- II. The Futility of Seeking Meaning in Life Without God 1:4-6:12
 1. The futility of natural wisdom 1:4-18
 2. The futility of pleasure and passions 2:1-11
 3. The futility of general success in life 2:12-26
 4. The inscrutability of life 3
 5. The seeming injustices of life 4
 6. The futility of vain religion 5
 - Riches however, do have a proper place 5:18-20

 7. The futility of the "*man who has everything*" 6

- III. The Satisfaction of Living Unto God 7-12
 1. Build good character in view of God's sovereignty 7
 2. Be a good citizen in view of God's sovereignty 8
 3. View life and death in view of God's sovereignty 9 - life has a grave plot
 4. Pursue wisdom in view of God's sovereignty 10
 5. Pursue daily life in view of God's sovereignty 11:1-8
 6. Live life joyfully in view of God's sovereignty 11:9-12:14

RECIPIENTS

God's people - specifically the Hebrews...and us.

Mitchell:

It is almost frightening to realize that this book has been a favorite of atheists, agnostics, heretics, and cultists (not to mention The Birds). They have quoted it profusely. It is of the utmost urgency, therefore, to understand the purpose of this book.

CONTRIBUTION TO CANON

Mitchell:

That Ecclesiastes is the book of the natural man is why the covenant name "Lord" (Jehovah/ Yahweh) is never used in the book. Only Elohim (God) as creator (cf. Genesis 1:1) is in the view of the writer. Hence the writer is limited to natural revelation (cf. the clause, "*I communed with my own heart,*" occurring as it does seven times). Man's wisdom, apart from God, must inevitably reach the conclusions of this book. God uses this book to demonstrate the complete bankruptcy of the unaided human philosophy apart from Divine revelation. Thus we will not be surprised to find statements which apparently contradict the remainder of Scriptures.

RESOURCES

Gromacki, Robert C. *New Testament Survey*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Baker Book House, 1978

Halley, Henry H. *Halley's Bible Handbook*, Grand Rapids, Michigan; Zondervan Publishing House

Horton, David, General Editor. *The Portable Seminary*, Grand Rapids, Michigan, Bethany House Publishers, 2006

Nelson's Quick Reference - Bible Maps And Charts, Nashville, Tennessee; Thomas Nelson, Inc., 1994

As general resources I've relied on my class notes from various professors at Biola University (especially those of Dr. Curtis Mitchell), Western Conservative Baptist Seminary, and Talbot Seminary as well as notes shared with me by Annie Kartoizian.

Additional reference material has come from the study Bibles of the English Standard Version, New American Standard Version, and The New Living Translation.

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