

An Introduction to Ecclesiastes

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Introduction:

- I. Mission statement (“bottom line up front”)
 - A. In the past several years the self-improvement industry has grown immensely
 1. We see as a result of the self-improvement/time/life management movement a tremendous change in our national vernacular
 2. New words and phrases creep into our vocabulary. Words like: synergy, thinking outside of the box, purpose statement, sharpening the saw and mission statement
 3. The mission statement is a concept borrowed from military planners who deal with military operations in terms of who, what, when, where and why
 - a. The purpose of these statements is to provide subordinates with a clear vision of the purpose of a mission and it’s end state
 4. I want to attempt to provide the same type of study for Ecclesiastes
 - a. What is the purpose of the book; what is its mission?
 5. We will discuss the who, what, when, where and why of the book of Ecclesiastes
 - B. Theme
 1. One of the characteristics of God’s word that has always served to build my faith is that of the timeless nature of it’s teachings
 - a. What an awesome God to inspire men to write messages that apply specifically to a particular people and yet lose absolutely nothing on an audience 3,000 years later in a cultural environment that is completely foreign to the audience to which it was written
 - b. No other document in the history of civilization provides the timeless nature that God’s word does
 - c. Ecclesiastes is such a message
 - 1) It was written for a specific audience at a specific time and yet holds as much application to us as it did to them
 2. The writer contrasts a life with the knowledge of God and His nature to a life set apart from God. The difference in a life that is centered on self (wealth, prestige, knowledge, fleshly pleasures) and a life that is God-centered
 3. The empty futility of attempting to live life apart from the counsel and wisdom of God
 4. In short I see this as the mission of the book
 - a. To present to the reader that all efforts and measures to find happiness or more importantly meaning and purpose in the difficulty of life apart from God is a waste of time and effort
 - b. It provides the reader with the benefit of the wisdom and experience of an older man who has attempted to find meaning in meaningless things and concludes that these things set apart from walking with God are fruitless
 - C. Key word:

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1. “Vanity” (*hebel*)
 - a. *Hebel*; breath or vapor
 - b. Otherwise translated as futility and meaningless
 2. The word, used 37 times in the text (NKJV), clearly stands out as the key word of the book
 - a. Used more often in this book than any other book of the Bible
 3. The key word is consistent with the theme of something that is fleeting and brings no substantive meaning to life
 - a. Living life apart from the knowledge of God and His plan for us is indeed grasping for the wind
- II. The uniqueness of the book
- D. If for no other reason the book stands out amongst the remainder of the Bible as unique
 1. It is a book when compared to the books of law, history, prophecy and even other wisdom texts
 - a. There are arguments made for Song of Solomon serving as an allegory for the love of God for Israel and Christ for His church
 2. It is enigmatic throughout its pages to the point that many scholars have attributed some critical words to the book as well as the writer:
 - a. Of the book:
 - 1) The most dangerous book in the Bible
 - 2) The strangest book in the Bible
 - 3) Contradictory
 - 4) Even questioning the Divine revelation of the book and causing some to question it’s canonicity
 - b. Of the writer:
 - 1) A rationalist, an agnostic, a skeptic, a pessimist and a fatalist
 - E. Yet the book is also very practical in nature
 1. There are numerous principles throughout the book that apply to daily practical matters
 - a. Subjects that he deals with
 - 1) Work ethic
 - 2) Seeking God’s favor and principles early in life
 - a) Compared to the mistakes of the writer
 - 3) The inevitability of certain events
 - 4) Life lived in moderation
 - 5) A God-centered world view
- III. It’s place in the Bible
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- F. It's traditional arrangement in the English Bible is among the wisdom or poetry literature (Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon)
 - G. It's traditional arrangement in the Hebrew Old Testament and Septuagint is within the "Writings" which includes the
 - 1. Poetical books (Psalms, Proverbs, Job)
 - 2. Five Rolls [Megilloth] (Song of Solomon, Ruth, Lamentations, Esther, **Ecclesiastes**)
 - 3. Historical books (Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, Chronicles)
 - H. Canonicity of the book
 - 1. As a result of the books unorthodox nature, seemingly pessimistic tone and enigmatic themes it's canonization was questioned
 - 2. Archeological evidence confirm that the book shared some status as of the 2nd century BC
 - a. Portions of the book were found at Qumran
 - 3. The Jewish schools of Hillel and Shammai were in disagreement about the canonicity of the book
 - a. They disagreed as to whether the book "defiled the hands" indicating that the book was divinely inspired and thus required the ritualistic washing of the hands prior to handling and reading
 - b. Hillel favored the inclusion of Ecclesiastes in the Old Testament text
 - c. Shammai did not favor it's inclusion
 - 1) His opposition was primarily founded on seemingly contradictory passages within the book (8:15 cf. 2:2; 7:3)
 - 4. Certainly the fact that Solomon wrote the book helped in it's acceptance
 - 5. The inclusion of the book was again debated in the 4th century Latin translation by Jerome and again it was accepted
 - 6. Although it is never quoted in the New Testament (the same is true of Joshua, 2 Kings, Lamentations, Obadiah, Nahum and Zephaniah) Paul may have alluded to it's theme in Rom. 8:20, "For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of Him who subjected it in hope;"
- IV. Significance of the title
- I. The evolution of the title
 - 1. Hebrew
 - a. The Hebrew title *Qohelet* is a rarely used term in the Hebrew language
 - b. It is found only in this book, although other words derived from the root word *qahal* are found on a few other occasions within the Old Testament
 - c. It's meaning is "to convoke an assembly, to assemble"
 - d. More on the Hebrew meaning of the word later in the discussion
 - 2. Greek
 - a. The Hebrew title *Qohelet* was translated into the Septuagint as *Ekklesiastes*
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- 1) Derived from the root word *ekklesia*
 - a) “Assembly”
 - b) “Church”
 - c) “Congregation”
 - 2) It simply means “the Preacher”
3. Latin
- a. The Greek title *Ekklesiastes* is further translated to Latin as *Ecclesiastes*
 - 1) It means “speaker before an assembly”
 - 2) Preacher
- J. He is a gatherer of God’s people

Body:

I. Unity

- K. The traditional analysis of the book of Ecclesiastes was always that there was a single author and generally he was accepted as Solomon (more in “Authorship”)
1. In the late 19th and early 20th century some scholars began to question the single authorship of Ecclesiastes
 - a. There are two primary reasons:
 - 1) The literary form of the book (see below “Literary Forms”)
 - 2) The seeming contradictions in the statements of the book, i.e., “all is vanity” (when discussing wealth and hard work) and “Here is what I have seen: It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage.” (Eccl 5:18)
 - b. One reason seems to support the other. The general idea is that the contrasting statements of the text demand that it is categorized as another literary form rather than just wisdom literature of a single writer
- L. There are several multiple authors theories
1. *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* suggests the following:
 - a. The simplest postulates 3 separate writers
 - 1) Qohelet, a pessimist in regard to the view of the relationship between man and God
 - 2) An orthodox “editor” most assuredly belonging to the *Hasidim* (“the holy ones” – predecessors of the Pharisees)
 - a) He brings a more orthodox Jewish view (contradiction) to the book
 - 3) Still another sage (*hakam*, “wise man) incorporated a series of traditional proverbs
 2. Others (Fox) postulate 2 writers:

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- a. Qohelet, again observed as a pessimist in his view of the world and man's relationship with God
 - b. A narrator of sorts who begins and ends the book
 - 1) This theory suggests that the prologue (1:1-1:11) and the epilogue (12:8:12:14) are structurally different than the body and therefore are composed by another
 - 2) More on this in "Authorship" and "Literary Forms"
 - 3. There are commentators who agree with a unified view of the authorship of Ecclesiastes
 - a. Franz Delitzsch supports a single author with the possible exception of the closing comments
 - b. "Gordis, for example, believes that the alleged differences do not need the explanation of different authors: 'Reared in the bosom of Jewish tradition and seeking the express in Hebrew a unique philosophic world-view possessing strong overtones of skepticism, Koheleth falls back upon the only abstract vocabulary he knows, that of traditional religion, which he uses in his own special manner.'"
 - M. There is unity in the book. Qoheleth poses many troubling questions and raises some of the same argumentation and questions that the reader does. He simply looks at the questions of life from many different angles.

II. Authorship

N. Identification of Qoheleth

1. Who was the "Preacher" and was he a preacher in the same context and capacity that we understand?
 - a. Is it possible that we associate Qohelet to a "church" because of the relationship to the Greek word *ekklesia*?
 - b. Many scholars agree that the "preacher" is not the same idea of a preacher that we understand today
 - c. Some suggest that a more appropriate idea may have been more a wise, scholarly teacher or sage (12:8) addressing a classroom of students rather than a preacher addressing a congregation
2. Qohelet is most assuredly a title rather than a proper name
 - a. It speaks to what the man does and not who he is
3. The etymology and other uses of the word may shed some light on this subject
 - a. The Hebrew Qohelet (*qoheleth* or *Koheleth*) is a derived form of the verb *qahal* (to gather or assemble)
 - 1) The form of this word is an active participle
 - 2) Used often as a noun (one who assembles)
 - 3) The gender of the word is feminine
 - a) Qohelet was not a woman
 - b) There is general agreement that the word belongs to a special class of words denoting particular functions and/or professions and in Hebrew

such abstract nouns are used for titles to eventually evolve into personal names

- c) Other biblical examples:
- 1] The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai, the sons of Sophereth, the sons of Peruda, (Ezra 2:55)
 - a] Cophereth (OT: 5618) (so-feh'-reth); **feminine active participle** of OT:5608; a **scribe** (properly, female); Sophereth, a temple servant:
 - 2] The sons of Solomon's servants: the sons of Sotai, the sons of Sophereth, the sons of Perida, (Neh. 7:57)
- d) This same evolution of professions/functions evolving to proper and family names exists in English as well (Scribner, Penman, Butcher, Taylor, Etc.)
- b. 1 Kings 8 uses the verbal root *qhl* quite often in reference to Solomon speaking to the assembled Israelites on the occasion of the Temple dedication
- 1) ¹Now Solomon **assembled** the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the chief fathers of the children of Israel, to King Solomon in Jerusalem, that they might bring up the ark of the covenant of the LORD from the City of David, which is Zion. ² Therefore all the men of Israel **assembled** with King Solomon at the feast in the month of Ethanim, which is the seventh month. (1 Kings 8:1-2)
 - 2) Then the king turned around and blessed the whole assembly of Israel, while all the **assembly** of Israel was standing. (1 Kings 8:14)
 - 3) Then Solomon stood before the altar of the LORD in the presence of all the **assembly** of Israel, and spread out his hands toward heaven; (1 Kings 8:22)
 - 4) Then he stood and blessed all the **assembly** of Israel with a loud voice, saying: (1 Kings 8:55)
 - 5) Other uses (Ex 32:1; 35:1; Lev 8:3, 4; Num 1:18; 8:9; 10:7; 16:3, 19, 42; 20:2, 8, 10; Deut 4:10; 31:12, 28; Josh 18:1; 22:12; Judg 20:1; 2 Sam 20:14; 1 Chron 13:5; 15:3; 28:1; 2 Chron 5:2, 3; 11:1; 20:26; Est 8:11; 9:2, 15, 16, 18; Job 11:10; Jer 26:9; Ezek 38:7; 38:13)
 - 6) This connection of Solomon as one who convokes an assembly may provide some evidence of the Solomonic authorship of the book (more on this topic later)
- c. Some interpreters suggest that Qohelet (assembler) was so called because he served as an "assembler" of wisdom literature (editor, publisher, collector)
- 1) The problem with this possibility is that the verb *qahal* is used only of assembling people never things
 - a) As in an "assembler" of things
4. The two great debates that exist among scholars in regard to the book of Ecclesiastes is that of authorship and timing
- a. Who is the preacher?

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- 1) And was he the only writer or a writer at all
 - b. Most scholars are more than skeptical of Solomon as the writer of the book
 - c. When did he write this book?
- O. Arguments against Solomonic authorship:
1. Most of the arguments against Solomon's authorship are connected to the possible date of the book based on linguistic arguments discussed below ("Date")
 2. Historical books demonstrate that Solomon apparently goes to the grave in his apostate condition as a result of his liaisons with his idolatrous foreign wives
 - a. This could not be a penitent treatise on the part of Solomon, as is traditionally believed because of the apostasy that plagued him in his later years (1 Kings 11:4)
 3. The statements in regard to the injustice found in government (3:16; 10:16-20)
 - a. If he was the king and he witnessed the injustice of the government why did he not take action?
 - 1) Many people, kings included, fail to take action on issues that they recognize intellectually
 - 2) Clearly Solomon was hard on the people
 - a) Solomon was a national taskmaster in regard to construction
 - 1] 7 years on the Temple (1 Kings 6:38)
 - 2] 13 years on his palace (1 Kings 7:1)
 - 3) His son Rehoboam failed to learn the lesson that the wise elders had learned under his father's administration
 - a) His father was known for his construction projects and the toll that it took on the nation (1 Kings 12:4)
 - b) He heard the advice of the older men who were a part of his father's administration (1 Kings 12:6-7)
 - c) He rejected the advice of the elders, to lighten the work load and accepted the counsel of the young men to increase it (1 Kings 12:7-9)
 - b. Could it be that the statements of the Preacher in regard to governmental injustice could apply to his son, his successors or even to the captors of the people in the future?
- P. Arguments for Solomonic authorship
1. The traditional view of the writings of Solomon:
 - a. The Song of Solomon was written as a young adult
 - b. Proverbs was written in the time period at the middle of his life
 - c. Ecclesiastes was written by a penitent Solomon at the end of his life in retrospect of his life's experiences and the apostasy of 1 Kings 11:1-13
 2. Internal evidences
 - a. Title of the writer (1:1)
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- 1) The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. (Eccl. 1:1, NKJV)
 - 2) The writer describes himself as:
 - a) The son of David
 - 1] Certainly David had several sons
 - a] 19 named sons by various wives
 - b] Unknown number of unnamed sons and daughters by various wives and concubines (2 Sam. 5:13)
 - 2] Solomon was the son of David and Bathsheba following the loss of their son as the result of their adulterous affair (2 Sam. 12:24)
 - b) King in Jerusalem
 - 1] Solomon is the third and final king of the united Israel
 - 2] No other king of Israel carries the name Solomon and no other son of David sits on the throne of Israel although many of his grandsons, great-grandsons, etc become kings over the southern nation of Judah
 - a] There are no scholars (that I am aware of) that suggest that Qohelet is actually a later king of Judah and a distant relative of David
 - c) The proper name “Solomon” is not invoked as it is in the opening of the book of Proverbs:
 - 1] The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel: (Prov. 1:1, NKJV)
 - b. He records the same title in 1:12:
 - 1) I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. (Eccl. 1:12, NKJV)
 - 2) What is immediately obvious is the past tense “was” in this title
 - a) Yet Solomon never abdicated his throne but rather died while in power (1 Kings 11:42-43; 2 Chron. 9:30-31)
 - c. His self-description further supports a Solomonic authorship in the description of his wealth and wisdom
 - 1) Wealth, power and prestige:
 - a) So I became great and excelled more than all who were before me in Jerusalem. Also my wisdom remained with me. (Eccl. 2:9, NKJV)
 - b) Solomon is recorded elsewhere as the wealthiest of men in Israel (1 Kings 10:14-29 specifically 1 Kings 10:23)
 - 2) Wisdom:
 - a) I communed with my heart, saying, “Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge.”(Eccl. 1:16, NKJV)
 - b) One of Solomon’s many identifying characteristics was his wisdom
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- 1] He asks for the wisdom to effectively rule God's people (1 Kings 3:9)
- c) In effect Solomon has become synonymous with wisdom and wealth
- d. Many other uses of the root *qahal* are connected with Solomon in his dedication of the Temple in 1 Kings 8 (see above)
3. "The tradition of David as singer and psalmist is borne out by an early reference at Amos 6:5 and is taken seriously in the light of the lament for Saul and Jonathan (2 Sam. 1:17-27). We ought to take Solomon's reputation for wisdom equally seriously and see his court as the center that drew wise men from all quarters to discuss problems of living in a difficult world (1 Kings 4:34)." (*The Expositors Bible Commentary*)

III. Date

Q. Early (1000 BC) vs. late (3rd-4th century BC)

1. The traditional date of the writing of Ecclesiastes is placed at the end of the reign of Solomon
 - a. This dating is obviously based on the traditional view that Solomon is indeed the writer of the book
 - b. This places the writing of the book somewhere around 930 BC
2. There is another theory:
 - a. Many scholars for many years have theorized that the book was written much later than the time period of the reign of Solomon
 - b. Most of this evidence is based on linguistics
 - c. Certainly the writing of the book can be no later than the writing of the Septuagint (300-200 BC) as the book was obviously included
3. Primary evidence for a date later than Solomon's reign
 - a. The book features some linguistic characteristics that are more in keeping with later Hebrew dialects influenced by the Aramaic language
 - 1) Obviously the effects of the Aramaic language suggests a later date than that of the 9th century BC
 - b. Language
 - 1) Persian
 - a) There are two examples of Persian-influenced words used in the text of Ecclesiastes
 - 1] I made myself gardens (*uwpardeecyim*) and orchards, and I planted all kinds of fruit trees in them. (Eccl 2:5)
 - 2] Because the sentence (*pitgam*) against an evil work is not executed speedily, therefore the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil. (Eccl 8:11)
 - b) Scholars suggest that the use of these words strongly suggests a composition date after the rise of Persia to world dominance toward the end of the 6th century BC

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- c) There is a possibility that although Persia did not rise to a position of world power until the 6th century BC that it did have regional influence that may account for linguistic influence earlier than the 6th century BC
 - 2) Aramaic
 - a) The record of the Aramaic language on the Old Testament is found in the pre-exile reign of King Hezekiah (716-687 BC)
 - 1] Then Eliakim the son of Hilkiah, Shebna, and Joah said to the Rabshakeh, "Please speak to your servants in Aramaic, (*'araamyth*) for we understand it; and do not speak to us in Hebrew in the hearing of the people who are on the wall." (2 Kings 18:26)
 - 2] This passage demonstrates that it was not a language yet understood by the Jews
 - b) Other Old Testament passages include Aramaic language or Aramaic similarities:
 - 1] Jer. 10:11
 - 2] Dan. 2:4-7:28
 - 3] Ezra 4:8-6:18; 7:12-26
 - 4] Some sources even cite Aramaic similarities as early as Gen. 31:47
 - c) There are a total of 42 Aramaisms in the text
 - R. Most scholars date the book in the time between the late post-exilic and the pre-Maccabean period
 - 1. Whybray contends for a date in the 3rd or 4th century BC (between the age of classical Hebrew and post-biblical Hebrew)
 - a. This date also allows an appropriate amount of time before the translation to the Septuagint
 - 2. James Crenshaw goes as far as dating the writing of the book to the specific time period between 225-250 BC
 - 3. The primary arguments for dating the book in this period are the language and the style
 - 4. The language is consistent with the transitional language characteristic of the period between classical Hebrew and Mishnaic Hebrew
 - 5. Franz Delitzsch goes as far as to say, "if the book of Koheleth were of Solomonic origin, then there is no history of the Hebrew language."
 - 6. Linguistic updating cannot be ruled out
 - a. Solomon could write the book toward the end of his life and reign as king and the language be updated at a later date
 - 1) Some postulate that the book was uttered by the tongue of Qoheleth (= Solomon) and later transcribed by a Phoenician scribe, thereby explaining both the Aramaisms and the Phoenician influences
 - 7. Gordis sums the date question up in this manner, "written in Hebrew by, a writer who, like all his contemporaries, knew Aramaic and probably used it freely in daily life."
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8. Eaton sums the date question up in this manner, “Our conclusion must be that the language of Ecclesiastes does not at present provide an adequate resource for dating.”

IV. Place of Origin & Destination

S. Place of Origin

1. It is an acceptable assumption that the place of origin for the book was Palestine
 - a. Based on references to:
 - 1) Weather (1:5-7)
 - 2) Anatomy (11:5; 12:1-7)
 - 3) Sacrifices (5:1; 9:2)
2. The writer gives the impression of writing from Jerusalem (1:1, 16)

T. Destination

1. Specifically to the Jewish audience
 - a. If a Solomonic authorship is assumed then clearly the target audience is the Jewish people at the end of Solomon’s reign
 - 1) A people who are at the edge of an extraordinarily difficult period of time (the divided kingdom)
 - 2) They will need the sage wisdom of Solomon in regard to the frustrations that face them as a nation as well as individuals
2. J. Stafford Wright makes the following observations in regard to the general target audience
 - a. “Ecclesiastes was clearly written as a discussion guide for people prepared to think out their response to God’s unseen hand in life as well as history.” (*Reflecting With Solomon*, 167)
 - b. He also suggests that due to the difference in the wisdom literatures (Ecclesiastes and Job are closer in form than the other books of this genre) the audience of Ecclesiastes is much different than that of Proverbs
 - c. He suggests that the Wisdom Writings as a whole have a two-fold scope:
 - 1) First, they set out the timeless rules of life (Proverbs)
 - 2) Society is not ideal and Ecclesiastes reconciles what occurs when the promises of Proverbs seem to be unfulfilled
 - a) The second scope is fulfilled in the writings of Job and Ecclesiastes
 - 3) “Society, however, is not ideal; mankind has a fundamental twist, and there will always be cases where a person finds things happening to him that he cannot reconcile with the promises of Proverbs. He may suffer when he expects the temporal blessings of God, and others who deserve punishment may prosper. This second scope of Wisdom writings is taken up by Job and Ecclesiastes, each in its own way. Job shows the nature of testing and something of Satan’s challenge, but Ecclesiastes explores these things more widely.” (Wright, 167)

V. Literary form

U. Genre

1. Wisdom literature

- a. Ecclesiastes is categorized as wisdom literature and indeed it passes the test as such
- b. The nature of Ecclesiastes is different than other wisdom literature (Psalms, Proverbs, Song of Solomon) and yet it is similar to Job
 - 1) Psalms deals with various topics
 - 2) Proverbs provides us with the most practical instructions in regard to living life each day
 - 3) Song of Solomon is a love story, although argued by many to be allegoric to the love of God for Israel and the love of Christ for His people
 - 4) Job and Ecclesiastes are different in that they deal almost exclusively with what happens when life does not go as we expect or in a manner in which we may feel is “fair”

2. Autobiography

- a. The traditional view of Solomon’s writing:
 - 1) Song of Solomon was written as a young man
 - 2) Proverbs written in middle life
 - 3) Ecclesiastes written at the end of his life
- b. Ecclesiastes is often viewed as an autobiography of an older man as he looks back on his life as that life is fast approaching an end
- c. Some scholars even suggest that it falls into a literary form that we would most closely identify with the historical fiction genre of literature
 - 1) The suggestion that Qohelet is simply a literary persona
 - a) Solomon is the “symbol” of wisdom and therefore the unidentified Qohelet takes on the persona of the king
 - b) Michael Fox takes this position
 - 1] He suggests that Qohelet may be a literary persona and not a real person
 - 2] There is no ancient parallel to this literary form
 - 2) Some scholars hold to the belief that there are structural indications of a second voice, particularly the conclusion of the book (see above)
- d. Tremper Longman suggests that the literary form itself contradicts a Solomonic authorship
 - 1) He suggests that the writer, Qoheleth is not Solomon but the material is presented as the wisdom of Solomon

3. Other Literary styles included in the book

- a. Although generally and correctly labeled a wisdom literature the book shares many other literary characteristics

- 1) Short truth statements (7:1-8; 10:1-3, 8-15)
- 2) Admonition (5:1-4)
- 3) Short story with a moral (4:13-16; 5:13-17; 9:13-16)

VI. Theological considerations

- V. The name of Jehovah is used 47 times by the writer, it is clear that he is not an agnostic or humanist
 1. The use of *Elohim* is used rather than that of *Yahweh*
- W. The writer contrasts two different spiritual states that mankind can find themselves in:
 1. The God fearing (3:14; 5:7; 7:18; 8:12-13; 12:13)
 - a. Righteous (3:17; 7:15-16, 20; 8:14; 9:2)
 - b. Good (9:2)
 - c. Wise (10:2)
 2. Sinners (2:26; 7:26; 8:11; 9:2, 18)
 - a. Wicked (3:17; 7:15; 8:10, 12-14; 9:2)
 - b. Fools (5:4)
 - 1) Not just an adjective to describe someone who is unwise but rather someone who is godless and wicked (Psa. 14:1; 53:1)
- X. The so what?
 1. What is the purpose of the book?
 2. What is the bottom line?
 3. What can we glean from this book that will guide us in our walk with God and in our daily lives?
- Y. The great experiment!
 1. Whether it was intentional or incidental to his life, the Preacher conducted an experiment in an effort to find answers, contentment and purpose “under the sun”
 - a. I don’t believe that the Preacher woke up one day and decided that he would conduct this great experiment but rather that in the course of his life he sought out numerous sources for happiness, contentment and purpose
 - 1) Much as we might today
 - b. Then toward the end of his life he records the conclusions that he has come to as a result of the search for purpose “under the sun”
 2. There was deliberation to his search:
 - a. He set his heart “concerning all that is done under heaven”
 - 1) And **I set my heart** to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. (Eccl 1:13)
 - 2) And **I set my heart** to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind. (Eccl 1:17)

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- b. He wanted to know and he went about his search in a deliberate manner, searching for the answers
3. How did the Preacher go about this experiment?
 - a. I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with **mirth**; therefore enjoy **pleasure**”; but surely, this also was vanity. (Eccl 2:1)
 - b. I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with **wine**, while guiding my heart with **wisdom**, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives. (Eccl 2:3)
 - c. I **made my works great**, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. (Eccl 2:4)
 - d. He sought numerous sources, many of the same sources that mankind still seeks to give them purpose in life
 - 1) Knowledge/wisdom
 - 2) Work, achievement
 - 3) Prestige, power
 - 4) Fleshly pleasure
 4. What were his conclusions?
 - a. Whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I did not withhold my heart from any **pleasure**, for my heart rejoiced in all my **labor**; and this was my reward from all my labor. Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done and on the labor in which I had toiled; and indeed **all was vanity and grasping for the wind. There was no profit under the sun.** (Eccl 2:10-11)
 - b. Pleasure, achievement, power, prestige, wealth, knowledge and wisdom were meaningless and only multiple trouble and sorrow when used in isolation from a relationship with God
 - c. He writes of the frustration that we may all feel from time to time
 - 1) The seeming injustice in the pleasures and wealth of an unrighteous man and the tribulation of a righteous man
 - 2) The inevitability of death for all
 - 3) The powerlessness to truly change many of the events of life
 - 4) Political injustice
 - d. He also writes of how one can find purpose and contentment
 - 1) Moderation
 - a) Eat, drink, rejoice, do good, and find pleasure in your work (2:24; 3:9-15; 5:18-20; 9:9-10)
 - b) Using these things as the primary source of happiness or purpose for our lives is misguided but to be content with such is wise
 - 2) Seek God (12:1, 12-14)
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- a) Anything set apart from a relationship with God and submission to His wisdom, power and plan will serve only as a vain attempt at an understanding of the frustrations of this life
 - b) Many of his admonitions are comparable to Jesus' instructions in the Sermon on the Mount
 - 1] Seeking God and His righteousness as opposed to the physical things of this world (Mt. 6:25-33)
 - 2] Suffering for the cause of righteousness (Mt. 5:10-12)
 - 3) In short the key to success in this discussion is a view of the events of the world around us through the eyes of one who lives a God-centered life

Conclusion:

- I. There are great debates in the halls of academia in regard to the date, authorship and literary forms of this book
 - Z. It is possible to look to the academic to the point that we fail to understand the timeless value of this wonderful book
 - 1. The Preacher writes of the same questions that trouble us 3,000 years later
 - 2. He deals with timeless frustrations and then gives the answers that are only comforting to those who are willing to submit to God
 - AA. In my opinion many scholars tend to rationalize the book to the point that they take away its great value
 - 1. There are many enigmatic questions to life and Solomon ponders these questions and then provides the reader with the solutions to these questions
- II. Let us take the value and the practicality of this book; learn it and apply it to our own lives and then help others to learn and apply as well
 - BB. Solomon's practical advise and his final conclusion apply as much to the 21st century Christian as they did to the 10th century BC Jew:
 - 1. Our life, our duty, our purpose for existence (whole) is to "fear God and keep His commandments"

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