

OT Wisdom Literature (OT6)

The Book of Ecclesiastes

May 29, 2014

Ross Arnold, Spring 2014
Lakeside institute of Theology



OT Wisdom Literature (OT6)

Apr 3 – Introduction to Wisdom Literature

Apr 10 – The Book of Job

Apr 17 – **No Class** (Holy Week)

Apr 24 – The Book of Psalms, Part 1

May 1 – **No Class**

May 8 – **No Class**

May 15 – The Book of Psalms, Part 2

May 22 – The Book of Proverbs

May 29 – The Book of Ecclesiastes

June 5 – The Song of Songs; Final Exam

THE STRUCTURE OF THE OLD TESTAMENT



_____ ()

_____ ()

_____ ()

GENESIS
EXODUS
LEVITICUS
NUMBERS
DEUTERONOMY

JOB
PSALMS
PROVERBS
ECCLESIASTES
SONG OF SOLOMON

ISAIAH
JEREMIAH
LAMENTATIONS
EZEKIEL
DANIEL

JOSHUA
JUDGES
RUTH
1 SAMUEL
2 SAMUEL
1 KINGS
2 KINGS
1 CHRONICLES
2 CHRONICLES
EZRA
NEHEMIAH
ESTHER

Number of books
in the
Old Testament:

Number of books
in the
New Testament:


Number of books
in the Bible:

HOSEA
JOEL
AMOS
OBADIAH
JONAH
MICAH
NAHUM
HABAKKUK
ZEPHANIAH
HAGGAI
ZECHARIAH
MALACHI

Regarding the Book of Ecclesiastes

“Of all that I have seen or learned, that book seems to me to be the noblest, the wisest, and the most powerful expression of man’s life upon this earth – and also the highest flower of poetry, eloquence and truth. ... I could say that Ecclesiastes is the greatest single piece of writing I have ever known, and the wisdom expressed in it the most lasting and profound.”

Thomas Wolfe, American novelist



The Book of Ecclesiastes

- ▶ **Hebrew Title:** *Qoheleth*, or *Koheleth*, meaning “Preacher” or “Teacher.” **Greek Septuagint Title:** *ekklesiastes*, which was transliterated into Latin as *Ecclesiastes*.
- ▶ The author “Koheleth” introduces himself in 1:1:
“The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem.”
- ▶ Though the Book of Ecclesiastes is **technically anonymous**, authorship has traditionally been attributed to Solomon, both because of the introduction in 1:1 and because of the range of activities and experiences described, which would have only been possible by a person of great power and wealth.

The Book of Ecclesiastes

- ▶ **Author**: Unknown, but traditionally Solomon
- ▶ **Date**: c. 970 BC - 931 BC
- ▶ **Theme**: The emptiness of life without God.
- ▶ **Purpose**: To show that satisfaction comes only from God. (*“Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. Ecc. 12:13)*
- ▶ **Outline**:
 - *Thesis: “All is vanity” (1:1-11)
 - *Proof from experience that “All is vanity” (1:12-6:12)
 - *Counsel for living with vanity (7-12)

The Book of Ecclesiastes

- I. Author (“Koheleth”) introduced. (1:1)
- II. Theme: The meaninglessness of life (1:2)
- III. Introduction: Inability of human toil to bring happiness. (1:3-11)
- IV. Discourse, Part 1: Despite meaninglessness, life is to be enjoyed as a gift from God. (1:12-11:6)
 - A. Since human wisdom & efforts are meaningless, enjoy life and work and its fruits as gifts from God. (1:12-6:9)
 1. Introduction (1:12-18)
 - a. Human endeavors are meaningless (1:12-15)
 - b. Pursuing human wisdom is meaningless (1:16-18)
 2. Seeking pleasure is meaningless (3:21-35)
 3. Human wisdom is meaningless (2:12-17)
 4. Toiling to accumulate things is meaningless (2:18-6:9)
 - a. Because people must leave the fruits of their labors to others (2:18-26)
 - b. Because all human efforts remain under God’s sovereign will, which people cannot fully know or change (3:1-4:3)

The Book of Ecclesiastes

- c. Because there are better things than the envy, greed and ambition that motivate such toil (4:4-16)
- d. Because the fruits of human labor can be lost, leading to frustration (5:1-6:9)
- B. People can't know what's best to do or what the future holds, so enjoy life and the work God has given (6:10-11:6)
 - 1. Intro: God's predetermined will is unalterable, and people can't know what's best or what the future holds (6:10-11)
 - 2. People can't know what is best to do (chs.7-8)
 - 3. People can't know what the future holds (9:1-11:6)
- B. Discourse, Part 2: Old age & death will come, so people should enjoy their youth, knowing God will judge (11:7-12:7)
 - A. Enjoy life on earth because the future after death is mysterious, and so meaningless for our present lives (11:7-8)
 - B. Enjoy fleeting joys of youth, but remember God will judge (11:9-10)
 - C. People should remember their Creator and his gifts in their youth, before old age and the deterioration of the body (12:1-7)
- VI. Theme repeated (12:8)
- VII. Conclusion: Reverently trust in and obey God (12:9-14)

The Book of Ecclesiastes – Key Verses

The words of the Teacher, son of David, king in Jerusalem: ² “Meaningless! Meaningless!” says the Teacher. “Utterly meaningless! Everything is meaningless.”

³ What do people gain from all their labors at which they toil under the sun? ⁴ Generations come and generations go, but the earth remains forever. ⁵ The sun rises and the sun sets, and hurries back to where it rises. ⁶ The wind blows to the south and turns to the north; round and round it goes, ever returning on its course. ⁷ All streams flow into the sea, yet the sea is never full. To the place the streams come from, there they return again. ⁸ All things are wearisome, more than one can say. The eye never has enough of seeing, nor the ear its fill of hearing. ⁹ What has been will be again, what has been done will be done again; there is nothing new under the sun.

Ecclesiastes 1:1-9

The Book of Ecclesiastes – Key Verses

I, the Teacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. ¹³ I applied my mind to study and to explore by wisdom all that is done under the heavens. What a heavy burden God has laid on mankind! ¹⁴ I have seen all the things that are done under the sun; all of them are meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

¹⁵ What is crooked cannot be straightened; what is lacking cannot be counted.

¹⁶ I said to myself, “Look, I have increased in wisdom more than anyone who has ruled over Jerusalem before me; I have experienced much of wisdom and knowledge.” ¹⁷ Then I applied myself to the understanding of wisdom, and also of madness and folly, but I learned that this, too, is a chasing after the wind.

¹⁸ For with much wisdom comes much sorrow; the more knowledge, the more grief. *Ecclesiastes 1:12-18*

A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, ²⁵ for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment? ²⁶ To the man who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God.

Ecclesiastes 2:24-26

The Book of Ecclesiastes – Key Verses

There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:

² a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,

³ a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,

⁴ a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,

⁵ a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain,

⁶ a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,

⁷ a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,

⁸ a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.

Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

The Book of Ecclesiastes – Key Verses

Go, eat your food with gladness, and drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God has already approved what you do. ⁸ Always be clothed in white, and always anoint your head with oil. ⁹ Enjoy life with your wife, whom you love, all the days of this meaningless life that God has given you under the sun—all your meaningless days. For this is your lot in life and in your toilsome labor under the sun. ¹⁰ Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with all your might, for in the realm of the dead, where you are going, there is neither working nor planning nor knowledge nor wisdom.

¹¹ I have seen something else under the sun:

The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise or wealth to the brilliant or favor to the learned; but time and chance happen to them all. Ecclesiastes 9:7-11

The Book of Ecclesiastes - Conclusion

Not only was the Teacher wise, but he also imparted knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and set in order many proverbs. ¹⁰ The Teacher searched to find just the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.

¹¹ The words of the wise are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one shepherd. ¹² Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them.

Of making many books there is no end, and much study wearies the body.

¹³ Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind.

¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

The Book of Ecclesiastes

- ▶ Having found no meaning in learning, pleasure, work, achievement, advancement, power and riches, and so finding all human activity “meaningless,” the writer of Ecclesiastes tells his readers to...
 - **Seek wisdom as a means for a well-lived earthly life. – though even wisdom has its limitations.**
 - **Enjoy the simple pleasures of life – eating, drinking, taking enjoyment in one’s work – for these are gifts from the hand of God.**

