

“The Good Life” (Ecclesiastes Overview)

THE TITLE: The name “Ecclesiastes” stems from the title given in the Septuagint—the Greek translation of the Old Testament. The Greek term *ekklēsiastes* means “preacher” and is derived from the word *ekklēsia* meaning “assembly, church.” The Hebrew title, *Qoheleth*, is a rare term found only seven times in Ecclesiastes (1:1, 2, 12; 7:27; 12:8, 9, 10). It comes from the word *qahal* meaning “to convoke an assembly, to assemble.” Thus, it means “one who addresses an assembly, a preacher.”

THE PURPOSE: Is life really worth living? Can I possibly find peace and purpose in this life? The author of Ecclesiastes attempts to answer these questions by proving that satisfaction in life can only be found by looking beyond this world. Ecclesiastes gives an analysis of negative themes but it also develops the positive theme of overcoming the vanities of life by fearing a God who is good, just, and sovereign (12:13-14).

THE THEME: The fear of God leads to a meaningful life.

THE AUTHOR: Although the author does not specifically name himself, he does call himself “the son of David, king in Jerusalem” (1:1, 12). While not conclusive, this certainly seems to be a clue. One quick read through of Ecclesiastes leads to the recognition that the most qualified Davidic descendant to write this book is Solomon. Our author’s unrivaled wisdom (1:16), exploration of pleasure (2:1-3), impressive accomplishments (2:4-6), and unparalleled wealth (2:7-10) were fulfilled only by King Solomon. It can be safely assumed, therefore, that Solomon is the author.

THE AUDIENCE: Solomon’s exclusive use of the general word for God, *Elohim* (41x’s), rather than His personal name, *Yahweh* (“Lord”) shows that the Creator/creature relationship rather than the Redeemer/redeemed relationship is being considered. Solomon is appealing to all men everywhere.

THE TIMES: Solomon probably wrote Ecclesiastes late in his life (approximately 931 B.C.). If this is correct, the great glory that Solomon ushered in early in his reign was already beginning to fade; and the division of Israel into two kingdoms would soon take place. Ecclesiastes may express his regret for his folly and wasted time due to carnality and idolatry (1 Kings 11). Jewish tradition asserts that Solomon wrote Song of Solomon in his youthful years, Proverbs in his middle years, and Ecclesiastes in his last years. Although Jewish tradition is by no means inspired, knowing Solomon’s history, this seems to make the most sense.

KEY WORD(S) & PHRASE(S): Vanity (38x’s), under the sun (29x’s), wisdom/wise (52x’s), man (47x’s), labor (36x’s), and evil (22x’s).

CHRIST IN ECCLESIASTES: Though no Messianic predictions or types appear in this book, some vague references may be seen. The message is called “words of truth,” (12:10) given by “one Shepherd” (12:11). Christ called Himself, “the truth,” “the good shepherd” (John 10:14), and “a greater than Solomon” (Luke 11:31), coming to show the true meaning of life.

SUMMARY STRUCTURE¹:

1. Declaration of futility (1:1-11)
2. Demonstration of futility (1:12-6:12)
3. Deliverance from futility (7:1-12:14)

Notes

¹ This summary structure was adapted and revised from Bruce Wilkinson & Kenneth Boa, *The Wilkinson & Boa Handbook* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson, [1983] 2002), 168.