

LIFE UNDER THE SUN



STUDIES IN ECCLESIASTES

12 August 2018

הַבֵּל

“See the true and better Adam
Come to save the bell-bound man...”

- From ‘Come Behold the Wondrous Mystery’

Ecclesiastes Part 1 - “The Message & the Messenger”

Introduction: Ecclesiastes & Wisdom Literature

- The Hebrew Bible (Old Testament) is divided into three sections: (1) Law (2) Prophets (3) Writings
- Ecclesiastes is associated with the ‘wisdom literature’ of the OT along with Job, Psalms, Proverbs, & Song of Songs.
“wisdom”— **חֵכְמָה** (*chokmah*) — This term is used 150 times in the OT and is used to describe the skill of artisans (Ex. 28:3), the proficiency of sailors piloting a ship (Ps. 107:27), and the capacity of rulers to govern well (Prov. 8:15-16; 1 Kings 3:28).
“Several key passages employing this term for ‘wisdom’ underscore the fact that the only way to properly understand this world is to perceive it as a creation arising out of God’s wisdom and governed by divine understanding (Job 38:37-38, Ps. 104:24; Prov. 3:19).” — O. Palmer Robertson, “The Christ of Wisdom”
- Although much of the wisdom literature offers practical instructions for life, the book of Ecclesiastes reminds us that life is not formulaic because we live in a fallen world.

Key Points: At certain times in our lives we will face the reality of unfulfilled _____.

Ecclesiastes is in our Bible to help us understand the _____ & _____ of life.

The Style & Structure of the Book

- The book has the form of *First-Person Personal* _____ (1:12-2:26) that also includes sections of proverbs (7:1-13; 10:1-11:4) as well as instructions (5:1-7) & exhortations (12:1; 13).
- The book has a very simple overall structure, but certain concepts and themes are repeated, meaning the book seems to lack a clear flow of thought.

Outline

Prologue (1:1-11)

Body (1:12-12:7)

Epilogue (12:8-14)

The Message of the Book

- The primary message of the book is found in the author’s use of three key terms:
 1. _____ — **הַבֵּל** (*hebel*) — Used 30 times in Ecclesiastes, the term is sometimes translated ‘meaningless’ or ‘futile.’ It literally means ‘vapor’ or ‘wind.’
Ecc. 1:2—Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.
Ecc. 2:11—Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity..
This term is used by the author to emphasize the nature of life: It is _____!
 2. _____ — **יִתְרוֹן** (*yithrown*) — Used 9 times in the book but nowhere else in Scripture. It can be translated as ‘profit’ or ‘advantage.’ It carries the idea of something remaining or left over in the end.
Ecc. 1:3—What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?
Ecc. 5:16—This also is a grievous evil: just as he came, so shall he go, and what gain is there to him who toils for the wind?
This term is used by the author to emphasize that our _____, our _____, and our _____ will all fail to give ultimate meaning to our lives.
 3. _____ — **טוֹב** (*tohv*) — A generic term that is used over 40 times in Ecclesiastes. It can be translated ‘joy’, ‘good’, ‘beautiful’ or ‘pleasant.’ The author employs the term at key points (2:24, 3:22, 8:15, 9:9).
Ecc. 2:24—There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil.
Ecc. 9:9— Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you under the sun

In light of the fleeting nature of life, this term is used by the author to exhort the audience to enjoy the _____ that God has given to rather than seeking to find meaning and purpose in them.

The Message Summarized: Do not live your life searching for ultimate meaning and fulfillment in the things of this world, rather, honor God and enjoy the good things which He has given to you throughout the days of your life.

The Messenger

- The author of Ecclesiastes never identifies himself, but instead refers to himself with a generic title:

“The Preacher”—קֹהֵלֵת (*qohelet*)—The noun form of the word *qabal* meaning ‘to gather’ or ‘to convene and assembly.’

Ecl. 1:1—The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

Qohelet’s Identity: _____ → This is based on both Jewish & Christian tradition as well as Qohelet’s own personal testimony detailed in 1:11-2:26.

⇒ It is also stated in both 1 Kings 8:1 & 2 Chron. 5:2 that Solomon ‘assembled’ (*qabal*) “the elders of Israel and all the heads of the tribes, the leaders of the fathers’ houses of the people of Israel, before [him] in Jerusalem.”

Qohelet’s Theological Perspective:

⇒ Qohelet’s main Scriptural influences appear to be Genesis 1-3 as well as portions of Deuteronomy.

Key Phrases: “_____” (1:3, 2:11, 5:13, 9:11)

“The phrase essentially describes the cycle of human life on the earth as it is defined by the regular rising and setting of the sun. [It] refers to a realistic perspective on life in this world where humanity as fallen into sin.” —O. Palmer Robertson

“_____” (12:13)

Deut. 8:6—So you shall keep the commandments of the Lord your God by walking in his ways and by fearing him.

The Audience

- The audience is hard to identify because of the uniqueness of the book. Consider the following:
 - The term ‘Israel’ is never used and any references to ‘people’ or ‘man’ or ‘mankind’ are generic (*adam*).
 - There are no references to any of the redemptive-historical acts of God (the exodus, the covenants with Abraham/Israel)
 - Solomon refuses to use his proper name, choosing to refer to himself as Qohelet.
 - God is never referred to by His covenant name, *Yahweh*, but instead in a generic way as *Elohim*.

The message of the book appears to be directed to _____ in general.

Ecclesiastes & Biblical Theology: _____

1. There are interesting biblical parallels between Solomon and _____:

- ⇒ Both were given the authority to rule (Gen. 1:27; 1 Kings 2:12)
- ⇒ Both used their God-given wisdom in naming/speaking of the animals (Gen. 2: ; 1 Kings 4:33)
- ⇒ Both were instructed to obey God’s commands & fail to do so (Gen. 2:15-17; 1 Kings 3:14...Gen. 3:6-7; 1 Kings 11:1-8)

2. Solomon seems to have understood that the _____ - _____ was intended to be an Adam-like figure.

- ⇒ This was particularly true in his own case given the special _____ that he was given by God.
- ⇒ We can therefore picture Solomon as a ‘second Adam,’ a great figure of wisdom who seeks to instruct mankind how to live life in light of the realities of Genesis 3.

Problem: Solomon is fit to serve as a _____, but not as a _____.

3. The book of Ecclesiastes anticipates both a _____ Messenger and a _____ - _____ Savior.

Isa. 11:2—And the Spirit of the Lord shall rest upon him, the Spirit of wisdom and understanding, the Spirit of counsel and might, the Spirit of knowledge and the fear of the Lord.

Luke 11:31—The queen of the South will rise up at the judgment with the men of this generation and condemn them, for she came from the ends of the earth to hear the wisdom of Solomon, and behold, something greater than Solomon is here.

John 4:13-14—¹³Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again, ¹⁴but whoever drinks of the water that I will give him will never be thirsty again. The water that I will give him will become in him a spring of water welling up to eternal life.”

_____ is the Greater Solomon and the true Second Adam!