

INTRODUCTORY SERMON ON QOHELET

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A. Title

Ecclesiastes is Greek for "member of an assembly," translation of Hebrew *qohelet*, probably in the sense of one who summons or addresses the assembly, thus "Preacher." The *qahal* in this case is probably to be understood as the assembly of Israel, the people of God. The central figure is addressing the congregation of God.

B. Authorship and Date

1. Not named explicitly.
2. Description of author fits Solomon, son of David: 1:1,13 (emphasis on wisdom); 12:9,10, cf. 1 Kings 4:29-34
3. The writer speaks of the Preacher in the third person: 1:2; 7:27; 12:9,10.
4. Language is strange
 - a) Lots of late elements; very unlike Proverbs or Canticles.
 - b) Lots of stuff that doesn't fit with late literature either.
5. Conclude that the thought is Solomon's. May be from his hand directly, though the text does not claim this; may be the work of another author of unknown date, based on Solomon's thoughts.

C. Major Themes

1. Vanity (first half).
 - a) 1:2,14; 2:11,17,26; 4:4,16; 6:9; 12:8
 - b) Signifies emptiness, wind, breath.
 - c) This is his verdict on everything "under the sun." Cf. Rom. 8:20, where *mataiot8s* is the standard reflex of *hebel* in Qoh. Thus Paul holds the same opinion, and relates it to the fall.
 - d) Another link to Genesis: The Hebrew word for "vanity" is the name of Abel, for the shortness and emptiness of his life (yet full of Godly significance, which should be a clue for us in studying this book!)
2. The travail that God has given to man, to search out unsearchable things.
 - a) In general: 1:13; 3:10; 8:17. For the futility, 7:14,23; 11:1-6.
 - b) This duty manifests itself in Solomon's own search, reported throughout the book: 1:13,17; 2:12; 7:25; 8:9,16.
 - c) Cf. Prov. 25:2. Solomon's wisdom did not come for free! God gave him an appetite and keen perception, but he himself went and looked for it! The virtue of study.
3. Anomalies with conventional wisdom.
 - a) Unworthy rewards: 9:11; 10:5-7.
 - b) Evil and righteous treated the same: 3:16; 7:15; 8:9; 9:2.
 - c) Yet God will right these wrongs. Even Qohelet can see this,

though not as clearly as we can in the light of NT revelation. 3:17; 11:9; 12:14.

4. God's sovereignty and man's futility.
 - a) God's sovereignty: 3:14,15; 7:13; 8:17
 - b) Futility of Man's labor (An antidote for workaholics): 2:17-23; 3:9; 4:4-6; 5:10-17; 6:1-9; 9:11-12.
5. Enjoy good from the hand of God.
 - a) Pervasive! 2:24-26; 3:12-13,22; 5:18-20; 8:15; 9:7-10; 11:7-10.
 - b) Do not confuse with "Eat and drink, for tomorrow we die," condemned in 1 Cor. 15:32.
 - c) Rather, 1 Tim. 6:17. Our future hope is in God, not riches; our present enjoyment is of the riches he has given.
 - d) Combats the ascetic idea.

D. Big Idea:

There are two errors we can make as believers in a fallen world. Qohelet warns us against both of them.

1. Danger 1: Pollyanna.
 - a) The world is fallen, and the effects of that fall surround us on every side. Qohelet has the courage to look the fall squarely in the face, and "tell it like it is."
 - b) Benefits of this honesty:
 - 1) Cf. our Lord, weeping over Jerusalem. If we don't recognize how bad it is, we will never be moved to help.
 - 2) Squelches pride, when we see how futile our own efforts are.
 - 3) Makes us more eager for the Lord's return; helps us to "set our affection on things above, not on things on the earth."
2. Danger 2: Pessimism and depression.
 - a) Recognize that God is sovereign, and he is using this fallen world for his purposes.
 - b) Enjoy what he does give us, as a gift from his hand, intended for our pleasure and refreshment.