

Study of Ecclesiastes: Introduction
Questions for Discussion

Key Words and Phrases:

Word or Phrase	Original Language	Meaning
Preacher (Teacher)		
Vanity (Meaningless)		
Under the Sun		

1. Why is the book entitled “Ecclesiastes?” What does it mean?

2. Who is the “traditional” Author of the book? _____
 - a. What evidence supports this author? (vv. 1:1,12, 16)

 - b. What argument do opponents use? (vv. 4:1; 5:8-9; 8:2-5; 9:1-2; 10:20)

3. What is the value in studying this book? What are the difficulties? (Phil 4:10-13)

4. What is the thesis statement found in 1:2? (Theme of the book - Matt 16:26)

5. What is the conclusion found in 12:13-14?

Study of Ecclesiastes: Introduction

Questions for Discussion

Notes & Answers

From Wikipedia

<http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Ecclesiastes>

Ecclesiastes (often abbreviated *Ecc*) (**Hebrew**: קהלת, *Kohelet*, variously transliterated as *Kohelet*, *Qoheleth*, *Koheles*, *Koheleth*, or *Coheleth*) is a book of the **Hebrew Bible**. The English name derives from the **Greek** translation of the Hebrew **title**.

The main speaker in the book, identified by the name or title Qohelet, introduces himself as "son of **David**, and king in **Jerusalem**." The work consists of personal or **autobiographic** matter, at times expressed in **aphorisms** and maxims illuminated in terse paragraphs with reflections on the meaning of life and the best way of life. The work emphatically proclaims all the actions of man to be inherently "vain", "futile", "empty", "meaningless", "temporary", "transitory", or "fleeting," depending on translation, as the lives of both wise and foolish men end in death. While Qohelet clearly endorses wisdom as a means for a well-lived earthly life, he is unable to ascribe eternal meaning to it. In light of this perceived senselessness, he suggests that one should enjoy the simple pleasures of daily life, such as eating, drinking, and taking enjoyment in one's work, which are gifts from the hand of God.

According to **Talmud**, however, the point of Qohelet is to state that all is futile under the **Sun**. One should therefore ignore physical pleasures and put all one's efforts towards that which is *above* the Sun. This is summed up in the second to last verse: "The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep His commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone" (12:13).

Title

The **Hebrew** קהלת is a feminine participle related to the root קהל meaning "to gather." Scholars are unsure whether it means the "one who gathers" or the "one among the gathering." Although the form is a feminine participle, virtually no scholars dispute that the author is a man. Except for one dubious example of a third-person feminine singular verb associated with qohelet, the subject always uses masculine nouns and even refers to his wife and women. He says that he has acquired *shida we-shidot*, an ambiguous phrase that may refer to a harem (*shdh* or "breasts"); he describes how he could not find a virtuous woman; and he exhorts the reader to enjoy (*re'a*) life with his wife.

English translation

The **English** title of the book, *Ecclesiastes*, comes from the **Septuagint** translation of *Qohelet*, Ἐκκλησιαστής. It is related to the **Greek** noun Ἐκκλησία (originally a **secular gathering**, although later used primarily of religious gatherings, hence its **New Testament** meaning of "church"). Greek translators used "ecclesia" to render קהל (qahal) of the same Hebrew root. The word *Qohelet* has found several translations into English, including *The Preacher* (following **Jerome's** suggested **Latin** title *concionator* and **Martin Luther's** *Der Prediger*). In view of the meaning of the Hebrew root ("gather, assemble, convene") one might opt for the translation "Speaker".^[1]

Study of Ecclesiastes: Introduction

Questions for Discussion

Author

In the two opening chapters the speaker describes himself as the son of [David](#), and king over Israel in [Jerusalem](#) (1:1, 12, 16; 2:7, 9), presenting himself as a philosopher at the center of a brilliant court. This could apply only to King [Solomon](#), for his successors in Jerusalem were kings over Judah only. Consequently, the traditional Rabbinic and early Christian view attributed *Ecclesiastes* to King Solomon. Most critical scholars suggest that *Ecclesiastes* was written around 250 BCE by a non-[Hellenized](#) intellectual in the milieu of the [Temple in Jerusalem](#), though Seow of the Anchor Bible commentary argues that it dates to the Persian period. The latest possible date for it is set by the fact that [Ben Sirach](#) (written ca. 180 BCE) repeatedly quotes or paraphrases it, as from a canonic rather than a contemporary writing. ^[citation needed]

Many modern conservative scholars today also suggest that Solomon is an unlikely author. Since this work is found within the [Ketuvim](#), there must be some room for poetical treatment. There are two voices in the book, the frame-narrator (1.1–11; 12.9–14) and Qoheleth (1.12–12.8). Scholars are not unanimous about whether this indicates two authors. ^[citation needed]

The Babylonian Talmud, while claiming that King Solomon composed the book, says that it was only written down much later (Bava Batra page 14 side B).

R' [Nachman Krochmal](#) suggests that the term "son of David" should be interpreted to mean "descendant of David". He posits that it was written by a powerful lord during the Persian Era (possibly during the missing years of Jewish history). The term "king" would not be difficult; since the Persian Monarch was known as the King of Kings, a lesser lord may have called himself a king. ^[2]

The New Bible Dictionary writes the following:

Although the writer says that he was king over Israel (1:12), and speaks as though he were Solomon, he nowhere says that he is Solomon. The style of the Heb. is later than Solomon's time. If Solomon was the author, the book underwent a later modernization of language. Otherwise a later writer may have taken up a comment on life that had been made by Solomon, 'Vanity of vanities, all is vanity,' and used this as a text to show why even a wise and wealthy king should say such a thing. We cannot tell at what date the book received its present form, since there are no clear historical allusions in it. About 200 bc is commonly suggested. ^[3]

Language

The Hebrew of *Ecclesiastes* was not common in the era of Solomon's reign, and the book contains words borrowed from other languages. For example, the book contains several [Aramaic](#) and two [Persian](#) words. The influence of Aramaic is characteristic of late Hebrew. Other examples of late [Biblical Hebrew](#) include the qetAl pattern form nouns, which would have dated after an Aramaic influence, the frequent use of the relative sh (-ש) alongside asher (אשר), the Ut ending (ות-), the frequent use of the participle for the present (which is later developed in [Rabbinic Hebrew](#)), using the prefix conjugation in the future (vs. the older [preterite](#) use), and terms that appear to specifically fit a Persian/Hellenistic context (e.g. Shallit). During the time of Solomon and through the eighth century, *matres lectionis* were not used inside words (except maybe in 'ir (city) in the Lachish letters), and there is no evidence for early [orthography](#).

Study of Ecclesiastes: Introduction Questions for Discussion

Date of writing

Dominic Rudman, *Determinism in the Book of Ecclesiastes* (JSOTSup. 316; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 2001, p. 13) cites the modern commentaries supporting this dating.

- Dominic Rudman. "A Note on Dating of Ecclesiastes". *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* vol. 61 no. 1 (1999) pp. 47–53 contains a discussion with C. L. Seow, "Linguistic Evidence and the Dating of Qohelet." in *JBL* vol. 115 (1996), pp. 653–54—Seow supports a 4th century dating.

"Most current commentators e.g., R. N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes* [NCB Commentary; Grand Rapids: Eerdmans; London: Marshall, Morgan & Scott, 1989] 4–12) argue for a mid-to-late-third-century date. Others, among them N. Lohfink (*Kohelet* [NEchtB; Wurzburg: Echter Verlag, 1980] 7) and C. E Whitley (*Koheleth: His Language and Thought* [BZAW 148; Berlin/ New York: de Gruyter, 1979] 132–46), have suggested an early- or mid-second-century background."

Key Words and Phrases:

Word or Phrase	Original Language	Meaning
Preacher (Teacher)	Koheleth or Qohelet	One who assembles a group for the purpose of teaching / instructing
Vanity (Meaningless)	Hebel	Vapor or Breath
Under the Sun		Within the realm of the earth, without regard for a creator.

Preacher:

Hebrew NASB Number: 6953

Hebrew Word: קהלת

Transliterated Word: *Qoheleth* (875a)

Root: from the same as [6951](#);

Definition: "a collector (of sentences)," "a preacher," a son of David:--

List of English Words and Number of Times Used

Preacher (7).¹

¹ New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.

Study of Ecclesiastes: Introduction Questions for Discussion

Vanity:

Hebrew NASB Number: 1892

Hebrew Word: הֶבֶל

Transliterated Word: *hebel* (210c)

Root: a prim. root;

Definition: *vapor, breath*--

List of English Words and Number of Times Used

breath (5),
delusion (2),
emptily (1),
emptiness (2),
fleeting (2),
fraud (1),
futile (1),
futility (13),
idols (7),
mere breath (2),
nothing (1),
useless (1),
vain (3),
vainly (1),
vanity (19),
vanity of vanities (3),
vapor (1),
worthless (2).²

² New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.

Study of Ecclesiastes: Introduction Questions for Discussion

1. Why is the book entitled “Ecclesiastes?” What does it mean?

The name “Ecclesiastes” comes from the Septuagint translation of the Old Testament.

Hebrew / Qahal = assembly/assemble // Greek (LXX) = ekklesia (assembly) / ekklesiastes (member of the assembly)

Qahal - Hebrew NASB Number: 6951

Hebrew Word: קָהָל

Transliterated Word: *qahal* (874c)

Root: from an unused word;

Definition: *assembly, convocation, congregation:--*

List of English Words and Number of Times Used

army* (1),
assembly (95),
companies (1),
company (15),
congregation (8),
crowd (1),
horde (2).

An asterisk () indicates that at least one other original language word was also translated as this English word. Look up this word in the English NASB concordance for the additional original language word(s).³*

Ekklesia - Greek NASB Number: 1577

Greek Word: ἐκκλησία

Transliterated Word: *ekklêsia*

Root: from [1537](#) and [2564](#);

Definition: *an assembly, a (religious) congregation:--*

List of English Words and Number of Times Used

assembly (3),
church (74),
churches (35),
congregation (2).⁴

³ New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.

⁴ New American Standard Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible.

Study of Ecclesiastes: Introduction

Questions for Discussion

2. Who is the “traditional” Author of the book?

Solomon

2a. What evidence supports this author? (vv. 1:1,12, 16)

Ecclesiastes 1:1 (ESV)

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

Ecclesiastes 1:12 (ESV)

¹²I the Preacher have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.

Ecclesiastes 1:16 (ESV)

¹⁶I said in my heart, “I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge.”

2b. What argument do opponents use? (vv. 4:1; 5:8-9; 8:2-5; 9:1-2; 10:20)

Say he would never say things such as these....

Ecclesiastes 4:1 (ESV)

¹Again I saw all the oppressions that are done under the sun. And behold, the tears of the oppressed, and they had no one to comfort them! On the side of their oppressors there was power, and there was no one to comfort them.

Ecclesiastes 5:8-9 (ESV)

⁸If you see in a province the oppression of the poor and the violation of justice and righteousness, do not be amazed at the matter, for the high official is watched by a higher, and there are yet higher ones over them. ⁹But this is gain for a land in every way: a king committed to cultivated fields.

Ecclesiastes 8:2-5 (ESV)

²I say: Keep the king’s command, because of God’s oath to him. ³Be not hasty to go from his presence. Do not take your stand in an evil cause, for he does whatever he pleases. ⁴For the word of the king is supreme, and who may say to him, “What are you doing?” ⁵Whoever keeps a command will know no evil thing, and the wise heart will know the proper time and the just way.

Ecclesiastes 9:1-2 (ESV)

¹But all this I laid to heart, examining it all, how the righteous and the wise and their deeds are in the hand of God. Whether it is love or hate, man does not know; both are before him. ²It is the same for all, since the same event happens to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the evil, to the clean and the unclean, to him who sacrifices and him who does not sacrifice. As the good one is, so is the sinner, and he who swears is as he who shuns an oath.

Ecclesiastes 10:20 (ESV)

²⁰Even in your thoughts, do not curse the king, nor in your bedroom curse the rich, for a bird of the air will carry your voice, or some winged creature tell the matter.

Study of Ecclesiastes: Introduction

Questions for Discussion

- Hebrew language style belongs to a time much later than Solomon
- Various styles in the book could be the result of multiple authors (narrative / proverbs)

Knowledge of the author is really not required for understanding of the book

3. What is the value in studying this book? What are the difficulties? (Phil 4:10-13)

Ecclesiastes dramatically shows that the attempt to manipulate life's circumstances to bring about happiness, contentment, fulfillment, etc....is a fruitless endeavor. To the Christian, this should be liberating to know that it is possible to find these things regardless of life's circumstances

Philippians 4:10–13 (ESV)

¹⁰ I rejoiced in the Lord greatly that now at length you have revived your concern for me. You were indeed concerned for me, but you had no opportunity. ¹¹ Not that I am speaking of being in need, for I have learned in whatever situation I am to be content. ¹² I know how to be brought low, and I know how to abound. In any and every circumstance, I have learned the secret of facing plenty and hunger, abundance and need. ¹³ I can do all things through him who strengthens me.

The difficulty comes from the perspective of "under the sun," which is required for understanding the sentiments of the author.

4. What is the thesis statement found in 1:2? (Theme of the book - Matt 16:26)

Ecclesiastes 1:2 (ESV)

² Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

Matthew 16:26 (ESV)

²⁶ For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

5. What is the conclusion found in 12:13-14?

Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 (ESV)

¹³ The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. ¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil.