

THE BOTTOM LINE
PREACHING THROUGH THE BIBLE: ECCLESIASTES
Ecclesiastes 12:13-14

I. INTRODUCTION

A. TITLE

1. HEBREW

- *Qoheleth* = The Preacher—‘one who addresses an assembly’
- Found in verses—**1:1-2, 12; 7:27; 12:8-10**
- Derived from ‘qahal’—to convoke an assembly

2. SEPTUAGINT

- *Ekklesiastes* = Preacher
- Derived from *ekklesia*—assembly, congregation, church

3. LATIN

- *Ecclesiastes* = speaker before an assembly

B. TYPE OF LITERATURE

1. PLACE IN HEBREW CANON

- a. One of eleven books in the ‘Writings’—*Ketuvim*
- b. Sixth in *Ketuvim* order
 - Psalms
 - Proverbs
 - Job
 - Song of Solomon
 - Ruth
 - Lamentations
 - Ecclesiastes
 - Esther
 - Daniel

- Ezra
- Chronicles

2. GENRE

- One of five poetic books—Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Solomon
- One of three wisdom books—Job, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes

C. PURPOSE

- To record author's search for satisfaction and meaning in life—and report his conclusions

D. AUTHOR

1. KING SOLOMON

- a. Not explicitly attributed in Scripture by name
- b. But accepted almost universally by biblical scholars

2. INTERNAL EVIDENCE

- a. By—*the son of David, king in Jerusalem*—**1:1, 12**
- b. By—the wisest man who had ever been over Jerusalem before him—**1:16**
- c. In his day—like Solomon—the author had these things
 - 1. Most extensive pleasure—**2:1-3**
 - 2. Impressive accomplishments—**2:4-6**
 - 3. Greatest wealth—**2:7-10**
- d. Proverbs in *Ecclesiastes* are like those in *Proverbs*
 - Qoheleth arranged proverbs into a collection—like the two collections in *Proverbs*

3. EXTERNAL EVIDENCE

- a. Talmud says Solomon was author

- b. Talmud also suggests—it was edited later by Hezekiah’s scribes—like **Proverbs 25-29**
- c. Some scholars suggest editing occurred later—in Ezra’s day

E. DATE OF COMPOSITION AND EDITING

1. COMPOSITION

- Late in Solomon’s reign—just before death in 931
- When the glory of his reign was beginning to fade

2. JEWISH TRADITION DATES SOLOMON’S BOOKS THIS WAY

- Song of Solomon—his early years
- Proverbs—his middle years
- Ecclesiastes—his late years

3. EDITING

- a. 7-8th century BC—if during Hezekiah’s reign (715-687 BC)
- b. 5th century BC—if after Ezra’s return to Jerusalem—458 BC

F. KEY THEMES

1. VANITY—EVERYTHING IN THIS LIFE IS VANITY

- **Vanity**—appears 37 times
- All earthly pursuits end in vanity
- Life **under the sun**—appears 29 times
- Mortal human life—is filled with inequity, uncertainty, and difficulties

2. SATISFACTION CAN BE FOUND ONLY IN GOD—THE ULTIMATE GOOD

- Vanity can be overcome only by fearing God—who is good, just and sovereign

3. LIFE IS GOD’S GIFT—IT SHOULD BE APPRECIATED AND ENJOYED DAILY

○ See—**2:24-26**—**3:12-13, 22**—**5:18-20**—**8:15**—**9:7-10**—**11:8-9**

4. TWO PERSPECTIVES

- a. *Under the sun*—all is vanity
- b. From God's perspective—life is a precious gift

5. FOCUS ON GOD AS CREATOR

- a. Exclusive use of *Elohim*—41 times—to identify God
- b. No reference to *Yahweh*—redemptive and covenant God of Israel

G. BIBLICAL CONTEXT

1. IT IS THE MOST PHILOSOPHIC BOOK IN THE BIBLE

2. WRITTEN FROM THE VIEWPOINT OF HUMAN WISDOM

○ 'Man'—*adam*—is used 47 times!

3. OUT OF CONTEXT—SOME STATEMENTS CONTRADICT BIBLICAL PRINCIPLES

- **2:24**—nothing is better than to eat, drink and say labor is good
- **3:19-20**—the fate of men and beasts is the same—all go to the same place
- **8:15**—I commend pleasure—there is nothing better than to eat, drink and be merry
- **9:2**—the same fate awaits both the righteous and the wicked—good man and sinner
- **10:19**—food is for enjoyment, wine makes life merry, money is the answer to everything
- **11:9**—young men, follow the impulses of your heart and the desires of your eyes

4. CONTAINS SEVERAL BIBLICAL TRUTHS

- God exists—**3:14; 5:2**
- God is sovereign and powerful—**6:2; 7:13; 9:1**
- God is just—**5:8; 8:12-13**
- Man is sinful—**7:20; 9:3**

- Man is finite—**8:8, 17**
- The possibility of eternal life—**3:11; 12:7**
- Divine punishments and rewards—**2:26; 3:17; 8:12; 11:9; 12:14**

H. STRUCTURE

❖ NUMEROUS WAYS TO OUTLINE BOOK—EVERY SCHOLAR DOES IT DIFFERENTLY

1. THE THESIS APPROACH

PART ONE—THESIS—ALL IS VANITY—**1:1-11**

PART TWO—PROOF THAT ‘ALL IS VANITY’—**1:12-through chapter 6**

Proof from Experience—**1:12-through chapter 2**

Proof from Observation—**chapters 3-6**

PART THREE—COUNSEL FOR LIVING WITH VANITY—**chapters 7-12**

How to Cope in a Wicked World—**chapters 7-9**

How to Cope with Uncertainties in Life—**chapter 10-through 12:8**

Conclusion—Fear God and Obey His commandments—**12:9-14**

2. THE SERMON APPROACH—FOUR SERMONS

SERMON ONE—Solomon’s Personal Experiences—**Chapters 1-2**

SERMON TWO—Solomon’s General Observations—**Chapters 3-5**

SERMON THREE—Solomon’s Practical Counsel—**Chapters 6-8**

SERMON FOUR—Solomon’s Final Conclusion—**Chapters 8-12**

3. TWO MAIN IDEAS APPROACH

FIRST MAIN IDEA—ALL IS VANITY—**Chapters 1-6**

His quest for meaning has led to nothing—it is not found in:

1. Pleasure
2. Wisdom (or folly)
3. Hard work
4. Earthly time
5. Justice and religion
6. Wealth
7. Pleasure
8. Or any other earthly pursuit

SECOND MAIN IDEA—DEATH IS BETTER THAN LIFE—**Chapters 7-12**

Life consists of preparing to die

In conclusion:

1. Though this life is futile—ultimately God will judge everyone
2. Remember God before it is too late
3. Fear God and keep His commandments

II. BIBLICAL TEXT

Ecc 12:9-14—**9** *In addition to being a wise man, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge; and he pondered, searched out and arranged many proverbs. 10 The Preacher sought to find delightful words and to write words of truth correctly. 11 The words of wise men are like goods, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd. 12 But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body. 13 The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. 14 For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.*

III. EXPOSITION

A. OVERVIEW

1. PASSAGE DIVIDES INTO TWO PARTS

a. **Verses 9** and **12**—begin with same word

- **yowther** = in addition to—besides—moreover

b. Marks the beginning of two concluding statements

2. SUMMARY OF MESSAGE

- *Qoheleth*—the wise teacher has collected many proverbs, which he has taught the people
- Though he has tried to use pleasing words—but has always spoken the unvarnished truth
- Wise sayings sting like a nail studded rod used by a shepherd to guide his sheep.
- In addition, pay close attention: obtaining wisdom is hard work; its study will exhaust you.
- The sum of things for everyone is this: respect God and obey His commandments.
- Because God will judge all we do, good or bad, even what is done in secret.

B. VERSE 11

11 *The words of wise men are like goads, and masters of these collections are like well-driven nails; they are given by one Shepherd.*

1. GOADS

a. Rod with an iron spike—sharpened at the end—used to drive oxen or sheep

- Judge Shamgar—defeated 600 Philistines with oxgoad—saved Israel—[Jdg 3:31](#)
- Saul—kicked against the goads—[in rebellion against God]—[Acts 9:5](#)

b. Used by shepherd to guide sheep out of danger—and from barren land to fruitful pastures

2. NAILS

a. Possibly—nails embedded in goads—like spikes

- Wise sayings can be hard and painful
 - *Qoheleth* has always told the truth—no matter how painful
 - The sting of wisdom—causes a response—a change in the learner/hearer
- b. Possibly—separate metaphor—symbolizing what is fixed—unalterable—firm
- Wise saying become fixed in the memory
 - They secure other knowledge in our mind
- c. Possibly—tent pegs—of the Shepherd’s tent
- Wise sayings set the boundaries for useful knowledge
3. The One Shepherd
- a. Possibly—the king—Solomon—who had collected many proverbs
- b. Probably—God Himself
- OT calls Jehovah the Shepherd of Israel—**Gen 49:24; Ps 23:1; 80:1**
 - Who feeds his people like a flock—**Gen 48:15**
- c. If Jehovah—this could be an allusion to divine inspiration of the book

C. VERSE 12

12 *But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body.*

1. *My son*—used only here in Ecclesiastes
2. *Beyond this*
 - a. Could mean—‘in addition’—this begins another section—another conclusion
 - b. Or—‘beyond’— apart from the collection of proverbs in this book

- So—criticism of writing many books does not include *Ecclesiastes*
3. *Be warned* [imperative]—about writing and studying
- a. Maybe—against too much writing and studying books *beyond* the Bible
 - Don't pursue every new idea/thought—that may lead astray
 - Paul warns against such novel doctrines—*II Tim 4:3-4*—itching ears
 - Exhortation—study the Bible—but not human philosophy
 - b. Maybe—excessive study/writing of any kind does not bring true wisdom
 - There is a limit to how much books can teach
 - True wisdom comes from applying knowledge experientially
 - c. Maybe—not anti-intellectual
 - Getting true wisdom is exhausting and endless work
 - It is not futile or useless—but worthwhile
 - To become a sage—you must commit to a lifelong process—much study

D. VERSE 13

13 *The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person.*

1. *The conclusion*
 - a. The summarizing point of the whole book
 - b. Contained in two imperatives—(1) fear God and (2) keep His commandments
2. *Fear God*
 - a. Defined
 - Have a reverential attitude—honor and respect Him

- This is true piety

b. Already mentioned in Ecclesiastes

- **3:14**—recognizing God’s unchanging power and justice
- **7:18**—it delivers from wickedness and self-righteousness
- **5:6ff** and **8:12ff**—it leads to hatred of sin

c. Elsewhere in Scripture—the ‘fear of God’

- This quotes almost identically—**Dt 23:22**
- What the Lord requires of you—**Dt 10:12**
- It is the beginning of knowledge—**Pr 1:7**
- It is the beginning of wisdom—**Ps 110:10**
- It *is* wisdom—**Job 28:28**

d. Ecclesiastes 12—makes this the *end* of wisdom

- The sum of all wisdom in this book is—fear the Lord
- All true wisdom points to this conclusion

e. Fear the **Lord**—and **not** men

1. **The apostles before the Sanhedrin—Acts 4 and 5**

2. **Nathan—before David**

- Delivered God’s promise about eternal covenant—**II Sam 7**
- Delivered God’s judgment about Bathsheba and Uriah—**II Sam 12**

3. **Hugh Latimer—preaching before King Henry VIII**

3. ***Keep His commandments***

a. This is how to show that we fear God

- Not a separate action—but an extension of the first one—fearing God

b. Not a legalistic list of actions that make one pious

- Obedience flows out of true piety—fear of God—not vice versa
- True piety—is not ‘achieved’ by obedience—but by fearing God Himself

4. *Because this applies to every person*

- a. Literal Hebrew phrase = *This is every man*
- b. Universal sovereignty
 - Jehovah is Lord over all creation
- c. Universal obligation—accountability
 - All humans are created by God—and owe him worship
- d. Universal soul competency
 - God created every person with a conscience
 - God created every person with a free will—to choose obedience or disobedience
- e. KJV = *this is the whole duty of man*
 - Expressed in the Westminster Catechism
 - **Man’s chief end is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.**

5. ‘Fear God and obey His commandments’—is a commitment of faith—trusting God

E. VERSE 14

14 *For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.*

1. This is almost identical with **11:9b**
2. Universal accountability
 - Of every *person*—for every *action*
 - Seen [implied]—and unseen done in secret
3. God is omniscient—He sees and knows all
4. God is impartial—and fair—and thoroughly just

F. CONCLUSION

1. THOUGH LIFE SEEMS UNFAIR AND MEANINGLESS
2. THIS COULD LEAD TO TOTAL DESPAIR AND NIHILISM
3. THIS COULD LEAD TO IMPIETY AND ATHEISM
4. INSTEAD *QOHELETH* IS STRUCK BY GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY—AND POSSIBILITY OF HOPE
5. THE PROPER RESPONSE TO GOD—IS TRUST—BY FEARING AND OBEYING HIM