

ECCLESIASTES CHAPTER 1 NOTES

The title:

In Hebrew the name of this book is 'Qoheleth', from the root qahal which means 'assembly.' Ecclesiastes comes from the comparable greek root 'ekklesia' meaning 'gathering' and often times translated as 'church' in the New Testament. This root is the origin of English words like ecclesiastical and ecclesiology.

The name of the book roughly means "the one who gathers an assembly" or in this case it's translated as "preacher".

So who is the preacher?

Tradition attributes the book to Solomon. This is reasonable given what we can gather about the author from the text, but not necessarily agreed upon. For all practical purposes the text is anonymous. Here is what is important for us to know about the author.

The author is:

- Identified as 'Son of David' which is a general reference to anyone from the lineage of David.
- Was a king in Jerusalem
- Has great wisdom
- Has acquired great wealth, servants, and concubines
- Gathered treasures from kings and provinces

The bottom-line to understand is that the author is a person who has seen and done it all. He's now older and reflecting on his life. He's seeking to pass on his understanding of what does and doesn't work for a meaningful life.

About the first chapter:

The author puts forth an assertion: "Vanities, vanities, all is vanity" or some translations read 'meaningless.' He raises a question of what is to be gained in this life. Gain is going to prove to be an operative word in understanding this book. Gain, which can also be translated "profit", means the "value left over."

In this opening chapter, verses 4-11, the author uses illustrations from nature to show that life is cyclical. Things come and go, but there is never really any gain.

He then goes on in verses 12-18, to assert that he looked inward as well as for what can be gained in life. He amassed wisdom and knowledge, but this too he feels is ultimately meaningless.

Regarding chapter 2:

Questions to consider:

- 1) In verses 1-11, what did the preacher pursue looking for meaning?
- 2) What conclusion did he come to from that experience (v. 12-17)?
- 3) How did this affect him (v. 18-23)?
- 4) Most content of the first two chapters is very negative. In verses, 24-26 we see the first positive thoughts. What hope do we get a glimpse of in these verses?

Keywords to mark and/or create lists about in the first two chapters:

- Vanities/meaningless
- Labor/toil
- God
- References to the author
- Wisdom
- Folly

For those of you interested in the marking technique that I use in my bible check out this post on my blog The Practical Disciple - [10 Things to Write in Your Bible, Podcast Episode 23](#).

Other considerations: The book of Ecclesiastes on the surface puts forward a very dim view of toil, work, or labor. This appears inconsistent with how toil is depicted in other books of the Bible. Scripture will not contradict itself, so how are these views different and why might that be? Examine the following scripture to consider this: Proverbs 1:7, 2:6, 4:5, 9:10, 15:33, and 1 Corinthians 1:18-24.

Resource page: I have put together a resource page for our class that includes links to handouts or other helpful resources. To access the resource page goto: <http://fpcwalnutridge.org/ecclesiastes>.