

INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

THE AUTHOR

In the first verse of the Book of Ecclesiastes the author identifies himself as the Preacher (Heb. Qoheleth), the son of David, king in Jerusalem. Solomon is identifying himself as the author, he was the son of David and the king in Jerusalem. Further investigation into the book also reveals Solomonic authorship:

- Solomon was the wisest man to teach in Jerusalem (1:16; cf. 1 Kings 4:29, 30).
- Solomon fits the description of a man who had it all (2:4-11).

THE MOOD

The mood of the book is humanistic and quite sad. Note the appearances of the following words: “man” 47 times, “vanity” 37 times, “labor” 23 times, “evil” 22 times, “vexation of spirit” 9 times, and other words of prominence are “oppression”, “grief”, and “mourning.”

THE THEME

The theme of the book is the emptiness of a life lived totally for this earth. The phrase “under the sun” is used 29 times in the book. It seems like the Preacher is trying to move the reader’s focus from under the sun to the other side of the sun.

THE SUMMARY

Dr. Harold Wilmington says, “The book of Ecclesiastes may be summarized by two statements, one made by a sewer worker in Chicago, and the other by a well-known agnostic lawyer. Both statements were in response to a question concerning their personal philosophy of life. There is a statement in the Bible which summarizes my life. It says, ‘We have toiled all night, and have taken nothing...’” (Lk. 5:5)—Clarence Darrow “I digge de ditch to gette de money to buye de food to gette de strength to digge de ditch!”—Cook County Sewer Employee

THE POINT OF VIEW

The Book of Ecclesiastes has been interpreted from various viewpoints.

- Fatalistic. There is nothing to be gained in this life, “All is vanity and vexation of spirit” (2:11).
- Humanistic. The author is giving his viewpoint of life, “Enjoy this life because this is it (2:14)
- Theistic. A life lived without God in the end means nothing in eternity, “Fear God” (12:13).

Solomon's View Point—some say he wrote:

- Song of Solomon in his youth
- Proverbs in his middle ages
- Ecclesiastes as an old man.

THE OUTLINE

- I. THE DILEMMA DECLARED: There is nothing on this side of the sun that brings lasting fulfillment (1:1-11)
- II. THE DILEMMA DELIBERATED: Reflections upon the futility of seeking fulfillment on this side of the sun (1:12-12:8)
- III. THE DILEMMA DECIPHERED: Fulfillment is found beyond this side of the sun (12:9-14)