

Ecclesiastes

The point of life

The author:

What we know: We know that the wisdom of Ecclesiastes comes from who is identified in Hebrew as *Qoheleth*, which means one who convenes, assembles, or compiles. This is more of a title than a name. Consequently, many Bibles refer to this book as from “The Preacher.” He is a son, or descendent of King David.

What we don't know: We don't know the exact identity of the compiler of this wisdom. It is very likely King Solomon, but references within refer to him in the third person, and when the first person is used, it is often a quote. Exact understanding of authorship is highly unlikely to impossible.

The uniqueness of the book:

For its time: We know that there was other “wisdom literature” being written in the secular sector at this time, however Ecclesiastes contrasts that by its final appeal. Other works focus more on success that follow right choices.

Purpose and message: The basic line of thought is the emptiness of the pursuits of man, but ultimately, our fulfillment comes when we live out our ultimate purpose, “Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.” – Eccl. 12:13. This is a unique word in the world of advice and counsel.

Content: This book opens with an introductory problem, life on earth is futile and empty, however it moves toward offering a contrasting view, that moderation in pursuit of God is a key to contentment. Even in the midst of hardship, this proposed way of life is rewarded. (While Job is the book of extremes, Ecclesiastes offers a moderate view of difficulty and trial where devotion to God gets put to test, only to render its value as a proper pursuit in life.) In conclusion, the compiler establishes that genuine and committed determination to glorify God is the key to life's success.

Major themes: **The retribution principle** – That wickedness is punished, and righteousness rewarded, is a sound theory built from theology, but does not always fit the situations of life (as seen in the book of Job). So why live according to that understanding? Because it has eternity in view, not simply this short life.

The revelation neglected – The preacher uses a philosophical approach in his argument, as though relating to someone outside of the faith to make an appeal for faith. He doesn't quote the law, prophets, or any other revelation, but builds his arguments solely on life experience.

The rejoicing man – A running theme is that we might find pleasure in this life, though the worlds offerings are inadequate. Some have questioned the closeness of the wisdom of the *Qoheleth* to Epicureanism (“Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die.”). Actually, Ecclesiastes does promote an enjoyment of this brief life, but that is the point, it can't be done in human wisdom or pursuits, but only through the knowledge of God and in His ways.