

Introduction and Background

📖 Ecclesiastes 1:1-2

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Tonight we will begin the OT book of Ecclesiastes. The Book of Ecclesiastes is a rather unique book in the canon of Scripture in that it explores the attempts of a man to find satisfaction, meaning and fulfillment in life, seemingly to no avail. It's for this reason, many have considered Ecclesiastes to be the most pessimistic book in the entire Bible. And yet I hope to clarify the book, showing that its ultimate message is not one of pessimism but optimism, and that life can be enjoyed when God is placed at the very center.

Now as for the title of the book, we know it by the English title, the Book of Ecclesiastes. This title was taken from the Latin Vulgate, *Liber Ecclesiastes*, completed at the end of the 4th century AD, and simply means, "Book of Ecclesiastes." The Latin title can then be traced back to the title given to this book by the Jewish translators of the Greek LXX, about the 3rd century BC, who called it *εκκλησιαστικος*, which during the classical period of Greek meant "member of the assembly." But this Greek title, which is the source of the Latin and the English titles, ultimately derives from the Hebrew *qohelet*, which is translated in verse 1 as **the Preacher**, though the word is somewhat ambiguous. After a discussion of the noun's source in the verb, Wallace says, "Thus **קֹהֵלֵת** might mean: (1) convener of the assembly, (2) leader, speaker, teacher, or preacher of the assembly, or (3) member of the assembly. Elsewhere in the book, **קֹהֵלֵת** is used in collocation with statements about his position as king in Jerusalem (Eccl 1:12), his proclamations about life (Eccl 1:2; 7:27; 12:8), and his teaching of wisdom and writing wise sayings (Eccl 12:9–10). Thus, **קֹהֵלֵת** probably means "the leader of the assembly" or "speaker of the assembly."¹ Since one who leads or speaks to an assembly is often known as a preacher or teacher, verse 1 is often translated "The words of the Preacher" or "The words of the Teacher." Yet the Jewish Publication Society and others have translated it as the personal surname of the author, "The words of Koheleth." By this they did not mean that the author was an unknown person named Koheleth, since they viewed the author as Solomon, but they preferred to refer to Solomon with the personal surname Koheleth "Because his words were proclaimed in public meeting [**קֹהֵלֵת**], as it is written (1 Kgs 8:1)."² However, *qohelet* should not be transliterated in the English Bible since it leads one to think the author is a man named Koheleth, when technically it is a professional title or vocation. We know this because in 12:8 *qohelet* is a participle with the article, indicating a substantive, which in the Hebrew designates a professional title or vocation, and not a personal surname. Furthermore, in 7:27 *qohelet*

is used with a feminine ending but with reference to a male. This is an intensive form, also indicating a professional title or vocation. Thus verse 1 should be translated, "the words of the Preacher or "the words of the Teacher." I don't like "the Preacher" because that word has too much baggage in our day. Originally, preacher had a good connotation, as it came from the Greek *κηρυσσω* referring to one who proclaimed the gospel, but preacher has come down today to someone who stands up and preaches a fire and brimstone message and that is not at all what this book is. So I prefer to translate verse 1 as "The words of the Teacher," and envision him as standing before the assembly of Israel to teach them wisdom.

As for its place in the canon of Scripture, the Jews divided the Hebrew canon into three parts; Law, or *Torah*, Prophets, or *Naviim*, and Writings, or *Kethuvim*. Together these constitute what they called the TANAKH, which is an acronym for the three parts; TA referring to Torah, NA referring to Naviim and KH referring to Kethuvim. Over the years I have encouraged you to teach these three divisions of the Old Testament rather than the five divisions commonly made by Gentiles simply because that's not the way Jesus and the Jews did it. For example, in Luke 24:44 Jesus referred to the Old Testament this way, "These are My words which I spoke to you while I was still with you, that all things which are written about Me in the Law of Moses and the Prophets and the Psalms must be fulfilled." The use of "Psalms" for the third section, instead of "Writings," was because it was first and largest of the books in the *Kethuvim*. But they all knew what He was talking about and they all knew what books were in those sections. Ecclesiastes was placed in the third section, the *Kethuvim*, along with other books like Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Song of Songs, etc... These books were placed together because they were chiefly known for their ability to impart wisdom. So what we will be gaining from Ecclesiastes will be wisdom.

Now wisdom in the Hebrew concept is not the Greek concept. The Greek concept of wisdom was philosophical reasoning or intellectual prowess, starting with the human mind and classifying and organizing the universe. But the Hebrew concept of wisdom came from the word *chokmah*, which has the basic meaning of "skill." One who had "skill" had "wisdom." For example, those who crafted the furniture in the tabernacle had "skill." It was related to a skill in some area of life and it was based not on human reasoning but on a gift of God. So the source and concept was very different and that's why in Ecclesiastes you will be coming away with more skills in living. It's a book about how to live well or how to enjoy life, and in many respects it tells you how not to live, but it also tells you how to live. And so despite all the claims that this book is so pessimistic, it's actually optimistic, because the Teacher is teaching us wisdom, how to live well and how to enjoy life and find significance in life.

Now additionally, Ecclesiastes was part of a group of five scrolls within the *Kethuvim* that the Jews called the Megilloth (roll, scroll). These five scrolls were short enough to be read at the feasts and gatherings of the nation Israel. The first in the Megilloth was Song of Solomon, and it was read at Feast Passover. The second was Ruth, it was read at the Feast of Pentecost. The third was Lamentations, it was read on the 9th of Av to commemorate the Fall of Jerusalem. The fourth was Esther, it was read at the Feast of Purim. And the fifth was Ecclesiastes, it was read at the Feast of Tabernacles. And the Feast of Tabernacles prefigured life in the kingdom. And so it is

possible that the reading and study of Ecclesiastes can help us understand how to live now in light of how we will live life in the kingdom.

Let's turn now to the author. The author never names himself by name, other than the title or profession he claims, that of *qophelet*, which we have translated "The Teacher." But who is this teacher who addressed the assembly of Israel? Well, from the earliest times this book has been assigned by both Jews and Christians to King Solomon. Why? Because he's the only one who fits the internal clues. For example, in 1:1 the Teacher is said to be a **son of David, king in Jerusalem**. Solomon certainly meets this criterion. Furthermore, in 1:12 the author says, "I, the Teacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem." The note that he was over "Israel in Jerusalem" limits the possibilities significantly, since only David, Solomon and Rehoboam very briefly, ruled over Israel in the city of Jerusalem. Later kings ruled in Jerusalem but only ruled the southern kingdom of Judah, whereas the rulers of Israel ruled from Samaria. Furthermore, in 1:16 the author describes himself as possessing unsurpassed wisdom. In 2:3 he makes mention of his opportunities to pursue pleasure. In 2:4-6 he proclaims his great building projects. In 2:4-7 he mentions his in-depth understanding of nature, plants and birds. In 2:7 he mentions his numerous servants. In 2:9 he describes himself as possessing great wealth. In 12:9 he claims to have written many proverbs. All these things have parallels in the reign of Solomon described in 1 Kings. Moreover, in 7:20 the author uses the expression "there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin" which is the same expression used by Solomon in 1 Kgs 8:46. Finally, he states in 12:13 that men should "fear God and keep His commandments," a theme familiar to us from Proverbs 1:7, which was written by Solomon.

While all of these factors indicate Solomon to be the author, beginning with Martin Luther, Solomon has been rejected as being the author. The arguments primarily come from linguistic grounds arising with critical scholarship of the Enlightenment in the 17th century. All these arguments have been adequately answered by conservative theologians. First, some argue that the use of 3-4 Aramaic and Persian words known from the later period between 450-250BC betray that it must have been written by a pseudo-Solomon during the Persian or Greek kingdoms. However, M. J. Dahood has discovered similarities in Ecclesiastes to Ugaritic literature as early as the 14th century BC. And further, no one really knows enough about linguistics at the time of Solomon to know that Solomon was not using words well-known at the time. He certainly had access to other languages through his ports at Ezion Geber on the Red Sea which sailed to India and beyond. And through them he could have picked up loan words. Others argue that because the Hebrew is similar to that in the Mishnah, written around AD200, that it must have been written much later. But again, not enough is known linguistically for such a claim to stand. Another argument is that the author never names himself, and therefore betrays it is not Solomon. But the contents of the book indicate that it couldn't be anyone but Solomon. A fourth argument is that the author never uses the name YHWH, and if Solomon were the author he certainly would have used the name YHWH. But the author did use Elohim and may have done so because he intended this book to go out to other nations with which he had correspondence, as a last ditch effort to dispense wisdom into the surrounding Gentile world. A fifth argument is that the author in 3:16 does not refer to himself as the king but as a

commoner. However, the author did refer to himself as the king in 1:1 and 12 and could be writing in 3:16 from the standpoint of the common man. A sixth argument is that Solomon was spiritually out of it and not qualified to write a biblical book at this point in his life. However, that view fails to account for 12:13, where we have every indication that the author repented. All in all the arguments are heavily weighted in the favor of Solomon.

So let's look a little at Solomon. Turn to 1 Kgs 3. Solomon acceded to the throne after his father David and Eccl 1:1 says the author was the **son of David, king in Jerusalem**. When Solomon came to be king 1 Kgs 3:5 says, "In Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon in a dream at night; and God said, "Ask what you wish me to give you." Now isn't this a wonderful opportunity? Ask whatever you want. And in verse 6 Solomon says, "You have shown great lovingkindness to Your servant David my father, according as he walked before You in truth and righteousness and uprightness of heart toward You; and You have reserved for him this great lovingkindness, that You have given him a son to sit on his throne, as *it is* this day." This great lovingkindness is a reference to the Davidic covenant. Solomon was now sitting on the Davidic throne in confirmation of the Davidic covenant and you can see that Solomon is thoroughly with it, spiritually. Verse 7, "Now, O Lord my God, You have made Your servant king in place of my father David, yet I am but a little child; I do not know how to go out or come in." Now just look at the humility of this man. Verse 8, "Your servant is in the midst of Your people which You have chosen, a great people who are too many to be numbered or counted. ⁹"So give Your servant an understanding heart to judge Your people to discern between good and evil. For who is able to judge this great people of Yours?" Now that is a highly spiritual request, and in verse 10 we see how the Lord answered it. "It was pleasing in the sight of the Lord that Solomon had asked this thing. ¹¹God said to him, "Because you have asked this thing and have not asked for yourself long life, nor have asked riches for yourself, nor have you asked for the life of your enemies, but have asked for yourself discernment to understand justice, ¹²behold, I have done according to your words. Behold, I have given you a wise and discerning heart, so that there has been no one like you before you, nor shall one like you arise after you. ¹³"I have also given you what you have not asked, both riches and honor, so that there will not be any among the kings like you all your days." Now that right there in verse 12 solidifies that Solomon is the author of Ecclesiastes. Why? Because verse 12 says that there would be no one as wise before Solomon and no one as wise after Solomon, until Messiah, of course (Matt 12). And in Eccl 1:16 the author says he had unsurpassed wisdom. So unless the word of God is wrong in verse 12 and there was someone wiser, then we have to conclude that the author was Solomon. Now turn to 1 Kgs 4:29. This is just a brief survey of Solomon. "Now God gave Solomon wisdom and very great discernment and breadth of mind, like the sand that is on the seashore. ³⁰Solomon's wisdom surpassed the wisdom of all the sons of the east" there's Mesopotamia, "and all the wisdom of Egypt." Then in verse 31 he refers to men in Israel. "For he was wiser than all men, than Ethan the Ezrahite, Heman, Calcol and Darda, the sons of Mahol;" we don't know these men, but they were Jews and his wisdom excelled them all. The verse goes on, "and his fame was *known* in all the surrounding nations." That's a catch all. Everybody around heard about Solomon. Verse 32, "He also spoke 3,000 proverbs," 3,000, that's a lot more than what we have in the Book of Proverbs. Proverbs is the tip of the iceberg. The man was a proverbial

machine. And not only that, "his songs were 1,005." The guy composed over a 1,000 hymns. And we have only one of them, the greatest song ever written, called the Song of Songs. Why did they call it that? Song of Songs is a Hebrew superlative. It's their way of saying the greatest of all songs. And it's a love song that Solomon wrote to one of the wives he really did love. As we'll find, he didn't love the other wives. Verse 33, "He spoke of trees, from the cedar that is in Lebanon even to the hyssop that grows on the wall; he spoke also of animals and birds and creeping things and fish." The man understood botany, zoology, ornithology, entomology and ichthyology. He was a renaissance genius. Leonardo DaVinci is often praised for his accomplishments but he doesn't even touch Solomon. Marcus Aurelius was considered a genius of geniuses, but he doesn't compare to Solomon. There's no one who has ever exceeded the wisdom of Solomon except Jesus Christ. And verse 34 says that people were coming from all over the world to hear his wisdom. You see that the rumors were just so unbelievable that people had to come and see for themselves. So let's turn to 1 Kgs 10 and see one of the rulers who came to hear. Verse 1, "Now when the queen of Sheba (she came out of Egypt) heard about the fame of Solomon concerning the name of the Lord, she came to test him with difficult questions. ²So she came to Jerusalem with a very large retinue, with camels carrying spices and very much gold and precious stones. When she came to Solomon, she spoke with him about all that was in her heart." This woman had questions; questions about life, questions about the meaning of life, questions about God, questions that normal everyday people have all their lives and they never get answers and so eventually they assume there are no answers. And yet verse 3, "Solomon answered all her questions; nothing was hidden from the king which he did not explain to her. ⁴When the queen of Sheba perceived all the wisdom of Solomon, the house that he had built, ⁵the food of his table, the seating of his servants, the attendance of his waiters and their attire, his cupbearers, and his stairway by which he went up to the house of the Lord, there was no more spirit in her. ⁶Then she said to the king, "It was a true report which I heard in my own land about your words and your wisdom. ⁷"Nevertheless I did not believe the reports, until I came and my eyes had seen it. And behold, the half was not told me." She interpreted all that she could see as wisdom because in Hebrew wisdom is skill in living, and Solomon obviously had it. So far we've looked at the early and middle life of Solomon, but in 1 Kgs 11 there was a shift sometime in his middle life and he started to blow it. "Now King Solomon loved many foreign women along with the daughter of Pharaoh: Moabite, Ammonite, Edomite, Sidonian, and Hittite women, ²from the nations concerning which the Lord had said to the sons of Israel, "You shall not associate with them, nor shall they associate with you, *for* they will surely turn your heart away after their gods." Solomon held fast to these in love. ³He had seven hundred wives, princesses, and three hundred concubines, and his wives turned his heart away." Now Solomon didn't really love all these women. He married these women as part of the treaties he was making with the surrounding kings of other nations. You see, Solomon wanted to secure his kingdom and make money. And rather than trust the Lord to do this for him, something God promised he would do for him, he started to trust in the deals he made. That's how ancient kings worked, they wheeled and dealed. But to enter these deals and secure them, you married the daughters of these foreign kings. So that's what he's doing here. In truth he probably never saw half these women more than the day he married them. They went into the harem and he kept them to secure the treaties.

But one of the problems with bringing in all these girls was these girls were allowed to bring in all their paganism. And ultimately Solomon went astray because they wanted him to build these temples to their gods and go to these temples and worship their gods and he eventually did. Verse 8 says he did it to satisfy these girls. And in verse 9 that made the Lord angry "because his heart was turned away from the Lord, the God of Israel, who had appeared to him twice." Think about that. The Lord personally appeared to Solomon twice and he still turned aside. And it just shows you that all the people who want God to show up to them in a dream or a vision because it will make them a really spiritual person are full of baloney. Solomon saw the Lord twice personally, and he blew it. So seeing Jesus isn't going to help. Studying the word of God, that's what will help, keeping your nose in this book. Solomon didn't do that, see. And it was all these treaties and intermarriages which set him off on his path without God at the center of his life. And out of that we have Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes is the report of a believer who went carnal and had every asset in the world and tried it all so that no one in history could come along and say they found the secret to life. And what that means is that you are not going to come to the end of Ecclesiastes and say, "Oh, I know something that will give me meaning in life that Solomon didn't try." Malarkey. You can never say that. You don't have the funds to carry out the kinds of experiments Solomon tried out. He had an annual allowance of about 50 million dollars. 50 million dollars to spend on whatever new-fangled idea he wanted to try. So don't come to me afterward saying Solomon didn't try this and Solomon didn't try that. Oh, he tried it all right. He had the ability to try it all and he did try it and he tried it repetitively with the best money had to offer. The man tried alcohol and women and real estate and academics and fame and entertainment and wealth and labor, and he even mixed some of these in all sorts of combinations, and you know what he found? If you don't put God at the center of your life in everything you do; it's just a waste of time, there's no satisfaction, there's no meaning, there's nothing. It's already been tried and the report came back. That's why this is one of the greatest books for youth who think they are going to get out of the house and have a hey day. But it's not just for youth because Solomon did this in his middle life and frankly, you can do this at any stage in life, and Solomon evidently wrote the book at the end of his life so that we all realize that the grass is not greener on the other side. The grass is brown and dead and lifeless and there's nothing over there.

Now when exactly did Solomon live and when did he write this book? What's the date? Well, Solomon reigned from 970-930BC. Now most think, and I agree, that of the three books he wrote, he wrote Song of Songs in his youth, Proverbs in middle life and Ecclesiastes in old age. So it was after he had reigned with great wisdom and prosperity and been drawn aside by all these women that he tried all these things to find meaning and fulfillment apart from God. Then he repented and he wrote the book. So I'd date it around 940-935BC.

Now I said Solomon repented but Solomon is often viewed as a man who never repented, and sometimes people will say he wasn't even a believer because he didn't persevere to the end. Now I think that theology is hogwash. That theology is what they call the perseverance of the saints. We don't believe in the perseverance of the saints. We believe in the preservation of the saints. In other words, the eternal security of the believer. But that's not what the book is about anyway. In the end though, I think Solomon did repent toward the end of his

life and that explains why he wrote this book and why we have it. So let's look at three or four statements that indicate that Solomon did repent. First, turn to Eccl 2:24. This seems to be the conclusion of his early arguments. He says, "There is nothing better for a man *than* to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God. ²⁵For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him? ²⁶For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God's sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind." See, Solomon understood in verse 25 that you can't eat and have enjoyment without Him. It just won't work. You've got to put God at the center. And as long as you don't put Him at the center you can do the same things but not get enjoyment out of it. So he seems to have come to understand that and it's an evidence that he repented in later life. Second, turn to 5:18. This seems to be the conclusion of his second series of arguments. "Here is what I have seen to be good and fitting: to eat, to drink and enjoy oneself in all one's labor in which he toils under the sun *during* the few years of his life which God has given him; for this is his reward. ¹⁹Furthermore, as for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, He has also empowered him to eat from them and to receive his reward and rejoice in his labor; this is the gift of God. ²⁰For he will not often consider the years of his life, because God keeps him occupied with the gladness of his heart." This sounds like a man who realizes that as long as you put God at the center, you can relax and enjoy life. And it seems like it's more evidence that Solomon did repent in later life. Third, turn to 8:15. This seems to be another conclusion of an argument he's making, "So I commended pleasure, for there is nothing good for a man under the sun except to eat and to drink and to be merry, and this will stand by him in his toils *throughout* the days of his life which God has given him under the sun." Now this statement is not as strong evidence, but it does show, that when it comes to pleasure and relaxation, it can only be enjoyed when God is at the center. It's an admission that God is the one who gives us the days of our life and we should enjoy them. Fourth, and lastly is 12:13. This is the strongest of all and the grand conclusion. "The conclusion, when all has been heard, *is*: fear God and keep His commandments, because this *applies to* every person. ¹⁴For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil." This is a major reason the book is not pessimistic. The book ends on an optimistic note; that there is a way to live life that is satisfying to God and that is to put God at the center of every activity. So a lot of people deny Solomon ever came back to God, but I think these four passages are good evidence that at the end of his life, after he'd tried to live without God, he found that it was vanity and he came back to God and wrote Ecclesiastes so we could learn from his mistakes and not make them, not try to live life without God, because it's not going to be any fun, it's just going to be a waste, vanity.

Ok, let's talk about the Theme of this book. Can you guess what it is? Vanity. Vanity, vanity, all is vanity. Now that's the main theme of the book, but there is second theme of this book, and if you don't understand this second theme you'll walk away from this book with a pessimistic outlook. So to fully understand the main theme you have to understand the second theme as well. Let's look at these starting with the main theme. Vanity, we know "vanity" is the main theme because the book begins and ends with the same expression. In Eccl 1:2 **Vanity**

of vanities, says the Teacher! All is vanity. Eccl 12:8 **Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher! All is vanity.** So the theme is vanity. Now this Hebrew word for **vanity** is *hebel* and *hebel* is used 73x's in the entire OT. 38 of those uses are in the Book of Ecclesiastes. That means that more than half of the uses of *hebel* are found in this book. Now this word, in the leading Hebrew lexicon, has three descriptions. The first is "*breath, wind, vapor.*" It's referring to something that is transitory, something that is temporary, something that appears on the stage as having substance, but then disappears. For example, in Ps 62:9 the Psalmist says, "Men of low degree are only vanity and men of rank are a lie; in the balances they go up; They are together lighter than breath." And what's the point? That evil people, no matter what their social class, are really nothing more than a breath, they come on the scene but they really don't amount to anything, and just as surely as they came on the scene they'll go off the scene, so don't worry about them. The second description is "*vanity*" and this is another word that refers to fleeting existence. It's the main idea in Ecclesiastes and it is described under three expressions. We want to look at these. The first expression is "chasing after the wind" and for this see Eccl 1:14. "I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and *chasing after the wind.*" In other words, there's just no lasting substance to all the work, you end up just chasing after something you can never catch, there's just no lasting value. The second expression is "no advantage" and for this look at Eccl 3:19. "For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is *no advantage* for man over beast, for all is vanity." It's futility, everyone dies, man and beast, so man doesn't have an advantage over beasts. That's vanity. The third expression is "no profit" and for this turn to Eccl 2:11. "Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was *no profit* under the sun." There's the words "no profit." You do all this activity, you exert all this energy, do labor and in the end there's "no profit." And the third and last meaning of *hebel* in the lexicon is "*idol.*" That's an interesting usage. An idol is considered vanity. Why? Because it doesn't exist. There's no real substance to it. And it's interesting to consider that since Ecclesiastes is about vanity that it just might be about idolatry, because the moment we try to find fulfillment in something other than God, what has that something become but an idol? And yet an idol is nothing and so that's why you can't get fulfillment out of it unless you put God in the center of it. So the first theme of Ecclesiastes is vanity. Vanity, vanity, says the Teacher, All is vanity! But to understand what Solomon means by "all is vanity" we have to understand the second theme. Because we might be tempted to take the word "all" in its absolute sense. The Hebrew "all" is *kol* and can mean absolutely all, but that's not the meaning in the context of this book. Obviously God is not vanity. Obviously justice is not vanity. So "all" is being used in a limited sense and that limited sense is explained by the second theme of the book. The second theme is "under the sun." This expression is used 29 times in Ecclesiastes and it has a peculiar meaning. Let's look at a few of these. In 1:3 we find the first usage. "What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the sun?" Now it doesn't tell us much, except the pessimistic tone of all work done "under the sun." So let's look at 2:17, "So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind." Here you have both themes together, work under the sun and vanity, chasing after the wind. And Solomon says I

hated life. Well, for what reason? Look at the way it's phrased, "for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous." Did you notice that it doesn't say all work? It says the work done "under the sun." It's referring to a specific kind of work and that kind of work is done without respect to anything above the sun. That is, without respect to God. It's work, but work without God at the center. And when that is all your work is then it is grievous. So this expression "under the sun" is communicating that when you do something, anything apart from God, without God in mind, without God at the center, it's not going to provide the fulfillment and satisfaction you think it will. It's going to be a fleeting, vaporous, emptiness, vanity. So when we put these two themes together and we read that the Teacher says "**all is vanity**," we are to understand that everything that is done under the sun, without God at the center, that's vanity; it's not going to bring happiness, it's not going to bring satisfaction, it's not going to bring fulfillment, it's just chasing after the wind. But all is not vanity when He is at the center, when we look beyond the sun where He is and keep Him in focus. When He is at the center there is happiness, there is satisfaction, there is fulfillment, and that's why this book ends on that optimistic note, "fear God and keep His commandments," and live in light of the fact that God is going to judge. That is the only way to live that is meaningful. So whatever you do; eat, drink, and enjoy life, but keep God at the center of it all.

Now that's the theme, but what's the purpose? Why did Solomon write this book? Why did the Holy Spirit canonize it among the other books of Scripture? Because it has a tremendous importance. I want to mention five things. First of all, since the name of YHWH is never used in the book, the Jewish name of God, but the name Elohim is used, a common name for God among the Gentiles, it may be Solomon's last effort to send a message to the Gentile nations. That message is that without God at the center you can try to get satisfaction and meaning from sex, food, money, labor, pleasure, academics and any number of other pursuits, but you will never find it apart from God. All of that is just a chasing after the wind. It's not possible to achieve. So it has a purpose to reach out to the unregenerate natural man. Second, it has an evangelistic purpose for us. When we realize that life under the sun, apart from God, is ultimately a drudgery and a lost cause, it should develop within us a heart for the lost. This is all they have, life under the sun, and yet there is no purpose, no meaning, no satisfaction, no fulfillment, it's just on and on and on, a drudgery. Shouldn't that develop within us a heart for the lost? That we have something that they need, the only thing that will ever give their lives purpose; God! Third, the book has a purpose of showing that a believer can live a carnal life and go about living life under the sun without respect to God. And if he does he will have all the same thinking patterns as the unregenerate natural man. He will have all the same thoughts as Solomon, that all is vanity, and it is when we live as Christians as if God is not there. That is what Solomon tried to do, and we know where that ends up. Our experience as believers begins to look identical to that of the natural unregenerate man, all becomes futile, a striving after the wind. Fourth, the book has the purpose of driving both the natural unregenerate man and the carnal regenerate man to trust in God. The natural unregenerate man is to trust in God for justification. The carnal regenerate man is to trust in God for sanctification. Fifth, the book is written to show that you can enjoy life; enjoy eating, enjoy drinking, enjoy your labor, enjoy wealth, you can relax, but the only way to do it correctly is to keep God at the

center of the eating, the drinking, the labor, the wealth, the pleasure. When He is kept at the center these things take on a whole new significance and meaning and are fulfilling.

Alright, we've looked at the title of the book, it's Ecclesiastes, but technically it's The Teacher. We've looked at the Author of the Book, it's Solomon. He's the Teacher. We've looked at the place of this book in the Hebrew canon, it's in the Kethubim which is the wisdom writings. It's also a part of the Megilloth and read every year at the Feast of Tabernacles. We've looked at the Date of writing, which is the end of Solomon's life, after he enjoyed prosperity with God and drudgery without God and finally repented, about 935BC. We've looked at the Theme which is all pursuits under the sun are vanity because they are pursuits without God at the center. And we've looked at the purpose, which is to drive unregenerate natural men to trust in God for justification and to drive regenerate carnal men to trust in God for sanctification and to remind us that you can enjoy life and find fulfillment, but not without God at the center of it all. Many times you think you can, but Solomon tried it with unlimited resources. And he concluded, it's impossible, you can't, you won't and you'll end up sowing the wind and reaping the whirlwind. The message is clear; put God at the center of every activity of your life because then you will find true enjoyment in life.

¹ Biblical Studies Press, The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible (Biblical Studies Press, 2005).

² Biblical Studies Press, The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible (Biblical Studies Press, 2005).