

Notes on Ecclesiastes 1:1-11; 12:9-1

Intro: The Hebrews called the book we are about to study “Qoheleth”. It is a Hebrew word from a word meaning “to gather or collect”; here it is people who are gathered. “Ecclesiastes is the name the Septuagint translators gave to the Hebrew book they were translating. See the word “ekklesia”, our NT Greek word for “church” or “assembly”. The word “ecclesiastes” means “one who assembles or gathers people”. Hence the book is called “ecclesiastes”; but when you read that just think of someone who gathers people together for teaching—“the Preacher”.

Identification of “the Preacher”

His identification

The authorship of the book has always been disputed. Good conservative scholars, even in the church, like Brother Hailey, for example, have questioned the idea that the work was written by Solomon. Others of course are rather certain that it was penned by Solomon.

First Solomon’s name never appears in the book. This is strange if Solomon is the author. Why is his name omitted?

At times it appears that there are two authors or at least two viewpoints represented. One who writes in the third person about “the preacher”; and then “the preacher” himself speaking in the first person. It is possible that Solomon might have done both. Others have concluded that the author writes about the life of Solomon. It is his wisdom and experience that is written from the vantage point of a wise man who had learned the lesson of his life.

The third difficulty relates to the life of Solomon himself. The historical books tell us of Solomon’s apostasy and but nothing of his return to the Lord. Those who favor the Solomonic authorship would say this book is the evidence of Solomon’s repentance. Another view is that the book was written by Solomon in his younger wisdom when he was truer to the wisdom God had given him. If he were capable of writing the many proverbs during this period, why not Ecclesiastes as well.

I suspect that most of us will incline toward the idea that Solomon is “the preacher”. It is simpler for us to take the statements of 1:1 as identifying Solomon since he was “the son of David and King in Israel” rather than imagine that a later wise man writes the story as if it were Solomon’s and consequently refuses to attribute the book to him directly; but rather attributes it to “The Preacher” or “Mr. Preacher”.

His qualifications.

Later in the book we see that “the Preacher” was wise, a teacher, who arranged many proverbs (12:9). This comports with Solomon. The three terms call attention to his method: 1) weighed (thought about carefully

and cautiously); 2) searched out (thoroughness and conscientiousness); 3) arranged (use of skill, art, and organization).

His motivations.

12:10 He wanted to penetrate the heart; but he also wanted to be honest with truth.

The purpose of the preacher's message, 12:11-12

Goads that prod (cf. 1 Sam. 13:21)

Stability of those who master the words of wisdom collected

The ultimate source of truth is God, who as a shepherd cares for His people and guides them into the right way. Hence, the wisdom literature comes from God and is not merely the words of men.

A warning to excessive devotion to other writings in which there may be false wisdom and the study of which is ultimately exhausting physically

A summary of the preacher's message, 12:13-14

Fear God (reverence God for who He is)

Keep His commandments (the only use in Eccl) but the natural outgrowth of the fear of the Lord

This is "every man"! The structure is common for a universality (i.e. everyone, Cf. 3:13; 5:19). It could mean "this is everyone's task or duty".

The opening challenge: The vanity of the secularist world view or paradigm (Life under the sun is without meaning or progress)—(1:1-11)

The vanity of life

Vanity of vanities is a Hebrew superlative for "the great vanity". The writer will refer to it at least 30 different times.

Some synonyms for vanity (emptiness, futility, deceit, brevity, insubstantiality, unreliability, frailty)

All of life comes under this charge.

Its consequences for man—v. 4

"What profit is there...?" Gain is a commercial term. Does life pay?

The unchanging nature of the world that is the source of vanity

People come...people go; but the world remains the same (1:4)

The processes of life move in an endless circle (1:5-7)

The implications for man

There is a weariness that man feels that is beyond words (8a)

His senses of sight and hearing are not satisfied by the world's activities (8b)

But no change can be anticipated (9), no new circumstances (10)

Therefore there are no lessons learned from the past to be used in the future (11)

Conclusion: From the secularist paradigm life is pretty pessimistic. But Solomon is not through; for he imagines that a couple of potential objections

might be offered. Surely there is some profit if we are properly educated or if we use the world for our pleasure! Really? We'll see next time.