

HOLY SPIRIT LAKELANDS

4-Aug-19

I. Ecclesiastes

A. Name

1. Ecclesiastes (Greek of Septuagint)
2. Qoheleth
 - a) One who addresses an assembly—"the Teacher"

B. Date

1. 450-180 BCE
 - a) After return from Exile and rebuilding of Temple (516)

C. Type of literature

1. Aphorisms

II. Admonition to read Ecclesiastes: a book for our time

III. Our situation

A. Difficult times

B. Climate catastrophe

1. Loss of things we love
2. Despair that it might be too late
 - a) We have reason to despair
3. Fear and uncertainty about what to do

IV. The writer's attempt to answer the basic question: what is good for mortals to do during their brief lives (2:3)

A. The writer's spiritual progression

1. Being successful: working to acquire things
 - a) The reality of death makes all this without lasting worth
 - b) There is no lasting worth
2. Turned to philosophy (wisdom vs. foolishness) (2:12)

- a) But this did not answer the deep question of impermanence/contingency
 - 3. I gave myself up to despair (2:20)
 - a) Life is unjust (2:21)
- v. Does he stop at despair or does he have answers to the question of how we should lead our lives?

VI. He starts from the perspective that all life is unsatisfactory

A. "Futility, utter futility"

B. "Vanity" in older translations

- 1. Not vanity in the modern sense
 - a) Self-love
- 2. Older English meaning of vanity as meaning futility, uselessness
 - a) In vain

C. Some say Ecclesiastes is pessimistic. But I don't think this is a correct interpretation. And many of the translations of *hevel* contribute to this misinterpretation.

- 1. When the Preacher says that all things are tired, weary and old, he is not saying that life is "futile," "meaningless" or "pointless."
- 2. He is saying that life is often lived with the wrong attitude.
 - a) We frequently can't control the things that happen in life.
 - b) But the attitude we take to what happens can make all the difference.
- 3. He is not being pessimistic
 - a) He is saying that we need to have a realistic outlook

VII. Hebrew: *hevel*

A. Mist, smoke, impermanent, evanescent, ephemeral

B. Everything depends on other things

1. Nothing exists on its own
 2. Do not make the mistake of thinking that things will last or that things can be permanent
- C. Time and chance govern all (9:11)
1. All life is suffering because the passage of time leaves nothing behind
- D. All things are impermanent (1:11)
1. Everything passes away
 - a) All things change and all beings die
 - b) This is not pessimism but what the book calls "the straight truth"
- E. Dalai Lama on emptiness and impermanence
1. Everything depends on other things

viii. Wisdom

- A. Our minds are filled with falsehoods, there is madness in their minds throughout their lives (9:3)
1. Don't be tripped up or stopped by your attachments to things that aren't real or that won't last
- B. Things are beyond human understanding
1. Language is insufficient to understand reality
- C. Wisdom was beyond my reach (7:24)
1. Limits of human reason and knowledge: No human being should be able to discover what is happening ((8:17)
 2. Knowledge leads to a greater appreciation of suffering i.e. not an escape from the human predicament (1:18)
- D. The Preacher is not dogmatic
1. The writer does not mention beliefs or commandments
 2. The attitude he is advocating is an open-eyed acceptance of reality as it is and a willingness to respond and adapt to existing conditions

ix. Happiness

A. Ethics

1. Avoid wicked acts do not be an evil-doer (8:13)
 2. Compassion
 - a) I saw the tears of the oppressed and there was no one to comfort them (4:1)
 3. Whatever task lies to your hand, do it with (all your) might (9:10)
- B.** If the reality is *hevel* (smoke) we are not to dwell on that
1. Banish vexation from your mind (9:10)
- C.** Vs. desire and attachment
1. Do not allow yourself to become attached to the way things appear to be
 - a) Nothing lasts
 2. It is better to be satisfied with what is before your eyes than to give rein to desire (6:9)
 3. Vs. attachment to wealth: No one who loves money can ever have enough, and no one who loves wealth enjoys any return from it (5:10)
 - a) As he came from the womb of mother earth, so, naked as he came, must he return; all his toil produces nothing he can take away with him. (5:15)
- D.** Do not be carried away by false and temporary happiness and excitement
1. Sobriety: grief is better than laughter (7:3)
- E.** The importance of friendship
1. Two are better than one...if one falls the other can help his companion up again (4:9f)
 2. A cord of three strands is not quickly snapped (4:12)
- F.** Be content with your lot
1. Not brooding over the passing years
 2. Enjoying life and its pleasures
 - a) Joy of heart
 3. Take pleasure in the small things of life

- a) I commend enjoyment, since there is nothing good for anyone to do here under the sun but to eat and drink and enjoy himself; this is all that will remain with him to reward his toil throughout the span of life which God grants him here under the sun. (8:15)
- b) Eat your food and enjoy it, and drink your wine with a cheerful heart; for God has already accepted what you have done (9:7)

x. Time

A. Passage of time is inexorable

- 1. Continual motion, flux
- 2. Cycles
 - a) The sun rises and the sun goes down
 - b) Generations come and generations go
 - c) Cycle of streams - sea - rain
 - d) Cycle of sun up and sun down
 - e) Cycle of winds north and winds south
 - f) Circularity: of time and creation

B. We possess a sense of the past and the future but no understanding of the overall sense of time (3:11)

- 1. The past is gone
 - a) Those who lived in the past are not remembered (1:11)
- 2. Future unknowable: What is to happen afterwards here under the sun, who can tell? (6:12)
 - a) We are greatly troubled by ignorance of the future (8:6f.)

C. Death

- 1. No one knows when his hour will come (9:12)
- 2. Death is the great equalizer: One and the same fate comes to all (9:2)
- 3. Ecc. is not saying that death is to be sought or that it makes everything in life meaningless
 - a) For anyone who is counted among the living there is still hope (9:4)
 - b) Why die before your time? (7:17)
- 4. Hymns about death

5. Luke and sudden death: vs. greed, attachment, illusion of permanence

D. The present moment

1. He has made everything beautiful in its time (3:11)
2. Every activity and every purpose has its proper time (3:17)
3. The light of day is sweet and pleasant to the eye is the sight of the sun. However many years a person may live, he should rejoice in all of them. (11:7-8)
4. The Preacher speaks of remembering your Creator
 - a) Put yourself in mind of what is real
 - b) Dispense with thoughts of the past or the future
 - c) Do not get lost in the small vexations of life
 - d) Stay mindful of the big picture
 - e) Stay hopeful and positive
 - f) Keep working to make the world better and to relieve the oppression of others
5. Remember your Creator in the day when the guardians of the house become unsteady...When the chirping of the sparrow grows faint and songbirds fall silent; when people are afraid of the steep place and the street is full of terrors (12:3-5)
6. Remember your Creator before the silver cord is snapped and the golden bowl is broken, before the pitcher is shattered at the spring and the wheel broken at the well, before the dust returns to the earth as it began and the spirit returns to God who gave it (12:6-7)