

## *Wisdom in Ecclesiastes*

### *What is Ecclesiastes?*

- A wisdom monologue that expresses the reflections of the author's life experiences
- The author is called Qohelet: Teacher/congregation gatherer
- Normally assumed to be Solomon based on textual evidence

### *The Structure*

- The structure of Ecclesiastes helps one to understand its message and purpose
- The opening prologue (1:1-11) & closing epilogue (12:8-14)
  - Written in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person *about* Qohelet, not *by* him
  - They summarize his message (1:2; 12:8)
  - Assert that his teaching is valuable to learn wisdom (12:9-11)
- However, Qohelet's word is not final in the book
  - The epilogue provides the proper perspective on the subject (12:13-14)

### *What's in a Word?*

- In order to understand the scope and meaning on Ecclesiastes, one come to terms with the frequently used and very important word hebel
  - It is found 37 times in Ecclesiastes
- It literally means 'vapor' or 'breath/wisp of air'
  - But what does it mean in Ecclesiastes?
    - It could imply the fleeting nature of all things
    - Or the 'meaninglessness/uselessness' of all things
    - Or a bit of both
- How one answers this question is determined by how one understands the other things Qohelet says

### *The 5 Realities of Qohelet*

1. God is the single, indisputable reality
    - Thus, He is the Creator of all and the One from whom all of life comes as a gift, including its burdensome nature
  2. God's way are not always, or ever, understandable
  3. The way things should be is not always, if ever, the ways things actually are
  4. Most things happen in a repetitive cycle
    - "There is nothing new under the sun"
    - And most things don't last long enough to count for much
  5. Death is the great equalizer
    - Qohelet doesn't seem to have any sense of resurrection
      - Perhaps not yet fully understood in progressive revelation
- Qohelet's point seems to be that despite life being *hebel*, it is still a gift from God to be enjoyed
    - Joy comes not in gaining things for oneself, but in living in the reality of God's common grace

- Common grace: “The gifts that God gives to all humans regardless of their relational stance with Him.”

### ***Two Views of the Book***

- Because of the way in which it is written, Ecclesiastes is a difficult book to read
  - It seems contradictory at times
- But, like every other section of Scripture, it needs to be read as a whole to be properly understood
- The difficulty of the book has led to two opposite views of how to read Ecclesiastes:
  1. Ecclesiastes can be read as cynical wisdom
    - This view sees the prologue & epilogue as orthodox
    - With the rest of the book being a foil to the orthodox view of God’s involvement in human life
    - In this understanding, Qohelet presents the view of those who try to find meaning in life without God’s involvement and no hope of resurrection
      - This is a deistic view that some think Solomon may have adopted at the end of his life (see 1 Kg. 11:1-13)
    - Qohelet’s view is meant to leave one cold, according to this view
      - Thus making the reader long for more, which is presented in the prologue/epilogue
        - A real covenant relationship with God
  2. Ecclesiastes can be read as an expression of how one should enjoy life under God in a world in which all die in the end
    - This view does not deny God’s involvement in this life
    - But rather reminds its readers to enjoy life despite its brevity
- Either way, one should have an overall strategy in reading the book