

Ecclesiastes Chapter One

The Prologue (vv. 1-11)

The Author (v. 1)

VERSE 1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem

דְּבָרַי קְהֵלֶת בֶּן־דָּוִד מֶלֶךְ בִּירוּשָׁלַם) [*noun m.p. dabar word + noun m.s.abs. qoheleth*

speaker in an assembly from the verb qalal 'to assemble' + noun m.s. ben son + proper noun

David + noun m.s.abs. melek king + prep beth w/noun proper Jerusalem]).

ANALYSIS: VERSE 1

1. V. 1 is a superscription providing the reader with a brief bio speaking in the 3rd person.
2. This study adheres to the orthodox view that has Solomon as the human author.
3. This opening verse parallels other superscriptions such as Prov. 1:1 (“The proverbs of Solomon the son of David, king of Israel.”; cf. Jer. 1:1 “The words of Jeremiah” & Amos 1:1 “The words of Amos.”).
4. The words “son of David” always refers to a biological descendant of David when used in the OT.
5. The phrase “king in Jerusalem” indicates that the human author composed this book sometime during his forty year reign (cf. 2 Chron. 9:30).
6. It will become clear that Solomon authored this book late in his career.
7. So this introductory verse identifies “the Preacher” with Solomon.
8. The noun “Preacher” is Qohelet is derived from the verb *qalal* which means ‘to assemble.’
9. So the term means ‘speaker in an assembly.’
10. In v. 12 the human author presents himself in the 1st person singular (“I, the Preacher, haven been king over Jerusalem.”).
11. When Solomon refers to his life experiences and observations on human behavior he speaks in the 1st person mostly.
12. He will return to the 3rd person at 12:8, 9 & 10 (once at 7:27).
13. In vv. 1-11 we have the books prologue.
14. The internal evidence for Solomonic authorship beyond this opening verse is transparently clear throughout this book.
15. Solomon wrote two psalms (72, 127), the book of Proverbs, Song of Solomon and Ecclesiastes.
16. The title for the book (Ecclesiastes) is taken from the OT Greek translation (LXX) and is derived from the Greek *ekklesia* which means an assembly for religious or political reasons (in the NT for the local church), and so corresponds to the verbal root *qalal* (see pt. 8 above).
17. Solomonic authorship is widely rejected in modern times.

18. But consider the following: (1) the author designates himself as a collector of proverbs (12:9), a description that obviously fits Solomon (1 Kgs. 4:32); (2) the reference to the author's great wisdom (1:16; 2:9) fits with Solomon's reputation (1 Kgs. 4:30f.); (3) the author's reference to the splendor of Jerusalem during his reign (2:4-9) points to Solomon (1 Chron. 29:25); (4) the subtle references to characteristics of his life (e.g., 4:13; 7:26, 28; 10:6, 16) point to Solomon.
19. It is to be noted that in all references in this book to deity Solomon uses the name Elohim/God and not Yahweh.
20. This can be accounted for since we are dealing with man's relationship to God as Creator rather than Redeemer.

The Mantra of Ecclesiastes (v. 2)

VERSE 2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher, "Vanity of vanities (הַבֵּל הַבְּלִים)

הַבֵּל הַבְּלִים אָמַר קְהֵלֶת [noun m.s. *chebel* breath, vapor; vanity, meaninglessness + noun

m.p.abs. chebel "vanities" + *Qal perf.3m.s. amar* say + noun m.s.abs. *qohelet* "Preacher" +

noun m.s.constr. chebel vanity + noun m.p.abs. *chebel*]!

All is vanity (הַכֹּל הַבֵּל) [*d.a.w/non m.s.abs. kol* all + noun m.s.abs. *chebel* ."]

ANALYSIS: VERSE 2

1. The Hebrew noun translated "vanity" (KJV, NAS, etc.) is *chebel* and occurs 36x in Ecclesiastes.
2. This was the proper name of the Abel, son of Adam and Eve.
3. Proposed translations include: vanity, meaninglessness, futility and absurd.
4. Each rendering has its limitations.
5. The word does not refer to an activity that is frustrated or to excessive regard for one's self; rather it is used in this book where an action does not yield a positive and lasting result.
6. 'Futile' makes good sense if it is kept in mind that although some endeavors may yield positive results but ultimately fail to achieve benefits beyond the grave.
7. This motto is a summation of Solomon's stated in an emphatic way and is to be taken comprehensively.
8. So his opening statement and theme for this book is absolute and unqualified.
9. An almost identical statement comes toward the end of this book at 12:8.
10. Between this verse and 12:8 is the 'everything' or 'all things' detailed by the Preacher.
11. While some things are good and beneficial, the point is that life taken as a whole apart from a viable relationship with God the Creator is utter vanity.
12. We can look at this in the sense the life 'under the sun' is senseless to the natural man.
13. Only a knowledge of the Creator gives life purpose and meaning.
14. Otherwise man's existence is akin to that of the beasts of the field.

The Key Question (v. 3)

VERSE 3 What advantage does man have in all his work Which he does under the

sun (מִהַיְתָרוֹן לְאָדָם בְּכָל-עֲמָלוֹ שִׁיעֲמֹל תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ) [*noun m.s.abs. yetron advantage, profit + d.a.w/prep lamedh w/noun m.s.abs. adam man + prep beth w/noun m.s.constr. kol all + noun m.s.contr.w/3m.s.suff. amal labor + rel.part w/Qal impf.3m.s. amal toil, labor + prep tabath under + d.a.w/noun both s.abs. shemesh sun*)]?

ANALYSIS: VERSE 3

1. This question sets the fundamental issue that the author sets out to answer.
2. This question also occurs at 2:22; 3:9; and 5:11.
3. The term “advantage” is a commercial term meaning that which is left over after expenses as in our expression ‘net gain’ (KJV has ‘profit’).
4. By itself it refers to that which allows one to get ahead in life.
5. The term “work” is *amal* and is used not merely of just work, but hard labor.
6. In Ecclesiastes it is used not merely of physical labor, but any activity that requires effort.
7. The realm of this labor is restricted to “under the sun” and excludes the heavenly realm.
8. In Prov. 14:23 the first phrase of this proverb says, “In all labor there is profit.”
9. Both v. 3 and Proverb’s verse use the same cognate terms for profit and labor.
10. The perspective is different in these two verses.
11. One declares what is universally understood: that hard work produces a profit to the laborer.
12. Here the question must refer to that which transcends the temporal realm.
13. While temporal benefits are achieved, there is nothing to show for it when life is over for all who live only for the here and now.

Cycles of Nature (vv. 4-7)

VERSE 4 A generation goes and a generation comes (דֹּר הַלֵּךְ וְדֹר בָּא) [*noun*

m.s.abs. dor generation + Qal part.m.s.abs. halak walk, go + conj waw/w/noun m.s.abs. dor + Qal part.m.s.abs. bo go; “comes”]),

But the earth remains forever (וְהָאָרֶץ לְעוֹלָם עֹמֶדֶת) [*waw w/d.a.w/noun both s.abs.*

eretz earth + prep lamedh w/non ms.abs. olam forever + Qal part.f.s.abs. amad remain, endure]).

VERSE 5 Also, the sun rises and the sun sets (וְזָרַח הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ וּבָא הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ) [waw w/Qal perf.3m.s. zarah rise + d.a/w/noun boths.abs. shemesh sun + waw w/Qal perf.3m.s. bo go, enter; “sets” + d.a.w/noun both s.abs. shemesh)];

And hastening to its place it rises there again (וְאֵל-מְקוֹמוֹ שׁוֹאֵף זֹרַח הוּא שָׁם) [waw w/part al into, to + noun m.s.constr.w/3m.suff. maqom place + Qal part.m.s.abs. sha-a long for, gasp, pant after; “hastening” or “hurries back” in NIV + Qal part.m.s.abs. zarach rise + pro.3m.s. hu it; “its” + adv sham there)].

VERSE 6 Blowing toward the south (וְהוֹלֵךְ אֶל-דָּרוֹם) [Qal part.m.s.abs. halak walk; “blowing” + prep el to + noun m.s.abs. darom south],

Then turning toward the north (וּסוֹבֵב אֶל-צָפוֹן) [waw w/Qal part.m.s.abs. sabab turn around; change direction + prep el to + noun f.s.abs. tsapon north)],

The wind continues swirling along (סוֹבֵב סָבַב הוֹלֵךְ הָרוּחַ) [Qal part.m.s.abs. sabah turn around + Qal part.m.s.abs. sabab turn around + Qal part.m.s.abs. halak walk; three participles; two the same = “continues swirling along” + d.a.w/noun boths.abs. ruach wind];

And on its circular courses the wind returns (וְעַל-סְבִיבֹתָיו שָׁב הָרוּחַ) [waw w/prep al + adv sabib round about; “circular courses” + Qal part.m.s.abs. shub return + d.a.w/noun both s.abs. ruach wind)].

VERSE 7 All the rivers flow into the sea (כָּל־הַנְּחָלִים הַלְּכִים אֶל־הַיָּם) [*noun m.s.constr.*

kol all + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. nachal river + Qal part.m.p.abs. halak walk; “flow” + prep al to + d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. yam sea; west],

Yet the sea is not full (וְהַיָּם אֵינָנוּ מְלֵא אֶל־מְקוֹם) [*waw w/d.a.w/noun m.s.abs. yam sea*

+ adv ayin not + adj.m.s.abs. male full]).

To the place where the rivers flow (אֶל־מְקוֹם שֶׁהַנְּחָלִים הַלְּכִים) [*prep el to + noun*

m.s.constr. makom place + asher which; “where” + d.a.w/noun m.p.abs. nachal river + Qal part.m.p.abs. halak walk; “flow”]),

There they flow again (שָׁם הֵם שׁוֹבִים לְלַכֵּת) [*adv shem there + Qal part.m.p.abs. shub*

return + prep lamed w/Qal infin.constr. halak “flow”]).

ANALYSIS: VERSES 4-7

1. This series of verses dealing with the regularity of the natural order of things is here presented in poetic form.
2. In light of 1:2 and the key question of 1:3 verses 4-7 cannot be taken as a celebration of the regularity of the natural order of things.
3. This opening poem (vv. 4-7) supports the theme of Ecclesiastes.
4. Even the natural order of things is futile when it comes to the ultimate meaning of human existence.
5. The cyclical nature of things taking place on earth demonstrates the motto of Ecclesiastes (1:2).
6. The first example is the coming and going of human generations (v. 4a).
7. This is contrasted with the permanency of the earth (v. 4b).
8. The earth is here to stay (cf. 1 Chron. 16:30 “...the world is firmly established, it will not be moved.”; Ps. 93:1c “Indeed, the world is firmly established, it will not be moved.”; 96:10 “Say among the nations, ‘Yahweh reigns, Indeed the world is firmly established, it will not be moved. He will judge the peoples with equity.’”).
9. The cycle of life and death has no meaning apart from a relationship with the Creator.
10. In vv. 5-7 the focus shifts from human generations to natural phenomena.
11. The author provides three examples: the sun (v. 5), the wind (v. 6) and the rivers (v. 7).
12. In each of the three examples movement is evident.
13. These three examples from the natural world have one thing in common and that is perpetual motion.
14. Exceptions to the regular natural movement of sun, wind, and streams/rivers are noted in Scripture but they are extremely rare and require divine intervention (e.g. a miracle).

15. Joshua's long day (Josh. 10:13); the stoppage of the flow of the Jordan (Josh. 3) and the holding back of the four winds of heaven at the midpoint of the tribulation (Rev. 7:1).
16. One thing is apparent from v. 5 and that is the fact that the sun is in perpetual motion relative to the earth!
17. The opposite view is the one that modern civilization holds to be true.
18. In the heliocentric model (e.g., Copernican) the earth is moving relative to the Sun.
19. But what we find in the Hebrew OT is that the earth is stationary and the sun is in perpetual motion over the surface of the earth (geocentric view or the flat earth model).
20. The second half of v. 5 is especially noteworthy in this regard.
21. "Hastening to its place" indicates a cyclical motion with a starting point which is repeated over and over, day in and day out.
22. The poetic aspect is seen in the participle "hastening" (*sha-ap*) which is used for longing for something (as in Job 5:5; 7:2; 36:20; Ps. 119:131; Isa. 42:14; Jer. 2:24; 14:6; Amos 32:7) and for trampling someone (Pss. 56:2, 3; 57:4; 119:131; Ezek. 36:3; Amos 8:4).
23. We have been taught that the sun is stationary relative to the earth and the solar system and that the earth is spinning and circling around the sun.
24. This does not accord with this verse poetic language notwithstanding.
25. If the four winds and the numerous rivers upon the earth are in perpetual motion then consistency requires that the sun likewise is in motion.
26. The thing that is not moving in relationship to sun, wind and river systems is the earth!
27. The sun "hastens" or "pants" indicates an exhausting, monotonous, never ending tasks to be completed to cover its path or circuit (line from a hymn: "the sun and moon and stars in their courses above").
28. In v. 6 monotonous activity is seen in the use of participles which stress continuous, round and round nature of the blowing wind.
29. In v. 6 the subject (the wind) does not appear until after five participles (*sabab* occurs 3x; 2x in a row).
30. The effect of withholding the subject and the use of five participles is designed to make the verse deliberately draw-out and monotonous, which poetically reinforces the impression of weariness.
31. The cyclical movement of water (rivers) to the sea (v. 7) does not appear to have any effect on earth's oceans as they are never full.
32. No apparent advantage is gained.
33. We understand the process as per the concept of evaporation.
34. The futility or senselessness of the natural order of things in vv. 4-7 underscores the theme of this book.
35. At this point I digress to demonstrate the biblical and Hebrew cosmology of our universe.