

OLD TESTAMENT BIBLICAL LITERACY

Lesson 37

ECCLESIASTES

Introduction:

1. *Author.*
 - A. Author is unknown but traditionally thought Solomon.
 - B. Qoheleth (Heb.) = Ekklesiastes (Gk.) = "Churchman" (Eng.)
2. *Perspective: Ecclesiastes (like Job) challenges the comfortable world of proverbial platitudes.*
 - A. Some of life is regular and predictable (3:1-8).
 - B. However, life often seems more like endless cycles without meaning (1:2-11).
3. *Message: life under the sun" is ultimately meaningless (1:2; 12:8).*
 - A. Phrase "under the sun" (29 times) = from earthly perspective.
 - B. *Hebel* (35 times) = "mist" or "vapor."
"Meaningless" (NW), "futile" (NET). "vanity" (KJV, RSV).
 - C. Method: personal experience and reflection (1:16-17; 2:3-9).

Qohelet's Critique:

1. *Toil is 'hebel..'*
 - A. It does not satisfy desires but creates more worry (2:11, 23).
 - B. Competition costs one rest and enjoyment of life (4:4-6).
 - C. Merely accumulating without purpose spoils pleasure (4:8-9).
 - D. **ADVICE: LIVE SIMPLY AND ENJOY YOUR TOIL** (2:24; 3:22; 4:6).

2. *Wealth is 'hebel.'*
 - A. It can be taken by others with power (5:8-9).
 - B. It is never enough to satisfy the desire (5:10).
 - C. It creates its own worries and hinders sleep (5:12).
 - D. It can be lost by bad luck (5:13-14).
 - E. **ADVICE: JUST ENJOY WHAT GOD GIVES YOU (5:19).**

3. *Wisdom is 'hebel.'*
 - A. The more you know and understand, the more you hurt (1:18).
 - B. Its relative advantage over foolishness is short-lived (2:14-16).
 - C. Misfortune can spoil its benefits (9:11-12).
 - D. A little sin can outweigh much wisdom (9:18-10:1).
 - E. **ADVICE: GAIN WISDOM ANYWAY, FOR ITS TEMPORARY ADVANTAGES (7:12; 8:1).**

4. *Pleasure is 'hebel.'*
 - A. Whether sensual or mental, pleasure-seeking ultimately accomplishes nothing (2:3, 8, 11).
 - B. **ADVICE: ENJOY LIFE WHILE YOU CAN, BUT REMEMBER THAT GOD HOLDS YOU ACCOUNTABLE (11:9-12:7).**

Qohelet's conclusion:

1. Lived "under the sun," everything about life is finally meaningless.
2. Life is a lock to which humans have lost the key. To find the key, they must go to the One who made the lock (12:13-14).