

Ecclesiastes

*We note the three levels of Hebrew Scripture

Torah: the Law - five books of Moses

Havtorah- the Prophets (including histories, eg 1-2 Samuel, 1-2 Kings)

Megilloth "the Scrolls" Song of Songs, for Passover; Ruth, for the Feast of Weeks (Pentecost); Lamentations, for the fast on the ninth of Av, commemorating the destruction of Jerusalem by the Babylonians and later by the Romans; Ecclesiastes, for the Feast of Booths (Tabernacles); and Esther, for Purim

*Pharisees: accept all these as Scripture

*Saducees: the Torah only

*Wisdom literature: the more philosophical books of the Bible

It was an international literary movement: well established in Egypt

Sheshat: 2nd dynasty goddess of wisdom, priestess recorded the words of Pharaoh at his coronation

The Wisdom of Ptahhotep (5th Dynasty Vizir)

Do not let your heart become proud because of what you know;

Learn from the ignorant as well as the learned man.

There are no limits that have been decreed for art;

There is no artist who attains entire excellence.

A lovely thought is harder to come by than a jewel;

One can find it in the hand of a maid at the grindstone.

Do not let your heart become swollen with pride

In case you may be humbled.

It is true that one may become rich through doing evil,

But the power of Truth and Justice is that they endure

And that a man can say of them: "They are a heritage from my father".

If you are resolute, acquire a reputation

For knowledge and kindness.

Follow the dictates of your heart.

Let your face shine during the time that you live...

It is the kindness of a man that is remembered

During the years that follow ...'

This is just a small part of the wisdom to

Mesopotamia: Gilgamesh (god of wisdom Nabu)

The quest for eternal life

Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes (or Qoheleth) and Song of Songs (or Canticle of Canticles) and the other two writings are Wisdom and Ben Sirach (or Ecclesiasticus).

- +to teach young men virtue, how to be right in the eyes of God and man
- +was Proverbs a copy book for young students
- +to record the sayings of righteous men of old for posterity
- +a quest for Harmony: in family, in community, with God's will
- +two flavors in Bible: Hebrew and Greek

"Golden apples in silver settings are words spoken at the proper time"
(Prov 25: 11)

- +what you need to know: Paidea, Bildung, {UK} character
- +see Proverbs 4&5

*Ecclesiastes

- +Hebrew name: Kahal (assembly) as in what might be read out loud
- +Septuagint: Ecclesiastes (as in ecclesiastical)
- +Like Proverbs, it appears to be without an exact order, a series of pithy statements

- +in antiquity it was attributed to Solomon, the archetypal wise man
- +the text has a number of Aramaisms, suggesting a later date

Not earlier than 450 BC, possibly as late as 180- BC

Reflects some Persian influence

- +form: Qoheleth a female name (KJV) "the preacher"

But this is attributed to Solomon a man

The author is so old he is weak like a woman?

Or is this feminized "Lady Wisdom" (Proverbs ch 3)

a narrator who tells us what Qoheleth says in the intro
a final voice at the very end wrapping things up

Structure: if there is one

Title (I: 1) Identification with Solomon

1. Initial poem (I:2-11)

- o Vanities of vanities! (lit. smoke or vapour)
- o An explanation of why all is a vanity
 - Nature runs its course
 - Time preserves nothing and nothing is ever new

- Compare this with Oscars and Emmys: a colossal waste of time

2. I: Kohelet's investigation of life (1:12-6:9)

- Wisdom appears only to make you sadder
- Noting gets fixed. So investigate this.....
- Pleasure (ch 2) but all that gets taken away from you
- Study of wisdom and folly: but being smart gets you the same end as a fool
- So just despair and forget it all (v.18 ff.)
- There is a time for everything
- Is there any retribution? Or are we like cattle?
- All this said: companionship and life are still good
- Ch 5: still do not mess with God
- The rich are not much happier than you; enjoy what you have
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3. II: Kohelet's conclusions (6: 10-11 :6)

- Introduction (6:10-12) None of this makes any sense
- A: Man cannot discover what is good for him to do (7:1-8:17)
 - Snares: wisdom, women,
 - Nonetheless: do not mess with the King
 - Sometimes, although not always there is retribution
- B: Man does not know what will come after him (9: 1-11 :6)
 - The problem of fools
 - The problem of slackers

4. Concluding poem (11:7-12:8)

- A reflection on youth and old age

5. Epilogue (12:9-14)

@this is life without God: this is the way of the world

This is where so many of our young people are

It may not be fun or cheery to listen to

We must reflect on the Christian virtue of hope

@things will not always be like this

@Christ can make things better for you in ways you do not know

There is a wisdom which does not come from sages or books but from Christ