

TONE: DIVINE REVELATION OR HUMAN REASONING?

Scripture's answer: Ecclesiastes 12.9-12

There are ten words or phrases that describe the content of the book and the author's writing processes and intentions.

1. Wise: skillful

Wisdom, biblically defined, is skill, practical ability, proficiency, expertise.

2. _____: insight gained through the _____, through experience

*In Ecclesiastes, this word is used six other times – always parallel to “_____.” Solomon uses “knowledge” in this book to accent the idea of skill – **something learned and practiced to a level of expertise.***

3. Arranging the wisdom & knowledge

a. _____: to weigh, consider

This word carries the idea of _____, comparing the words to a standard and being satisfied only with that which measures up.

b. _____

A deliberate search, not just accidentally running across good things to repeat.

c. _____: to line up

This word describes organization, _____ and orderliness. The Preacher's words were not cast together helter-skelter or chaotically; he thought through what he wrote and put it on paper in a way that _____.

4. _____

- This is “a portable saying in poetic form expressing a general observation conditioned by a biblical worldview” (Layton Talbert).

5. _____ words: words of delight

- Literary quality, topics under consideration, or the conclusions and exhortations of the book

6. _____: straight, honest

This word is not an adjective (a description of the things written); it is an adverb (a description of the writing process). What Solomon wrote, he wrote _____; he frankly

discusses the disappointments of life under the sun. Ecclesiastes displays a candidness and open-mindedness about the _____ of life on earth.

7. Words of _____: faithfulness, reliability

The same word describes _____ (Ps. 57.10). It refers to something that proves true – it accurately meets the expectations (I Ki. 10.6).

8. _____: motivators, pushing and prodding in the right direction

9. _____: stabilizers, holding in place and supporting

Note: both goads and nails are sharp – they _____!

10. Given from one _____: the source of the Preacher's words is God

Conclusion

This is perhaps the clearest statement of inspiration that any book of Scripture makes specifically about itself (with the possible exception of "Thus saith the LORD"). It lays the responsibility for the book's content squarely at the feet of Yahweh – the protecting and providing Shepherd of Israel. We may wonder why a book with such a clear claim to inspiration seems so hard to understand and interpret. Perhaps this difficulty is precisely why God put such an obvious stamp of authenticity upon Ecclesiastes. By God's own affirmation, Ecclesiastes is a book of integrity, profit, doctrine, reproof, correction and instruction! As we work our way through the simple passages and the difficult ones, we will continually look for interpretation and understanding that fit the divine source of this book.

INTERPRETATION

Viewpoint

Having resolved that Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes, and that this book is not merely a collection of possibly errant human thinking, we face the question: "From what viewpoint did Solomon write this book?" or "With what lens should we read this book?" What perspective serves as the framework by which we understand the individual verses and themes of Ecclesiastes? Over the centuries that men have puzzled through Solomon's words, several options have arisen.

1. _____ Interpretation (early Jewish scholars)

- Turning questionable statements into questions: "*Is there nothing better for a man, than that he should eat and drink, and that he should make his soul enjoy good in his labour?*" (2.24)
- Blaming the seemingly "unorthodox" teachings on Solomon's backslidden condition

- Paraphrasing the questionable statements: “Go taste with joy thy bread which has been given to thee on account of the bread which thou hast given to the poor and the unfortunate who were hungry, and drink with good heart thy wine, which is hidden for thee in the Garden of Eden, for the wine which thou hast mingled for the poor and needy who were thirsty, for already thy good work has been pleasing before Jehovah’ ” (2.24).
- *This is a dangerous way to handle any Scripture – it is subjective and capricious and ignores the fact that God has given authoritative objective truth through His Word.*

2. Struggling _____

- All the “opposites” represent a philosopher’s dark struggle to reconcile his faith in a perfect God with the hard realities of life in an imperfect world.
- *To a degree, perhaps, but opposites hardly make up the main content and structure of the book. The book doesn’t exactly form a “battle of thought-systems” – it is more like a cycle of difficult realities and exhortations to build to a conclusion.*

3. The Original _____

- Tearing down the “rationality of existence” and exposing the absurdity of life
- Highlighting the validity of “inner experience”
- *Inserting modern philosophy into ancient biblical texts is never a sound method of Bible study. Solomon doesn’t present life as meaningless, subjective futility; he is certain of the existence of a real God who made the world and holds all men accountable for their choices.*

4. _____ Argument

- Destroying secularist foundations in order to point to God
- *Close, but this book would be a tract like none other. It starts with the endless repetition of a life of vanity and pushes its readers to enjoyment and obedience. This interpretation is on the right track, but not quite sufficient.*

5. Skeptical _____

- Constantly re-affirming life’s “vanity”
- Frequently referring to the certainty of death
- *The dark passages are often followed by exhortations of joy. This view is based on an inaccurate understanding of the word “vanity.”*

6. _____ License

- Repeating the exhortation to eat and drink with merriness, to enjoy life
- Letting the vanity of life push the reader toward carefree happiness
- *The book nowhere encourages restraint-free living; rather, it balances the enjoyment commands with reminders of our accountability to God.*

7. Presentation of a _____ Worldview

- “The uncertainties of life have one exception: _____”
- “The vanity of life has one solution: _____”
- “The injustices of life have one explanation: _____”
- “The realities of life lead to one conclusion: _____ and _____ God for He is the final judge of all persons and actions” [from Dr. Layton Talbert]

Purpose

As Solomon wrote Ecclesiastes, God inspired the words to convey His revelation of a biblical worldview. Can we say anything more specific about the purpose of this book? Some special features of this book include:

- God’s _____: only Elohim (not Yahweh)
- Unique _____: similarities to other languages
- Unique _____: unrivaled in wisdom, accomplishment, and international fame
- Broad _____: dealing with experiences and circumstances common to all men
- Basic _____: not focused on Israelite-specific religion
- Delayed _____: the entire conclusion is saved for the end
- Generic _____: the final exhortation is to fear and obey God

It has been suggested that Solomon intended Ecclesiastes at least in part as an outreach to the nations around him. It doesn’t call the reader to “conversion”; it doesn’t proselytize the reader to Judaism; it doesn’t expose the fallacies of any specific false religion. Rather, **speaking in timeless truths and reasoning from common ground, Ecclesiastes exposes the reader to God Himself and points to a relationship with God as the ultimate answer to the perplexity of life.**