

01-01-14b Ecclesiastes

Let's resume our study now in Ecclesiastes, chapter one. We will actually move into chapter one this morning, but it's not an easy thing to approach a book that has been so misunderstood and so variously interpreted without setting some sort of background and having covered some of these introductory issues. And I think to appreciate what is really going on, we have to at least take a look at what people have observed in the book and perhaps wrongly concluded about the book at the beginning, because some of these views pervade even the church at large today.

We've already talked about the first point, which is the problem of authorship. And if you just come to this book out of the blue, these are valid concerns. I don't mean to belittle the, I mean, the people who are making these claims are not dummies.

They are scholars. They're widely read in ancient Near Eastern literature. They're very familiar with literature from Egypt and from other surrounding neighbors.

And so it is hard for somebody who has the knowledge of literature that they have to come to this book and see the characteristics of it and find a way to believe that it was actually written by Solomon. And one of the first reasons is that, and one of the easiest things to do is to say, well, all of our problems are solved if it wasn't written by Solomon, just somebody using his name to gain a foot in the door for his ideas or to use it as a device in the way that wisdom is personified in Proverbs. Wisdom cries out in the streets, her voice is heard, young man don't run away with the women with the pretty ankles and the tongues dripping like honey and so forth, that by personifying yourself as something or someone, it's a literary device that is used to get the point of the book across.

We will talk more about the rejoinders or the answers to these observations after we cover all of them. Right now, we're gonna look at all the reasons why people think there's a problem with the date and the authorship of the book. So we've seen this thing about the royal fiction that's dropped after chapter two about the viewpoint that doesn't seem to reflect a king on his throne, but a subject looking at justice or injustice in the realms of rulership.

They also point to the statement in 12.9 of Ecclesiastes that says that Kohelet was a sage who assembled Proverbs and things. And they see this word for sage, which is hakam in Hebrew, H-A-C-H-A-M, or actually C-H-A-C-H-A-M. Hakam is related to chakma, which is one of the words for wisdom.

We saw that when we studied Proverbs 2 and 1. But a hakam came to be, in later Judaistic usage, sort of a formal title for a sage or a wise man, a professional wise man. And so the statement, once you start believing that the book is late, and then at the end of the book, it says, well, Kohelet, who wrote this book, this is the epilogue, somebody else kind of putting in editorial comments, says, well, Kohelet that wrote this book, he was a hakam. You say, oh, he was a

professional sage.

And he sort of impersonated Solomon at the beginning for his own purposes, but he was basically one of these professional wise men. And many people share this view, even Harrison in his Old Testament introduction. Harrison is one of the more well-respected Old Testament scholars, and he shares this view.

Secondly, under the point of the problem of authorship, first of all, we have the royal fiction problem. We don't think he was a king. Secondly, it's been claimed that if he was Solomon, why didn't he just say, I'm Solomon, instead of calling himself Kohelet, and using this enigmatic term that occurs nowhere else in scripture, nowhere else in any of the extant ancient Near Eastern literature.

He calls himself the son of David, king in Jerusalem. And so the idea here is that it was probably not intended to indicate that the composition was really from Solomon, that this implies by the fact that it doesn't say, hey, I'm Solomon, that you're not supposed to really take it literally that it is Solomon. Rather, just to show that the wisdom that's presented in this book is characteristic of those utterances that were attributed to Solomon, that, well, I want you to treat what I'm saying as up on a par with what Solomon did say, kind of a thing.

Also, they point to chapter one, verse 12, where he says, I, Kohelet, or I, the preacher in our English, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. And they said, well, if you look at this in Hebrew, that's a past tense. It says, I was king in Israel, implying that right now as I write, I'm not king.

I was king, but now I'm not. And there isn't a time in Solomon's life where he could have written this because he was king all the way up until the day he died. So this is supposedly a clue and that it's just a fiction used to lend credence to the view presented in the book.

And the view is the highest attainments of mortal man have no eternal or absolute value or significance. And that to get this across, why not impersonate Solomon, who is the emblem of human attainment, human wealth, and so on. Surprisingly, and this would be a point C or a third point under the problem of authorship, one of the first people in modern times to doubt Solomon's authorship was Martin Luther, whose scholarship in the word of God is generally valuable and valued, but he didn't think Solomon wrote it.

More recently, one of the foremost Hebrew scholars in the entire history of mankind, Delitzsch of Kyle and Delitzsch fame. There's a set of Old Testament commentaries by Kyle and Delitzsch that even though they're over a hundred years old are still a standard reference work for any study of the Old Testament. But Delitzsch, his famous quote is, well, if Kohelet is of Old Solomonic origin, then there is no history of the Hebrew language.

He basically looked at it and said, this in no way reflects the Hebrew that existed in the time of Solomon. So if Solomon wrote this weird Hebrew, then Hebrew has no history. 19th century

scholars also thought that they saw influences of Greek.

They thought they saw Grecisms and Greek philosophical influences in some of the ideas that are presented. They thought they saw the Stoic or the Epicurean philosophies being presented. And these ideas came in, as Alexander the Great and the Greek culture infiltrated the region, then people began to voice these new ideas.

We've seen this in connection with the afterlife. Where in the Old Testament do you find different destinations after death for the wicked and the righteous? Do you have any Old Testament reference that talks about the good going to heaven and the bad going to hell or any similar concept? There isn't. Yet in the New Testament, you have the rich man and Lazarus, you have the lake of fire, heavenly bliss and so forth.

So why is, if this is a constant and if salvation is the same in every age, the issue is faith in Jesus Christ. Some say you have to have personal faith in an individual savior, no matter who you are or when you lived, all the way back from Adam forward to the end of time. Well, it does prove somewhat puzzling that there is no reference made to a different destination.

In fact, David is at pains to say that it seems like the righteous and the wicked all go to one place. The dust cannot praise you. There's no remembrance of you in the grave, he says to God.

So we know that the ideas about different destinations for the wicked and the righteous already existed in the Persian empire, the Persian culture, Persian philosophy. And that when the Southern kingdom went into the Babylonian captivity, these ideas would have been absorbed and brought back in the post-exilic times to be sort of common wisdom or common perception and would have been incorporated into the Jewish worldview, the Jewish cultural view of life and death. And that goes a long way toward explaining why Jesus gives the parable of the rich man and Lazarus and talks about consequences of what you do in this life in terms that were prevalent among people of the day.

Just remember, it is a parable. Jesus doesn't present it as a true picture of an actual event any more than the vineyard that gets dug around for three years and fertilized and watered or the unfaithful steward or any of the others that are designed to communicate a principle. So if Kohelet writes and presents ideas that seem to be those that are suggested by Greek culture and by later times, this argues in many people's minds for the idea that that's when the book was generated.

This is what it seems to assume. And that would argue for a much later date. By the way, just for reference, Solomon and David are roughly circa 1000 BC.

David comes to his throne just real close to 1000 BC. Remember, we saw when we reviewed the history of Solomon coming to the throne, that when he went to build the temple, it gave us a chronological reference and said it was, I believe it said the 480th year from the going forth of Israel from Egypt, words to that effect. Well, if the Exodus is in 1440 BC, that gives us a pretty

good date for the accession of Solomon to the throne.

This, I believe, was in 1 Kings chapter four. Once again, I'm using a different Bible than I did last week, so I don't remember where it was on the page or chapter four, chapter five, along in there. Anyway, I believe it said 480 years.

So you come forward from 1440 BC and you get to around 960 BC in that century. So roughly 1000 years before the time of Christ. Now, the Greek conquest of the world took place in the 300s BC.

Alexander the Great was doing all his stuff in that time period. So after Alexander's death and the division of his empire among Ptolemy and Seleucid and the other generals, then you had those sort of sub-empires existing after that fact. So based on the ideas and these other factors, people, most scholars, and by most I mean nearly all, assigned the date of Ecclesiastes to around 250 BC.

So they're saying that it is about 700 years after Solomon. You think about the English language. We're here in the year 2001.

You know the kind of language that Shakespeare spoke, the kind of English that he used, and you have Chaucer before that with Beowulf, and that's about 600 or 700 years ago. You have Shakespeare back in the 1400s, as I recall. So the distance between Chaucerian English or Shakespearean English and the present day ought to be roughly the same distance between classical Hebrew composition of David's day, Solomon's day, and what would prevail under the Ptolemies in post-exilic Israel.

And it is true that the language of Kohelet, the language of Ecclesiastes, is radically different than classical Hebrew. It doesn't read like the Psalms. It doesn't read like the Proverbs.

It doesn't read like any other Old Testament book. And so this is also a problem. And so under your second major point of contention about the origin and date of the book, the first one is the authorship.

We don't think it was a king. We don't think it was Solomon. We don't think the ideas and things reflect what somebody would have been thinking a thousand years before Christ.

The second major problem is the language of the book. And this sort of overlaps with the first because obviously somebody who's living late is going to be using late vocabulary. Here's a quote.

The peculiarities of the kind of Hebrew employed by Kohelet are so great that some scholars have maintained that the book was originally written not in Hebrew, but in Aramaic. That the extant Hebrew book is actually a translation backward from Aramaic trying to approximate Hebrew, but leaving many words untranslated and rendering peculiarly Aramaic syntax and

idioms literally into Hebrew. And this created a crabbed and often opaque style.

This is what Huibre says, one of the commentators, one of the noted commentators on Ecclesiastes. So basically the language is so weird that they think it might have actually been written in a different language and sort of retroverted into Hebrew to try to give it substance as an older book. Others maintain that it was written in Hebrew originally, but by somebody whose native language was Aramaic.

And because a lot of the constructions, a lot of the way words are put together and uses of the personal pronoun and so forth, there was a long form and a short form of the personal pronoun. When you talk about yourself, Ani is the short form and there's a longer version in Hebrew. And so they say, well, since it uses Ani all the place, that means it's late.

Secondly, this is another quote by the way, relatively late books like Chronicles and the Hebrew parts of Daniel and he says in parentheses, Daniel was written in the first half of the second century BC. They still retain most of the features of earlier classical language of the 10th to 8th centuries. So basically what they're saying is, well, you know the prophecies in Daniel and they say, well, it couldn't actually have prophesied.

So Daniel had to have been written after the events that it prophesies. And so many scholars, not as many as think Solomon didn't write Ecclesiastes, but there's lots of people that think Daniel is a late book. They think Chronicles was not actually compiled and written until during the exile when the priests didn't have a whole lot to do.

So they sat around dragging up old records and writing it all down into Chronicles. And if they're not contemporary records, they're looking back. And that Kings might've been one of their sources and they had some other stuff and they were sitting around in captivity with nothing to do.

So they wrote Chronicles. Well, of course this would make the book several hundred years later than the events that it talks about. Same thing with Daniel.

They say, well, there really was a Daniel, but he didn't write the book of Daniel. It was written just a few hundred years before Christ. If it's the first half of the second century BC, this means 150 BC is when they think Daniel was written.

But they say, look, even Daniel, it was written only 150 years BC. It's Hebrew portions sound like the regular classical Hebrew we're used to in the rest of the Bible. But Ecclesiastes seems much later than that, much more full of Aramaic and Aramaisms and Aramaic terms.

And they think they even see Greek and Persian and other terms in it. So if Daniel is late and Chronicles is late and this language is even later than that, they say this language more closely reflects that of the Mishnah. Now the Mishnah is the rabbi's commentary on the Old Testament.

And it was compiled and kind of put into its final form 200 years after the birth of Christ. Around 200 AD, you have the earliest copies that they know of of the Mishnah. Now they think it reflects verbal traditions and teachings that go back many generations before that.

But the actual written copies of Mishnah that they have now, the oldest, are a couple hundred years after Christ. Our Old Testament, our New Testament manuscripts are older than the earliest copies of the Mishnah. And they say, you know, the language of the Mishnah where they're commenting on the Bible and so forth, that language sounds like Ecclesiastes.

So based on this evidence, these people would actually put the composition of Ecclesiastes after Christ, after Daniel, after Chronicles, all the way down possibly even after the fall of Jerusalem because the language match is closest to what they find in the first few hundred years after Christ. However, that theory was going great guns until about 1948 when they found the Dead Sea Scrolls and found a copy of Kohelet in the Dead Sea Scrolls. Well, oops, because those scrolls are 200 years before Christ.

And so that theory got all shot down and you won't find anybody saying, boy, did we ever have egg on our face? But that's basically what happened. Everybody convinced themselves over the last 150 years that Ecclesiastes was really, really, really late based on this linguistic comparison. Well, how then did it get in the Scrolls of Qumran? And beyond that, the scrolls in Qumran were considered sacred.

And it's not like this post-exilic author could rip something off and put Solomon's name on it and hand it to the Essenes or whoever was living in Qumran and say, hey, I just wrote an inspired book. Why don't you add this to your library of sacred writings? It had to have already been considered sacred to be included in the place where it was found in the Qumran Scrolls. And that means that it had to have been around for a while.

So anyway, this really, people got upset. They wish they hadn't found a copy of Kohelet in the caves because it really fouled up their conclusions. But this also goes to tell you that when you only have a few pieces of evidence, it's a lot easier to come to a wrong conclusion.

And when we go back this far in history, dealing with literature, clues and examples are few and far between. How much of ancient Near Eastern literature has survived down to the present? Less than 5%, probably less than 2%. We have a tiny fraction that we can compare to and say, well, this vocabulary is like that vocabulary.

There are no other ancient Hebrew writings. We have nothing that was written except a few tablet fragments and things and a couple of ostraca and short messages from back in David's day and Moses' day and so forth. There are no contemporaneous examples to compare to and say, well, was biblical Hebrew different than spoken Hebrew and that kind of thing.

So those are two big question marks about the book. First of all, how could Solomon have written

it? That doesn't seem right. The authorship doesn't seem right.

Secondly, the language is so different than any other Hebrew book, even if you believe Daniel was written when it says it was written and Chronicles was written when we think it was written, which is back during the time that the events took place. Still, this language seems much later, much more full of Aramaic influences, which Aramaic came in with the Persians. It's a cousin language to Hebrew, has the same origins, but it would be sort of, if you could think of, I mean, it would be worse than the difference between Australian English and American or British English and American.

It was an early split and developed separately, has a lot in common, but it also has a lot of differences. So it might almost be considered the difference between English and Pidgin English. So here's a third point.

Further arguments against Solomonic authorship and an original date around 1000 BC are these. The style and way of arguing in the book are unique. Ecclesiastes, Kohelet, is classified as wisdom literature.

It's giving you proverbs and analyzing life. It's not a story, it's not a narrative, it's not so much poetry, although it contains some poetry, but its style and way of arguing are unique even among wisdom literature. The other classic examples of wisdom literature are Job and Proverbs.

And you look at the Proverbs, what's Proverbs composed of? It's these two-line pithy sayings as like apples of gold and pictures of silver, so are words coming from a far country or whatever. Actually, I think it says a word fitly spoken is like apples of gold and pictures of silver in the old King James. So you say like this is this, or contrasting what happens to the wicked and what happens to the righteous, what happens to the wise, what happens to the fool.

Two-line pithy Proverbs. You can look anywhere in Proverbs 10-29 and everything you see there is an example. Sometimes it's longer poems like the first nine chapters of Proverbs or a lot of Job where the various monologues that Job's friends and Job himself deliver are actually poetic in structure.

But when Kohelet uses a proverb in a two-line pithy saying, he doesn't seem to use it the way that it's used in Proverbs or even in Job because he brings it up to qualify it or to question it or to say, well, it is said that it's good to be righteous and it's bad to be wicked, but I see the wicked prospering and I see that there's no difference when they die. They all go to the same place. And so when he brings up these Proverbs, it's as though the absolute truth of them is not assumed by the author of Kohelet.

He doesn't take their absolute truth for granted. Now, here's another quote from Huibre. In order to express his ideas, he was obliged to invent or develop an entirely new style of discourse.

And it is clear that the line of argument that's used here is unlike anything else in the Bible. He says, you don't find these phrases in Proverbs or even in Job. I turned, then I saw, then I perceived, then I said to myself, where you listen in on the author's personal thought processes as he looks at things and he thinks of a proverb or a statement from the existing scriptures and he says, well, wisdom is good, being foolish is bad, but I've seen this.

And then I turned and saw that, and then I considered, and then I perceived, and I said to myself, so it's as though he's wrestling in his own soul. And this is another difference from classic wisdom literature because most wisdom literature, these aphorisms and Proverbs, are talking in the third person. The fool and his money are soon parted.

Wisdom is bound up in the heart of a child, but the rod of correction will drive it far from him. In Ecclesiastes, the first person verb is used 82 times. First person singular.

I saw, I considered, I turned. And there's only 222 verses in the whole book. And so you've got nearly a third of them contain this first person point of view.

And you say, well, I can go to the Psalms and see a lot of first person. But there's a difference because in the Psalms, even the first person viewpoint is really designed to be a reflection of a general feeling among the people. The I of Psalms is supposed to be anyone in Israel where the I in Ecclesiastes is this actual individual author.

He's speaking specifically for himself. This is the argument anyway. I think there's a lot of personal things in Psalms, but this is what these people conclude.

And this first person point of view, they say, reflects Greek influence where the author no longer hides behind literary convention. They say the first person singular in the Psalms and other sections is sort of a convention, a literary convention where he's speaking on behalf of sort of a universal person. And that this is a late thing.

And you see this development in our own culture. We had the Pepsi generation and the me generation where people used to think much more in terms of America and being an American and being part of a community, being part of a family, where now it's sort of every man for himself. They say, this is a normal progress of thought.

So the style and way of arguing are unique. It uses the first person a lot, which doesn't happen in the rest of the wisdom literature. Thirdly, the degree of abstraction is greater than earlier books.

Proverbs exhorts individuals for the common good. And the viewpoint of Psalms and Proverbs and even Job and some of the other wisdom books is designed to encourage people to assume their place and their responsibilities in the nation of Israel. You belong to God's chosen people.

You have a corporate community responsibility. And there's a big community viewpoint in the

other wisdom literature. Even when it comes to personal wealth and things of that nature, what's the idea? When you get a good name, when you get great riches, one of the good things about this, classic wisdom literature says, is that you have something to pass on to your children.

A lot of the wisdom literature, a wise son makes glad the heart of his mother. And you have this idea of family and continuity and contribution to the community and to the nation of Israel. And that seems to be entirely lacking in Ecclesiastes.

When he talks about profit, what does it profit? It doesn't seem to have any community viewpoint. It seems only interested in the individual. Chapter two, verse 21, is given as an example of this, where he says, there is a man whose labor is with wisdom and knowledge and skill, but he has to leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it.

This is vanity and a great evil. He doesn't say, what am I going to leave to my son? Or what is this going to contribute to the city or to the community? You know, a wise man can save a whole city even though he's poor, you find in the Proverbs. Here, it's all about me.

Well, I'm going to do all this work and labor and I'm going to give it to somebody who didn't work for it. Woe is me. And it's all kind of an individual viewpoint.

So there's no mention of inheritance of goods or reputation by one's children. So there's a detachment from the common life of the community. Commonly accepted notions in the community are tested against his own viewpoint and his own perceptions.

He doesn't take anything for granted. He questions everything. He doesn't offer very many solutions.

This is why it's been such a puzzling book because he raises these questions and doesn't seem to offer any answers. They say, well, there's sort of a lame answer at the end, you know, do good and fear God and mind your own business. But, you know, the question seems, or the book seems to raise many more questions than it answers.

Who knows is a question that recurs throughout the book. You find this in chapter two, verse 19, chapter three, verse 21, chapter six, verse 12, chapter eight, verse one. There's just four examples of where he says, well, who knows what's going to happen.

And so this is sort of like the intellectual analyzing the proverbial wisdom. The intellectual is looking at this commonly accepted viewpoint of life in Israel and saying, well, I'm not sure that's really true. And so this seems to be a later development, an intellectual approach that didn't occur until much later in Israel's history.

Finally, and this is my fifth point under style and argument political, economic, and social conditions reflected in the book seem to correspond most closely with the Ptolemaic period. Their rulership seems to be oppressive and well-organized despot type government. The economic and

social background does not seem to accord with the time of Solomon.

The book seems to reflect a time of misery. You look at chapter one, verse two through 11, or chapter three, verse one through 15, where it seems like the nation is in decline and injustice and violence are rampant in the first part of chapter four. Normal incentives for living don't seem to be there.

Chapter seven, verse one. So they say these conditions that the author describes don't seem to match Solomon's time. They seem to match much later time under the Ptolemies.

Under the Ptolemies, there was great economic expansion, entrepreneurship, people were going out and making a profit in business. Because the book spends a lot of time talking about what profit is there, he seems to have sort of an economic, wealth-driven point of view. So all of these things militate, all of these things add up, and the conclusion they draw, here's another quote from Huibre.

There is then a clear convergence of the evidence concerning the date and historical background of the book. It is a work of the later post-exilic period when old values of Israelite society had been largely set aside as a result of Hellenism and the new spirit of commercial enterprise that was fostered under the Ptolemies. At the same time, it doesn't show the signs of party strife and nationalistic sentiment that characterized the Maccabean period.

Remember, the Maccabees were like 167 BC. So they say, well, it's after the Greek conquest and before the Maccabees. And so this is why they conclude that it was composed in the middle of the third century BC.

Most scholars assign the date of writing between 280 and 200 BC. Well, what is the answer to all of this? And I have to tell you, if you come as a fledgling seminary student or someone who just comes and reads all the commentaries, by the time you look at five or six or seven different books and the assembled weight of intellect of all of these commentators who all come to the same conclusion, who all look at the language, who know more Hebrew than I'll ever know, how do you answer these things? Well, first of all, it's very simple. If the book claims to be written by Solomon, it was written by Solomon.

That's the answer. Same thing as Genesis chapter one. If Genesis says God created the earth in seven days, guess what? Actually, six days.

The earth was created in six days. End of discussion. If the Bible says it, it is so.

What has been the problem in the age of the earth creation debate? People have lent equal credence to the evidence of their senses, to the evidence of archeology, the evidence of paleontology and fossil records and so forth to that of scripture. Where there is a conflict between what people say with what life says, with what experience says and what the scripture says, a

properly interpreted scripture is the authority. Now, that argument has been abused because there are people who make the Bible say things that it was never intended to say, such as bring your tithes into the storehouse and you're going to have all of this great prosperity.

So that's why I add the phrase a properly interpreted scripture. We have to know accurately what scripture says. Now, there is a reason why we don't tithe for blessing, even though the scripture says, bring your tithes into the storehouse and the windows of heaven will open and all this great stuff's going to dump out on your head.

Why is that? Because we look at the reason that it is said. We look at the audience to whom it was directed. We look at the context and we don't yank things out of context and make the Bible say something that it does not say.

In this book, when you look at the context, you look at the purpose of writing, you look at the intended audience, there is no reason to say it was written by Solomon if it wasn't. It accomplishes nothing. Why would God have to resort to some weird artifice of impersonating Solomon? If God wants this to appear as though it came from Solomon, he would have given it to Solomon to write, which is exactly what he did.

It's easy to look at these other abused scriptures. You know, you go to Mark 16, they will handle snakes and scorpions and drink poison, nothing will hurt them. And people go to that and say, well, that's what the Bible says, so it must be true.

I don't need the evidence of medicine or science or biology or anything. I can drink poison and it will not harm me because these signs will follow those who believe. Well, we go to that scripture and look, find out, first of all, is it scripture? And it turns out it's not.

It's something that someone added much later than the book was written. But even if it were scripture, it was given to a particular group of individuals who are not on the earth anymore, which is the apostles. So some of the things that the apostles did, Jesus told them, you can say to a tree, be uprooted and be planted in the sea and it will do so.

Well, can anybody, can I walk out here to my front yard and talk to this tree and have it go uproot itself and go into Lake Ray Hubbard? No. And I can have faith so as to move mountains and mountains are not necessarily gonna move because that was a specific statement made to specific people for a specific purpose. And when you understand rightly what scripture says, now you can take it and have it stand by faith in your soul against any other evidence of human wisdom or human science or whatever.

This book clearly says it was written by Solomon, so that's the fact. Well, why does it not just come out and say, hey, I'm Solomon and I'm writing this book? As I mentioned before, some of the same reasons that some other books of the Bible are not identified by author, such as Hebrews or Malachi. This book, and here, this, by the way, is a major conclusion.

If you haven't been writing anything else down, this is something you need to write down. This is my view, and to my knowledge, I don't know where you could find it anywhere else. I'm sure somebody else has drawn the same conclusion, but they didn't publish a book, just like I haven't and probably won't.

But this is my conclusion from looking at all of these things. This book, it has all the characteristics of post-exilic Israel, doesn't it? Israel under the thumb of other rulers than the Solomonic king, and all of this flack has been written. Well, Solomon couldn't have written it because it doesn't look like the time of Solomon.

Well, guess what? It was written anticipating the situation of the nation of Israel during and after the exile. This is scripture that God gave Israel to carry them through the exile and the post-exile times. God is the God characterized by telling you what's going to happen beforehand, by giving you the information you need, the perspective you need, the viewpoints you need before you need it, so that you have it in your soul and you have it there for application, rather than running out and saying, well, gosh, we're in the exile.

Let's have somebody write us some exile scripture. Well, now we're in the post-exilic. Let's have somebody quick dream up some post-exilic wisdom.

That's the human view. That's what these authors conclude. God gave them this beforehand.

We do have prophets who write during the exile and after the exile, such as Daniel, such as Jeremiah. You have Ezra and Nehemiah writing during the time of the return. So why, again, would God give this to Solomon? Because it goes beyond just the national need for viewpoint and for perspective during and after the time of national discipline.

Remember the name that Solomon uses for himself. He says, I am Kohelet. I am the assembler, the gatherer.

This is appropriate for one who is calling together and addressing the remnant, the faithful, those who have an ear to hear wisdom from God. And he's teaching them to think regardless of circumstances. They're getting this information in a time of unparalleled prosperity, in a time of unparalleled peace.

But God gave this wisdom to Solomon during that time of peace and prosperity to set down and to have available so that when that peace and prosperity goes away, people who have an ear to hear, people who have studied and taken to heart the truth that's in this book are going to survive in the exile, who are going to survive after the exile, and not just survive in the physical sense, but are going to be producing spiritual fruit, righteousness by faith. And to do that, he's got to take an unconventional approach. It is specifically applicable not only to people in the nation of Israel during and after exile, but also to the spiritually mature who by their faith and by their obedience have already recognized that they are strangers and pilgrims in whatever circumstances they find

themselves, whether it's peace and prosperity.

Even in a time of peace and prosperity, the poor you have with you always, and yet some of the wisest people in the nation are in the poverty class. So what are they going to think? For them, this peace and prosperity, you know, you hear a lot about this in election years about how well the rising tide has not floated all boats, and some people have not benefited from prosperity, and we need to bring them along. Vice President Gore, this was one of his themes during the election is, well, yes, we've had great prosperity, but not everybody's been brought on board the big floating boat, so my goal is to extend the prosperity to everyone.

Well, if you're a faithful, obedient Israelite and things are not going well for you, maybe the nation is prosperous, but your individual circumstances are what concern you, and you have been mistreated by the judges, or you have been unable to see the value in accumulating riches, you're beginning to learn as you grow in faith and understanding of the Word of God that really earthly accomplishment isn't all it's cracked up to be. You're smarter than the Pharisees who assumed that riches mean blessing from God and healthy spiritual existence. You're starting to rise above that.

You're starting to learn a deeper level of truth, and you begin to recognize that the earthly life is not an end in itself. It's the means to an end. Well, you need more than just what's presented in the Proverbs.

You need more than what can be gleaned from the basics of redemption and reconciliation and propitiation that's found in the ritual observance and in the Mosaic Law. You need truth that goes beyond addressing the nation and goes to the individual. This book is written to the faithful remnant, and they're a remnant even before the official remnant in the time of the exile and the captivity and the post-exilic times.

There's a remnant in every generation regardless of national circumstances, physical circumstances, historic circumstances. So I submit to you that Kohelet, Kahal, was used often of the assembly of worship in Israel. They were called, they were caused to assemble for the purpose of worship.

They were also caused to assemble for the purpose of battle. These are the two primary uses of Kahal in the Old Testament. Assemble Israel for worship, assemble Israel for battle.

When Solomon assumes this sobriquet, this pen name, and calls himself Kohelet, and he says, I am the assembler, but it's not in the hyphel and it doesn't use the nifal, what is he saying? This is operating at a different level than a literal assembly. This is operating at a different level than a literal convocation of the armies for battle. He's calling the faithful, he's calling the wise, the remnant of those who grow by faith and obedience in Israel to an understanding of the purpose and plan of God.

Remember the gift of wisdom given by Solomon. All of these commentators seem to overlook and ignore what the Bible says, that Solomon was the wisest man who ever lived. You would expect this book written in his later life to be reflective of that wisdom.

And it's going to be different. Finally, on the language.