

Enjoy Life, Fear God

Making Sense of Ecclesiastes

I. Introduction

- A. **Personal Motivation.** For years, the book of Ecclesiastes plunged me into mental confusion and spiritual depression. My wife had to set limits on my study of the book to restrain the cynicism that seemed to grow each time I read it. To me Ecclesiastes was a lock without a key. If *“all Scripture is given by the inspiration of God and is profitable,”* (2 Tim. 3:16), I could not find the profit in this one. Ecclesiastes was a dark rabbit hole for soul-less philosophers with an agnostic bent.
- B. **A Foil Covered Book.** I have come to believe that Ecclesiastes is a foil covered book. Like a mirror, it tends to reflect the readers own personality and concerns, which conceals the author’s original painting beneath.
1. James Crenshaw put it like this, “Research into the book shows that it reflects the interpreter’s world view. That is why opinions vary so widely about Qohelet’s optimism or pessimism, his attitude toward women, and his advocacy of immoral conduct” (Crenshaw, Ecclesiastes, p. 47).
 2. Katharine Dell, in her book, “Interpreting Ecclesiastes: Readers Old and New,” she provides an overview of how Ecclesiastes was interpreted through the centuries (Katharine J. Dell. *Interpreting Ecclesiastes: Readers Old and New, Critical Studies in the Hebrew Bible*, vol. 3. Eisenbrauns, 2013). Her examination reveals how commentaries on Ecclesiastes tend to reflect the values of the age.
 - a. Early commentaries describe “Solomon” as a solitary figure who advocates withdrawal from society. Jerome used Ecclesiastes to advocate for the monastic system (347-420 AD).
 - b. Commentaries from the reformation era (i.e. Luther), see the “Solomon” of Ecclesiastes as engaged in public debate and promoting integration with society.
 - c. Modern commentaries (materialist), hear “Solomon” preaching a message about the personal enjoyment of possession and power.
 - d. These differences in interpretation led Dell to conclude, “Ecclesiastes illustrates the problem of interpreting a text through the lens of current culture rather than the author’s culture and intent.” Iain Provan adds, “The difficulty may be that the book speaks truly about reality while we are devoted to illusions” (Ecclesiastes. Provan. NIVA, p.25).
 3. The modern commentaries on Ecclesiastes I examined varied greatly on the message of the book.
 - a. James Crenshaw, and to some degree, Tremper Longman, view Qohelet as “a prime representative of skepticism,” who denies God’s goodness, and portrays people as powerless to understand essential truths, thus their comments take on a gloomy tone (Longman, T. (1998). *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (p. 36)).
 - b. On the other hand, many, if not most, devotional commentaries today describe Ecclesiastes in more optimistic terms. One author shockingly describes Ecclesiastes as, “The Philipians of the Old Testament,” yet the joy described in each book are as different in value as a penny is from a one-hundred-dollar bill (William Barrick, Ecclesiastes, Christian Focus. 2015).

4. All books are susceptible to the “foil cover,” reflecting the reader’s agenda rather than the author’s intent. Yet, the literary genre and proverbial style makes this more of a problem for Ecclesiastes. (The Song of Songs, and apocalyptic literature share similar ailments.)
5. The foil cover of Ecclesiastes is made even shinier by the *strange content* of the book in view of rest of the Biblical Cannon.
 - a. Ecclesiastes says nothing of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There is no mention of the origin story of Exodus, the Land of Promise, or Messianic hope.
 - b. Like a pagan philosopher, Ecclesiastes highlights the frustration of life and the irresistibility of death. It pictures God as present, but someone distant and uninvolved. It tells the story of life in light of Creation history, not Redemptive History. It addresses God as “Elohim” (Creator God), and never as “Yahweh” (Covenant Lord).
 - c. There is no talk of redemption, reconciliation, the joy of salvation nor the resurrection. Ryken quips, “Think of Ecclesiastes as the only book of the Bible written on Monday morning” (Ecclesiastes Preaching the Word. Ryken, p.14)
 - d. In addition, there are several contradicting statements in the book.

“I said in my heart, “Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure”; but surely, this also was vanity. ² I said of laughter—“Madness!”; and of mirth, “What does it accomplish?” (2:1-2)

“I commended enjoyment, because a man has nothing better under the sun than to eat, drink, and be merry” (8:15)

Consider also,

“Therefore I praised the dead who were already dead, More than the living who are still alive. (4:2)

“Anyone who is among the living has hope—even a live dog is better off than a dead lion!” (9:4)

- e. Also, the book can be read with a hedonistic tone. You hear it in the refrain to “*eat and drink and find satisfaction*” (2:24; 3:13), which taken on its own sound like the Rich Fool of Luke 12:19.
- f. The unique nature of Ecclesiastes makes it an alluring field for people to cherry pick passages that validate their own agenda.

C. ***Tools to Scratch Away the Foil Cover.*** Bible students have several tools to help us scratch away at the foil cover to reveal portions of the author’s picture beneath. Some of the tools that helped me see Ecclesiastes clearer are the following.

1. *The Literary Structure of the Book.* In the same way that bones set the shape of the body, so the literary structure reveals the shape of the author’s message.
2. *The Genre of the Book.* Genre provides us with the literary glasses through which to read and interpret the book. With regards to Ecclesiastes Tremper Longman observes, “Genre identification significantly affects a reader’s interpretation and application of a text. Proper identification may lead to correct interpretation, but a mistaken genre identification will certainly distort the reader’s understanding” (Longman, T. (1998). *The Book of Ecclesiastes.* p. 16).

3. *Thematic Words or Phrases.* Closely related to literary structure, Ecclesiastes uses several thematic words and phrases to communicate a consistent message. These words/phrases are identified by their prevalence and placement in the text.
4. *The Role in the Bible Story.* Keys to a book's intent can also be found by identifying the role it plays in the larger Biblical narrative. This exercise is sometimes referred to as "intertextual reading" or "typology."
5. These hermeneutical tools are supposed to help lay bare Biblical truth like an archeologist brushing the dust off an ancient fossil. Yet, each of these tools are somewhat broken when it comes to Ecclesiastes. Yet, their cumulative use gives us the best chance to peer behind the "foil cover."

II. The Literary Structure of Ecclesiastes

A. *A Personal Exploration Within an Editorial Frame.* First, the book of Ecclesiastes consists of a long body which is framed by an introduction and conclusion. It is these framing texts which hold the key to understanding the main body. We see the same structure in Job (Job 1:1-2:10; 2:1-37:24; 38:1-42:9), and Proverbs (Prov. 1:1-7; 1:8-31:9; 31:10-31). In the same way, Ecclesiastes divides into three parts.

Prologue (1:1-1:11) – Editorial Frame
Qohelet cited in the third person

Body (1:12-12:8) – Qohelet's Inner Dialogue
Qohelet speaks in the first person

Epilogue (12:8-14) – Editorial Frame
Qohelet cited in the third person

1. *The Editorial Frame.* The introduction (1:1-11) and conclusion (12:8-14), show signs to be written by an editor who provides a context in which to read the Qohelet's message (By "editor" I do not mean someone who changed/corrected Qohelet's message, rather someone who collected and arranged Qohelet's proverbs, sayings and instructions.). The prologue introduces some of Qohelet's themes (1:1-11), and the conclusion makes a final application of the Qohelet's message (12:8-14).

- a. In these sections the editor refers to the Qohelet in the "third person,"

"The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem" (1:1)

And,

"because the Preacher was wise, he still taught the people knowledge; yes, he pondered and sought out and set in order many proverbs. ¹⁰ The Preacher sought to find acceptable words; and what was written was upright— words of truth." (12:9-10)

Outside "the frame" the editor only shows his pen once in the middle of the book, in Ecclesiastes 7:27,

**Here is what I have found,” says the Preacher,
“Adding one thing to the other to find out the reason, (7:27)**

Here the voice of the Qohelet and the one who assembled his work is heard in the same sentence.

- b. Some believe there is one author who takes on the “third person voice” for rhetorical purposes. But there seems to be little advantage to this, and it seems more reasonable that a framing editor is bookending a collected work. This approach also makes Ecclesiastes 7:27 read strangely, even deceptively.
 - c. From the editorial frame, it is reasonable to assume that the Editor had a godly world-view (Creation – Eccl. 1 / Judgment – Eccl. 12). The frame editor is a spiritually minded person; not distinctly different from Qohelet. The editor alludes to the Law, and encourages people to fear God and remember judgment.
2. *Qohelet’s Identity*. The vast body of the book is written in the “first person,” and a personal examination of life by one the editor describes as Qohelet. The word “Qohelet” refers to someone who gathers or speaks to a group, or it could be a title, or his personal name (Qohelet from *qhl* = “to assemble;” in Greek *ekklesiastes*, a person who spoke at an *ekklesia*. (Ecclesiastes. Provan. NIVA, p. 28)). The wisdom genre of the book leads us to see Qohelet as a teacher of wisdom. The canvas he uses is his own personal pursuit of life’s significance.
- a. There is little doubt Qohelet and his Editor want us to see the main speaker of the book as a king, perhaps even Solomon (1:1, 12). The wealth, power and pursuit of pleasure described in Ecclesiastes 2 were certainly possessed by Solomon (1 Kings 10:14-29).
 - b. Yet, if the author is Solomon he never uses his name, unlike in Proverbs and Song of Songs (Prov. 1:1; 10:1; 25:1; SofS 1:1; 3:11; 8:12). He claims to have more wisdom than all the kings in Jerusalem before him (1:16), which would be just one, “David,” unless you consider Jebusite kings. In addition, the “kingly voice” of Ecclesiastes drops away after chapter 3, where the author writes more like a citizen than a king (i.e. 8:2-9).
 - c. Tremper Longman pulls from his study of ancient wisdom literature to show parallels with “fictional autobiography,” in which a wisdom teacher took on the mantle of a historical character to illustrate a truth (Longman. Ecclesiastes p.17).
 - d. Much of the talk about Solomonic authorship seems to matter little to understanding the message of the book. Clearly Qohelet and the Editor want us to read the body of the book as through Solomon wrote it. So, we will accept his direction.
- B. ***What Was the Role of the Framing Editor?*** A major concern is to decide what the framing editor did. Did he/she simply gather the wise writings of Qohelet and perhaps even put them in order? Or, did the editor seek to correct errors in Qohelet’s thinking with counter wisdom of his/her own? The answer to this question affects how we read the book. This question arises out of the apparent “contradictions” or “inconsistences” in the book. These “contradicting arguments” in the book give rise to different methods of interpretation.
1. *The Quotation Theory (Qohelet Solution)*. This approach solves the inconsistencies by saying that Qohelet intended them. This argument claims

Qohelet quotes philosophies of his day with which he does not agree, so that he may expose their weaknesses. As Provan puts it, “He reproduces what is termed “traditional wisdom” only in order then to refute it.” (Provan. *Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (p. 31)). I was taught this approach to reading Ecclesiastes as a young preacher. I boldly told people that Solomon set up the straw men of human wisdom in order to blast them away with divine understanding. However, this approach has many problems. The most glaring one is, “Where are the quotes? What “traditional wisdom” is Qohelet rejecting?” The number of “quotations” seen varies greatly depending on the reader. Thus, this method becomes a way for the reader to accept the bits he likes, and reject the bits he didn’t. The bits he doesn’t like he labels as “traditional/worldly wisdom,” and the bits he likes he identifies as coming from Qohelet, the champion of godly wisdom (See Seow. *Ecclesiastes*. p.40)

2. *The Addition Theory (Editor Solution)*. The second approach says the Editor cleans up Qohelet’s misguided wisdom. The Editor collects these sayings from Qohelet, with which he does not agree, and then periodically adds a counter argument to correct the error of Qohelet. If this is happening there is no strong editorial hand seen (i.e. “Qohelet wrote...but he was wrong.”). In fact, the Editor’s words in the prologue and epilogue contain the same themes as Qohelet, and he calls Qohelet “wise” (12:9) and encourages his readers to accept Qohelet’s teaching as truth (12:12). But most damaging is the thought, “Why would the Editor even want to save a document he disagreed with?”
3. *The Inner Dialogue Theory*. What do we do with the numerous “contradictions” in the book? The text seems to favor the idea that Qohelet is having an inner dialogue. He intellectually, experientially pursues a line of reasoning and draws a conclusion, but as soon as he does he notes the limits and exceptions to the rule.
 - a. This is a literary feature of the “wisdom genre.” At times the author holds two ideas in contrast and asks the reader to think about how both can be true. A classic example comes from Proverbs 26:4-5

⁴ Do not answer a fool according to his folly,
Lest you also be like him.

⁵ Answer a fool according to his folly,
Lest he be wise in his own eyes. (Prov. 26:4-5)

Wisdom literature does not deal in absolutes, but in how the world works. Sometimes you should answer a fool, sometimes not. It takes wisdom to know the difference. Qohelet’s contradictions are intended to engage our minds to understand how things work.

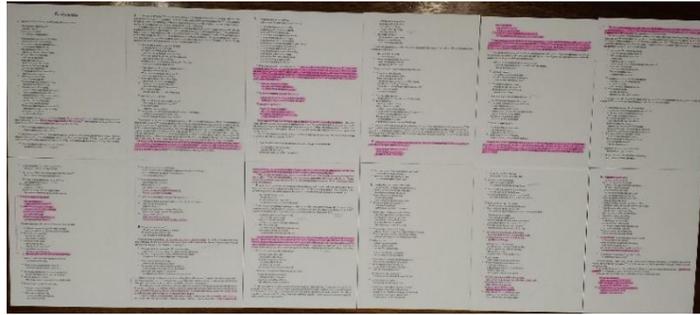
- b. Living within the mind of Qohelet are competing realities. Wisdom is the search of how these multiple realities can be true. Taken on their own, apart from balancing truths, these realities can be heretical. *“money is the answer for everything”* (10:19), and *“silver and gold...are meaningless.”* (2:8-11). *“Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor* (2:24). Yet, there are times when both seem to be true. *“the dead are happier than the living,”* (4:2) and *“the living are better off than the dead”* (9:5). These competing realities are one of the major ways Qohelet seeks after wisdom. Qohelet advances a truth, only to correct it or limit it some way.

- c. It should be noted that this inner dialogue limits itself to *Creation History*. It deals with reality largely on material realities. We do Qohelet's approach an injustice by interjecting *Redemptive History* and the *spiritual realities* revealed in the gospel. He is playing his game on a different court.
 - d. *Essential Consideration for Teachers*. When we recognize Qohelet's dueling realities, we become very careful not to accept Qohelet's assertion without also inspecting his balancing truth. *If we fail to see the "balancing wisdom" of Ecclesiastes we will make the book into a heretical defense of hedonism, materialism, and skepticism.* We will construct a message that accomplishes our purposes, rather than wrestle with conflicting realities that give us insight into the complexities of life.
4. *The Editorial Frame Is the Lens Through Which to Read Qohelet*. The broad structure of Ecclesiastes reveals the method through which to investigate the book.
- a. The epilogue especially asks the reader to consider Qohelet's truths and wise words through the lens of one who "fears God," who obeys "God's commandments," and will face God's judgement (Eccl. 12:13-14). To read Qohelet apart from this lens may lead some to a hedonistic, materialistic, self-indulgent conclusion. Yet, when Qohelet is read through the "God lens" the rightness of rejoicing and enjoying His creation is seen as an act of worship, not idolatry.
 - b. To read Qohelet through the lens of the epilogue's call to "fear God, obey God for God will judge," causes the reader to "see" the message Qohelet himself makes. For it is primarily Qohelet, and not the Editor, that calls the reader to consider life's unanswerable complexities in connection with God.
 - c. After all my struggle with understanding the book, imagine my surprise to discover the key is out in the open, so carefully placed by the Editor, "*Fear God and keep His commandments, for God will bring every work into judgment*" (12:13-14). In days of delight and despair; in pain or pleasure; in frustration or illumination remember God is worthy of awe and obedience for He is your judge. That doesn't answer all our questions, any more than God answered all of Job's questions (Job 38-42), but it is something "knowable" and "certain" in a *hebel* (vain) world.

C. ***Literary Clues to Structure***. The above discussion looks at the structure of Ecclesiastes from a the "content of the book." However, there are also a few helpful literary clues to the structure the author intended.

1. *The "God's Gifts" Sections*. Most helpful to understanding the book is understanding the role of what I'll call the "God's gifts" sections. These sections are often found at the end of Qohelet's contemplation of a topic. Qohelet has advanced a thought, corrected and limited it, then he interjects God into the equation. Now, this interjection of God doesn't solve all the confusion and inequities, but it allows Qohelet and his readers to see a solution exists beyond our understanding and experience.
 - a. I found seven such "God's gift" sections in the book, with the conclusion in Ecclesiastes 12:13-14, providing the eighth (note a possible connection to the "seven, and eight" pattern in Scripture). These sections are divided by the refrain to enjoy life.

- #1 – 2:24-26
- #2 – 3:10-19
- #3 – 5:1-7
- #4 – 5:18-6:6
- #5 – 7:13-14
- #6 – 8:12-9:7
- #7 – 11:9
- #8 – 12:13-14



- b. The “God’s gifts” sections provide the wisdom seeker with a place to rest in areas where life’s answers are elusive. They also acknowledge the control of God over human affairs. Like children may not always understand the plans of the parents, but they trust those plans exist and are intended for their good.
 - c. *However*, the wisdom seeker will not find all the answers in the “God’s gifts” section. Many of them end with an exclamation of “*vanity!*” For example, 2:24-26 is the first “God’s gifts” section. It urges “enjoyment of eating, drinking and laboring.” It even mentions these things come from God’s hand and are enjoyed by God’s wisdom and knowledge. However, the section ends with, “*This also is vanity and grasping for the wind*” (2:26). “This also!” Just because someone believes in God and knows His law is does not mean life is suddenly full of meaning. Even “God-fearers” will find life to be *hebel*, unknowable and uncontrollable. The introduction of the gospel gives disciples of Jesus a fuller view of God’s plan, but even they will find life to be frustratingly *hebel* at times. However, Qohelet is not examining life from the plains of Redemptive History. His struggles take place on the landscape of Creation’s History. Therefore, the “God’s gifts” sections are not intended to provide answers; they are intended to engage our faith. God does something similar for Job.
 - d. It is in these “God’s gifts” sections that Ecclesiastes provides us with its own perspective on God (Theology). It describes a God who is the Creator, who works in ways that are incomprehensible, but He is just and will be the Judge (Note the Ecclesiastes uses *Elohim* for “God,” and not the covenant name *Yahweh*. It has no reference to the priest or sacrifice, and it waits until the end to allude to “the commandments” – Law.)
2. *Carpe Diem Divisions*. Another popular way to divide the book is along the thrice repeated refrain, “a man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work” (2:24; 5:18; 8:15)
- 1:1 – 2:26 (2:24)
 - 3:1 – 5:20 (5:18)
 - 6:1 – 8:15 (8:25)
 - 8:16 – 12:14 (12:14)

This approach does identify an important theme in Ecclesiastes: Finding enjoyment in the gifts of God, i.e. eating, drinking and work. However, it can cause the casual student to a “hedonistic” interpretation of the book, since carpe diem clauses in our day have little to do with spiritual, eternal pursuits, and

more with temporary, immediate pleasures. The *carpe diem* of the Qohelet is limited by a recognition of judgment and a gratitude that the day comes from the Creator as a gift.

- D. **Summary:** The structure of Ecclesiastes reveals that a spiritually minded editor believed the intellectual struggles of Qohelet are worth considering. Yet, Qohelet's truths and wisdom must be read through the editorial lens of fearing and obeying a God who will judge.

III. Thematic Words and Concepts

- A. Another tool that helps chip away at the foil cover of Ecclesiastes is to look for words and concepts that are important to the author. Their importance can be discerned by their prevalence, or placement in the book.
- B. **Vanity – Hebel (Incomprehensible).** Chief among the thematic words of Ecclesiastes is “*Vanity*,” “*meaningless*,” or other words translated from the Hebrew words “*Hebel*.” This word is found 37 times in Ecclesiastes. The word is translated differently by English versions, partly because it is a metaphor. The word literally means, “breath, vapor, wind.” The meaning of the metaphor changes depending on the context.
1. *Life is Brief.* For example, “*Hebel*” can describe the transitory nature of life and the certainty of death (3:19, animals and man both die). This is the way James uses the metaphor of “life as a vapor” (James 4:14). The certainty of death is a major theme in Qohelet, but “*hebel*” is rarely used as a metaphor for brevity.
 2. *Life is Incomprehensible.* The main way Qohelet uses “*hebel*” is to picture the incomprehensible nature of life. “Everything is beyond human apprehension and comprehension” (Seow, p. 59). Fox has a helpful examination of this word, and concludes that the meaning of *hebel* must be derived from the context. Then he provides a helpful example from Ecclesiastes 8:14, where “*hebel*” forms an *inclusio* to a text that provides its definition.

There is a vanity which occurs on earth,
that there are just *men* to whom it happens according to the
work of the wicked;
again, there are wicked *men* to whom it happens according
to the work of the righteous.

I said that this also *is* vanity. (Eccl. 8:14)

Here “*hebel*” describes a circumstance that is absurd, irrational, an affront to reason. When life is examined it doesn't make sense all the time. It is like trying to define a breath—about the time you capture it, it is gone, and what you are left with is devoid of meaning. The world escapes our intellectual mastery (see 1:17-18).

3. *Chasing the Wind (Uncontrollable).* The meaning of “*hebel*” is clarified when it is seen in connection with its parallelism with the phrase, “*chasing after the wind*” (1:14; 2:11,17,26; 4:4, 16; 6:9).

all is vanity
and grasping for the wind

Here the metaphor speaks of the uncontrollable nature of life. You cannot control life, any more than you can grasp the wind, or literally, “Shepherd the wind.” The wind goes where it wishes, even when you wish it not to. We cannot force or manipulate life to our own ends. “Our projects are cloud castles on a windy day” (Leithhart, *Solomon Among the Post-moderns*. p. 68). (see Jesus use of the metaphor in John 3)

4. As Provan puts it, “life is resistant to intellectual or physical control” (Provan p. 36). Is this not also the message of Job!? The incomprehensible, uncontrollable nature of life leads Qohelet to two conclusions
 - a. *Accept Life*. Accept life for what it is, and not what you wish it to be. The injustices and inconsistencies of life might cause the pagan to “give up” or become cynical. Qohelet advises, “Accept life’s absurdities. You’re not going to figure it out, or control it. So, accept life as it comes. Enjoy it each day. For it is a waste of time to try to figure everything out and straighten it out!” (7:13-14)
 - b. *Let God Be God*. The second application Qohelet makes about life’s “*hebel*” nature is to let God be God. When we accept that we cannot figure out why everything happens, and that we can’t control everything that happens, we are driven to God’s sovereign control. For example, “*God has sent eternity in the hearts of men;*” a striving for understanding and significance, why? Qohelet answers, “*God does it so that men will revere him*” (3:11,14). The “*hebel*” nature of life has a hortatory (instructive) purpose, to drive us to consider the futility of living life apart from a fear of God.

C. **Death**. The “*hebel*” nature of life is emphasized throughout Ecclesiastes through several illustrations, and one of the most common is death.

1. *Death is The Uncontrollable Reality*. Death is pictured as the uncontrollable reality that comes to men and animals (3:19. “*Man’s fate is like that of the animals...as one dies, so dies the other.*”), the foolish and the wise (2:14-16, “*like the fool, the wise man too must die!*”), kings and servants. It is inescapable. It is the great leveler.
2. *Death Makes Life Seem Worthless*. Qohelet also uses death to show how worthless life’s efforts can seem. A man can work all his life, die, and his goods go to a fool (death makes life’s efforts come to nothing – 2:18-20). Not only does death cause our possessions to come to nothing, death causes our *name* to come to nothing, “*For the wise man, like the fool, will not be long remembered, in days to come both will be forgotten*” (2:16). Death wipes away the memory of even those who did great acts of courage and compassion in this life, “*no one remembered*” who they are (9:15).
3. The nature of death causes us to live for more than this life. It causes us to trust in God’s judgment to right the injustices and remember the righteous.

“God will bring into judgment
both the righteous and the wicked,
for there will be a time for every activity,
a time to judge every deed.” (3:17)

- D. **Profit; Gain.** The futility of life at the time of death is magnified by the lack of profit in life's efforts. "No profit" is a synonym to "*hebel*" in the text. This is the Hebrew word "*yitron*," and it is used 10 times in Ecclesiastes (1:3; 2:11,13; 5:8,15; 7:12; 10:10-11). For all Qohelet's desire to get gain in life, to get ahead, to possess the things that make life enjoyable, he found only a breath of wind was left in the hand. He could not gain the things in life that make it meaningful. (Consider Paul's use of "gain" in Phil. 3).
- E. **We Cannot Know.** The limits of human knowledge are also a major theme in the book (3:21; 6:12; 7:24; 8:17; 9:1,12; 11:2, 5-6). This is what makes life "*hebel*," try as we might we cannot intellectually know all we wish to.

²¹ **Who knows** if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?" (Ecclesiastes 3:21)

¹² For **who knows** what is good for a man in life, during the few and meaningless days he passes through like a shadow? (Ecclesiastes 6:12)

No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. Even if a wise man claims he knows, **he cannot really comprehend it.** (Ecclesiastes 8:17)

¹² Moreover, **no man knows** when his hour will come:
As fish are caught in a cruel net,
or birds are taken in a snare,
so men are trapped by evil times
that fall **unexpectedly** upon them. (Ecclesiastes 9:12)

⁵ As **you do not know** the path of the wind,
or how the body is formed in a mother's womb,
so **you cannot understand** the work of God,
the Maker of all things. (Ecclesiastes 11:5)

One the other hand there are some "Fixed truths;" things we can know because of the nature and presence of God (2:14; 3:12,14; 9:5; 11:9; 12:11). These are what the Editor calls, "right words, ... upright and true."

¹² **I know** that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live. (Ecclesiastes 3:12)

¹⁴ **I know** that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him. (Ecclesiastes 3:14)

"It is helpful to know that Qohelet didn't need to discover fundamental truths of undeniable certainty to be able to say with confidence, "I know..." (Leithhart, Solomon Among the Post-moderns. p. 99).

- F. **Injustice.** One of the major concerns that drives Qohelet's "*hebel*" view of life are the many injustices. The fool and the wise both die and are forgotten (2:15-16). One works, and another gets the benefits (2:21). Judges were wicked (3:16). The oppressed had no comforter (4:1). The people don't value a good king (4:13-16). The good man and the sinner have the same fate (9:2). Etc.

G. **Judgment.** Qohelet appeals to two devices to level all the injustices of life. One is *death* (see III. C.), and the second is *judgment*. Judgement appears in the Editorial frame at the end of the book as an interpretive key, “*for God will bring every deed into judgment*” (12:13), but this is not the first mention of it. The theme of judgment, as an answer to the “*hebel*” nature of life, comes from Qohelet.

¹⁷ I thought in my heart,
“God will bring to **judgment**
both the righteous and the wicked,
for there will be a time for every activity,
a time for every deed.” (Ecclesiastes 3:17)

⁹ Be happy, young man, while you are young,
and let your heart give you joy in the days of your youth.
Follow the ways of your heart
and whatever your eyes see,
but know that for all these things
God will bring you to **judgment**. (Ecclesiastes 11:9)

The concept of judgment is also seen in the concept of “pleasing God.”

“To the person who **pleases him**, God gives wisdom,
knowledge and happiness, but to the sinner he gives the
task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to
the one who **pleases God**.” (2:26)

“And I find more bitter than death the woman whose
heart is snares and nets, Whose hands are fetters. He
who **pleases God** shall escape from her, But the sinner
shall be trapped by her.” (7:26)

Also,

² Obey the king’s command, I say, because you took an
oath **before God**. (8:2)

H. **Summary:** The thematic words and phrases of Ecclesiastes reveal a message that centers around the “*hebel*” nature of human life. The “*hebel*” nature of our existence is seen in the injustices of life, the lack of gain in life, the lack of understanding, and the inescapable nature of death. All these illustrations of life’s “*hebel*” nature drives us to consider God and seek to be pleasing to Him at the judgement.

IV. The Genre of Ecclesiastes

- A. **The Importance of Genre.** Longman writes, “Genre identification significantly affects a reader’s interpretation and application of a text. Proper identification may lead to correct interpretation, but a mistaken genre identification will certainly distort the reader’s understanding.” (Longman, Ecclesiastes. NICOT. p. 16).
- B. **The Editor Identifies the Genre.** At one level the question of genre is answered by the Editor in the closing frame.

⁹ Not only was the Teacher **wise**, but he also imparted
knowledge to the people. He pondered and searched out and
set in order many **proverbs**.¹⁰ The Teacher searched to find just
the right words, and what he wrote was upright and true.

¹¹ The **words of the wise** are like goads, their collected sayings like firmly embedded nails—given by one shepherd. ¹² Be warned, my son, of anything in addition to them. (12:9-12)

1. *Ecclesiastes Contains Proverbs*. The Editor tells us his work includes “*many proverbs*” (12:9).
 - a. Hermeneutical tools of understanding “proverbs” then come into play. They are general truths. They are not to be understood as commandments or prophecies.
 - b. In addition, these proverbs are “*ordered*” to teach a lesson. Therefore, they should be read *in their context* to properly understand their meaning.
 - c. This is especially true since Qohelet examines topics through “balancing proverbs.” A proverb he states emphatically in one place, he will negate with an equally emphatic proverb that reverses or limits his previous observation. The Bible must be carefully about “cherry picking” the proverbs he/she likes—the cherries need to be eaten together in the pie Qohelet has cooked.
 - d. Ecclesiastes is sometimes abused in preaching and teaching for these two reasons: The teacher comes to the book, picks out the words that make his point, without considering the *context* or the *general nature* of proverbs.
2. *Ecclesiastes is Wisdom Literature*. “*Words of the wise*” (12:11).
 - a. *The Two Paths*. Ecclesiastes often presents the “two paths” approach of wisdom literature. Therefore, when Qohelet mentions *one path*, the reader must look for and consider the *second path*, before making up his/her mind about the Qohelet’s point. The two path approach is sometimes used, like in other wisdom literature, as warning: “Be warned” against a false view of life (12:12).

“To the person who pleases him, God gives wisdom, knowledge and happiness, **but** to the sinner he gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth to hand it over to the one who pleases God.” (2:26)

“God will bring into judgment both the **righteous** and the **wicked**, for there will be a time for every activity, a time to judge every deed.” (3:17)

“**God enables** him to enjoy them... **God does not enable** him to enjoy them” (5:18-6:2)

“For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is **good** or **evil**.” (12:14)

- b. *Fear God*. Key to wisdom literature is also the need to “fear God” (i.e. Prov. 1:7; Job 42-ff).

“¹⁴ I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him.” (3:14)

“For when dreams increase and words grow many, there is vanity; but God is the one you must fear.” (5:7)

“It is good that you should take hold of this, and from that withhold not your hand, for the one who fears God shall come out from both of them.” (7:18)

“Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him.” (8:12)

But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God. (8:13)

Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man. (12:13)

- c. The instruction of Qohelet is given as wisdom literature, and it is presented in the form of Proverbs. His advice in the context of belief in a Creator God who loves what is right and hates what is wrong.

C. ***Framed Wisdom Autobiography.*** Examined as a whole Ecclesiastes, should also be seen as a framed wisdom autobiography. Longmen presents a number of precedents for this style of writing in the culture of the day

1. “Thus, while there are a number of possible genre labels for the book of Ecclesiastes (wisdom literature, reflection, etc.), the present interpretation describes it as “framed wisdom autobiography.” (see Longman. NICOT. p. 17-ff) Longman argues that this style of writing was often written by an unknown author who takes on the mantle of a famous person to write a fictional account to communicate some wise instruction.
2. Seeing Ecclesiastes as an autobiography invites the reader to see the message in the context of Solomon and the excesses described in 1 Kings 10-11. This provides a historical background for the book.

V. Intertextual Reading of Ecclesiastes

A. ***Ecclesiastes’ Place in the Bible Story.*** The Editor and Qohelet invite us to read Ecclesiastes intertextually—this book has a historical and religious context in which to be read.

1. *Historical/Covenant Context.* We are told Qohelet is the son of David, king in Jerusalem. This invites the reader to consider *Israelite History*, and *Covenant History* through David.
2. *Wisdom Literature Context.* Qohelet and the Editor tell the reader to “***Fear God,***” and calls the writing, “***proverbs***” and “***words of the wise,***” which are words which invoke Biblical wisdom literature (12:9-13). This invites the reader to consider Ecclesiastes as another wisdom book, which should be treated as other Biblical wisdom literature.
3. *Law Context.* At the end the Editor invites the reader to consider Ecclesiastes in light of a Law context, “***keep His commandments***” (12:13). Keeping God’s commandments are a key conclusion of the book, yet nowhere does the Editor or Qohelet define those laws or tell us where to go to find them. Thus, *the reader must assume that Ecclesiastes must be read with the book of the Law open to the side.*

4. *One Story*. In addition, if the inspiration of Ecclesiastes is accepted, then its placement in the Biblical Canon is part of a unified narrative. (Side note: Some see inspiration in the epilogue in the phrase, “*words of the wise...given by one shepherd*” (12:11), though I am not personally convinced this is a clear reference to God.) Thus, the reader should expect to see themes developed earlier in the Biblical story to reemerge and be explored in Ecclesiastes, in order to advance the story. Therefore, Ecclesiastes should not be read in isolation.

- a. *Warning #1*: Intertextual connections is not where the student should start. Ecclesiastes should be considered first on its own. It is a unified volume with introduction and conclusion, and there is value to be gained from accepting and considering it on its own—the limited perspective it has on the Bible story.
- b. *Warning #2*: We should be careful not to interject intertextual readings where they do not belong. This is too often done in devotional and homiletical treatments of the book. I randomly selected a devotional commentary on Ecclesiastes from my shelf and found an example—it may not be the clearest example, but it will serve the purpose. The author concludes a topical chapter entitled “**Seeking Purpose, Finding Futility,**” with the following,

“[The Preacher’s] pessimism about life is an admission that life without God is vain no matter how you look at it. ... The lives of people who live without God’s guidance and without trust in God are vain and striving after the wind. ... On the other hand, living a life in submission to God’s will is a life with purpose and meaning. This is the Preacher’s message in Ecclesiastes. ... Paul said the very same thing in the New Testament: “Therefore, my beloved brethren, be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord” (1 Cor. 15:58)” (Seeking a life that Counts. Gleaves, p.29)

- 1) Some of what the author says is true, “lives lived without God’s guidance is vain.” However, this ignores Qohelet’s use of “*hebel*.” Qohelet doesn’t say if you serve God your life will be full of purpose and meaning. No. He says, “*Even* if you eat and work with an awareness of God’s gifts and judgment you will still find life “*hebel*” – beyond intellectual and physical control.”
- 2) In addition, the Ecclesiastes is *not* making the same point as Paul in 1 Corinthians 15.
 - a) *First*, the “labor” Paul is advocating is “in the Lord,” the work of a disciple—those things we do as members of God’s kingdom. The “labor” throughout much of Ecclesiastes is the work we do as parts of God’s creation, the laborious work tainted by the fall.
 - b) *Second*, the reasons Paul says our labor is “not in vain,” are not under consideration in Ecclesiastes! Paul’s “Therefore,” looks back to our salvation through the gospel (1 Cor. 15:1-2, not “vain” inclusio with 15:58), and our resurrection from the dead (1 Cor. 15:35-ff). The resurrection of the grace-saved is a message of the Gospel, it is not the path to meaningful living in Ecclesiastes.
 - c) Yes, Ecclesiastes and Paul use similar words, but they are looking at them from two different perspectives.

- 3) A better approach would be to first let Ecclesiastes make its point, with all the limitations of its perspective; then to add the gospel perspective to subject. For example,

“Solomon tried all there was in life and found it to be futile. Even with his limited view of God he found life to be frustrating. However, in Christ we are given a greater work and with greater promises—of salvation and resurrection. Truly, we should “be steadfast, immovable, always abounding in the work of the Lord, knowing that your labor is not in vain in the Lord.” (1 Cor. 15:58).”

5. *Be Careful Not to Read N.T. Principles into Ecclesiastes.* As disciples of Jesus we must be careful not to read Ecclesiastes and jump to concepts of redemption, sacrifice, resurrection, heaven and hell. These are *not* concepts that are a part of Qohelet’s reasoning. To be honest with the text we must allow Qohelet and his Editor make their case on their own.

B. ***Ecclesiastes And the Fall of Creation.*** Many Bible students believe Ecclesiastes should be read in light of the futility and corruption which entered the world as the result of sin (see Gen. 3:17-19 and Romans 8:20-21). For example, the introduction to the Ecclesiastes in the ESV summarizes the book by saying, “God’s judgment on Adam for his sin (Gen. 3:17–19) echoes throughout the book (especially 12:7)” (English Standard Version. (2016). Wheaton: Standard Bible Society.) There are three judgments against Adam that do “echo” through Ecclesiastes.

1. *Frist, there is the frustration of earthly production.* The earth is created to “bear fruit according to its kind” (Gen. 1). But sin frustrates earth’s fruitfulness by introducing useless “*thorns and thistles*” in the place of useful herbs for food (Gen. 3:18). This creates a unsatisfying expectation in humanity—“Life should be productive, but for all we do it yields useless results.” The injustices and confusion that the curse brought are certainly at the heart of Ecclesiastes.
2. *Second, there is the insufficient and unfulfilling nature of human labor.*

“In **toil** you shall eat...

all the days of your life. ...

In the **sweat** of your face you shall eat

till you return to the ground” (Gen. 3:17-19)

The futility of work and the certainty of death are the inclusion of the curse on Adam. The curse emphasizes the difficulty of work, but also its futility, it must be done all day, every day, until you die. The work never ends. This too is a theme of Ecclesiastes.

3. *Third, there is the certainty of death.* “*Till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for dust you are, and to the dust you shall return*” (3:19). This aspect of the curse is clearly referred to by Qohelet and the Editor.

“All go to one place. All are **from the dust, and to dust all return.**” (Ecclesiastes 3:20)

“**the dust returns to the earth** as it was, and the spirit returns to God who gave it.” (Ecclesiastes 12:7)

Like God’s curse of death in Genesis 3, there seems to be little hope for the body beyond death in Ecclesiastes. Rather, death is seen as the unavoidable destiny of humanity. Death is not infused with joyful expectation. It is largely viewed as a “curse.”

4. *The Name of God – Elohim.* The connection between Ecclesiastes and the Creation/Fall story is strengthened by the name Qohelet and his Editor used for God, “*Elohim.*” This is the only name by which God was known in the Creation account. *Elohim* is therefore considered the most general/universal name for God, emphasizing His role in Creation. Thus, Qohelet is dealing with the world as it is in the context of a Creation frustrated by sin. He rarely sticks his head up to consider Covenant History, and never Redemption History. He is writing as a man “under the sun” (1:3,9,14; 2:11, 17-18; 3:1), which is not simply a *spatial* reference, but a *temporal* reference to the “now” as opposed to the “then” when we are no longer under the sun.
5. *Creation Is Broken.* The beginning of Ecclesiastes also draw the reader back to the Creation story. Just as Genesis begins with the sun, earth, rivers, and people calling Creation to life, so Ecclesiastes begins with the sun, earth, rivers, and people revealing Creation is broken (See Eccl. 1:1-18).

C. ***Ecclesiastes And the Restoration of Creation.*** The clear references to themes of Creation and The Fall in the book of Ecclesiastes, invites the reader to consider how the themes of Creation, Fall, and Redemption recorded in Genesis 1-6 might provide a background for Ecclesiastes. Many authors provide such an analysis. I found most helpful,

Cain, Abel, Seth, and the Meaning of Human Life as Portrayed in the Book of Genesis and Ecclesiastes, by Radisa Antic (Andrews University Seminary Studies, Vol. 44, No2, 203-211)

Koheleth’s Use of Genesis, by Charles Forman (Journal of Semitic Studies, Vol. 5, Issue 3, 256-263)

Gleaning from these studies and my own examination of the texts, I find a helpful Redemptive Story which plays out throughout Biblical history. Ecclesiastes plays a beautiful, unexpected role in the retelling of this story. I’ve thought of it as, “Three children tell the history of the world.” Ellen van Wolde wrote, “The story of Cain, Abel and Seth in Genesis 4 presents an account of how harmony and happiness were transformed into absurdity, meaninglessness, and pessimism. The book of Ecclesiastes develops a similar idea by attempting to answer the riddle of human existence” (*The Story of Cain and Abel: A Narrative Study*. JSOT 52:29)

1. *The “Futility” of Abel.* It is compelling to realize that Abel’s name in Hebrew is “*Hebel*,” which is the same word translated “vanity, meaningless” in Ecclesiastes. In fact, over half of the uses of “Hebel” in the Old Testament are found in the one book of Ecclesiastes.
 - a. To the reader of Genesis Abel doesn’t amount to much. He is a breath that appears for a moment and disappears. Abel has no lines in the drama. His actions take place off stage. His mention is brief. His life gives the impression of meaninglessness, absurd, temporary, and his loss is seen as a waste.
 - b. All this even though he was obedient to God and God looked favorably upon him. In the story of Genesis his life comes to nothing. “Hebel” was his name, and “*hebel*” was his life.
2. *The “Possessions” of Cain.* Then enters Cain. While some debate whether His name means, “The possessor; acquire,” the story clearly describes him as the one with all the possessions (Gen. 4:10-24).

- a. *He possessed his brother.* In the text Abel is constantly referred to as “Cain’s brother” (Gen. 4:1,8 (2X), 9 (2X), 10, 11). And in the end Cain winds up possessing Abel’s life. To the reader of Genesis, it looks like Cain wins. If you have enough power you can manipulate the world to accomplish your desires.
 - b. *He possessed God’s protection.* While Cain is cursed for his actions, he also receives the special protection of God (Gen. 4:15). God put a mark on Cain to protect him from reprisal, and as a sign of God’s mercy in the same way God clothed Adam and Eve with skins as a sign of their sin and God’s mercy (Gen. 3:21). Again, the reader of Genesis says, “Score number two for Cain.”
 - c. *He possessed a land.* Cain leaves and “lived in the land of Nod” (Gen. 4:16; “Nod = wandering”). Cain’s possession of the land of Nod gave Cain security, provision and a future.
 - d. *He possessed a wife.* While Abel seemingly had no family. Cain had a wife and their family thrived (Gen. 4:17). Cain had a home, fellowship and a future. Again, it looks like the way of Cain works! You can possess the things in this world that will give you happiness, security and a future.
 - e. *He possessed a son.* Cain’s family is then listed, his son “Enoch” and his children and grand-children (Gen. 4:17-18). You can see Cain on the couch opening the family album, showing you the pictures. You might think, “What a great family; they have a rich, full life.” The way of Cain works!
 - f. *He possessed a city.* Finally, Cain’s security becomes complete. He goes from a wonderer in a land, to a builder of a city. He even named it after his son (Gen. 4:17). Now, Cain will live on beyond his years. He has made his mark on the world. He has really lived life to the full.
 - g. *He possessed his own path.* Ultimately Cain is the one who chose his own path through life. Adam and Eve rejected their state as created beings by eating the forbidden fruit—they chose to be a law to themselves. Their rebellion deepens in Cain. While Adam and Eve are guilt-ridden by their sinful deed, Cain is angry and defiant. Cain chose to be his own boss; call his own shots. And it worked!
 - 1) The reader of Genesis gets to the end of chapter 4 and says, “Cain’s way works. If you have power, people, and possessions you will have life!”
 - 2) Anitic summarizes, “[Cain] secured his future and lived an apparently meaningful life, but he lived his life independently of God. Human life without God seems to have meaning; opposition to God has proven to be rewarding. Evil and all those who have incorporated it in their lives will, according to Cain’s experience, rule the world.” (ibid, p. 207).
3. *The “Gift” of Seth.* But, then enters a third child that will turn things upside down—or “right side up” as it turns out. His name is Seth, which Adam defines in this way, “*God has granted me another child in the place of Abel*” (Gen. 4:25). The name Seth is chosen because he is a “gift from God,” and because he was a “substitute” for his fallen brother (Seth from the *shith* meaning “to place, to put,” suggesting the idea of substitute—put in the place of another.)
 - a. *A Return to the Lord.* With the birth of Seth and his children, “*at that time people began to call on the name of the Lord*” (4:26). A new, a third choice is emerging. Not the way of Abel, or Cain, but the way of Seth.

- b. *The Removal of Cain.* Then, in a shocking twist God sends a flood. Every member of Cain’s family, with all of their possessions and pleasures, is wiped off the face of the earth. Cain doesn’t win. He loses. He ends in death and meaninglessness just as his brother Abel. Cain’s family tried to be a law to themselves and live apart from God, but it ended in failure—completely destruction.
 - c. *The Survival of Seth.* Only the descendants of Seth, the one who God put in the place of Abel, survived the flood.
4. *The Relation of Genesis 4 – 6 and Ecclesiastes.* The dominate idea of Ecclesiastes 1 is “*hebel*,” but the prevailing thought in Ecclesiastes 2 is *possession*. Qohelet “*planted, built, bought, amassed, acquired,*” this is the path of Cain (note 2:7, “owned” is the root word in the name Cain), and what does Qohelet get for all his possession? Nothing. For a while it looks like Cain > Abel, but in the end, it is really Cain = Abel. Both the way of Cain and the way of Abel are ultimately meaningless.
- a. But then enters God’s Seth, God’s gift. We see Qohelet addressing a sea of Cain’s and Abel’s and urging them to look at life, work, possessions, food as “gifts of God” (2:24; 3:13; 5:1, 19; 9:9).
 - b. Again, Antic summarizes, “Seth, who was given “in place of Abel” as God’s gift, was the only son to carry on the line of Adam, thereby completing Adam’s genealogy. He was the only son to truthfully reveal the image of Adam (Gen 5:3). Thus, in order to recover the image of God lost in Abel and distorted in Cain, humanity must begin again from point zero.

By stating that “everything is Abel” and by concluding with “everything is Adam,” the author of Ecclesiastes speaks about the only possible solution and hope for humanity, that is, the new-birth or new-creation experience that comes from God. The new world and the new man must be put in place of the present one.

As it was God who granted to Eve “another child in place of Abel,” so, in the same way, a solution must come from God. God will put another world in place of this world. God has promised that he will put enmity between the serpent and its posterity and the woman and her posterity, and that, finally, the serpent’s head will be crushed by God himself, who took on human nature, thereby becoming the second Adam (Gen 3:15; Eccl 12:13). Thus, the meaninglessness brought into the world through Cain’s murder of his brother is forever revoked by the death of Jesus, the second Adam. (ibid p. 211)

- 5. A devotional development of the Abel, Cain and Seth story is at the bottom of this document.

VI. Ecclesiastes Today

- A. I noticed some of the children in the church singing a popular song of the day. The hook line caught my attention, so I looked up the lyrics. This song is intended for young children, yet it expresses the message of Ecclesiastes, showing that this book is perennially applicable.

Thumbs

by Sabrina Carpenter

Somewhere in the world there, is a father and a mother
And the father is a son, who has a mother
The mother has a daughter who gets married to the brother of a mother
And they all just tryna multiply with one another

‘Cause that’s just the way of the world
It never ends till the end, then you start again
That’s just the way of the world
That’s just the way of the world

Somewhere in the world, they think they’re working for themselves
They get up everyday to go to work for someone else
And somebody works for them and, so, they think they got it made
But they’re all just working to get paid the very same

And so, they keep on twiddlin’ them thumbs
Skiddly-dee-da-dum
They gonna keep on twiddlin’ them thumbs
Skiddly-dee-da-dum-dum
And so, they keep on twiddlin’ them thumbs
Skiddly-dee-da-dum (skiddly-dee-da-dum)
They gonna keep on twiddlin’ them thumbs
Skiddly-dee-da-dum-dum

Somewhere in the world, you got a robber and a bank
And the bank robbed the people, so the people rob the bank
And the police came to get him, but they let him get away
‘Cause they’re all just workin’ to get paid the very same

‘Cause that’s just the way of the world
It never ends till the end, then you start again
That’s just the way of the world
That’s just the way of the world

And so, they keep on twiddlin’ them thumbs
Skiddly-dee-da-dum (skiddly-dee-da-dum)
They gonna keep on twiddlin’ them thumbs
Skiddly-dee-da-dum-dum
And so, they keep on twiddlin’ them thumbs
Skiddly-dee-da-dum (skiddly-dee-da-dum)
They gonna keep on twiddlin’ them thumbs
Skiddly-dee-da-dum-dum

Don't believe everything that you hear
Let it go through your left and right ear
Don't just march to the beat of that drum
Don't be one of them people just twiddlin' them thumbs
'Cause that's just the way of the world (way of the world)
It never ends till the end, and then you start again
That's just the way of the world
That's just the way of the world

And so, they keep on twiddlin' them thumbs (keep on)
Skiddly-dee-da-dum (skiddly-dee-da-dum)
They gonna keep on twiddlin' them thumbs
Skiddly-dee-da-dum-dum (Woo-oo, woo-oo)
And so, they keep on twiddlin' them thumbs (keep on, keep on)
Skiddly-dee-da-dum (skiddly-dee-da-dum)
They gonna keep on twiddlin' them thumbs (la-a-a-a-a)
Skiddly-dee-da-dum-dum
(Siddly-dee-da-da-da-de-da-dum-dum)

They keep on twiddlin' them thumbs (keep on, keep on)
Skiddly-dee-da-dum
They keep on, they keep on
They gonna keep on twiddlin' them thumbs
Skiddly-dee-da-dum-dum
Cause that's just the way of the world

- B. ***The Answers Are Not in Human Knowledge and Attainment.*** We live in a time when we believe we can know our world, our bodies, and therefore control and fashion them to accomplish our own agendas. Human wisdom, we think, will result in progress to our utopia. Yet, the more information we have the more ways we find to sin. The more we trust our information, the less we respect God's revelation.
1. Ecclesiastes dispels the illusion that the world is knowable, controllable, and death is avoidable.
 2. Rather Ecclesiastes replaces the illusion with truth: God exists, the universe is a gift from God, life is a gift, so embrace life for what it is, not for what you wish it to be. So, reverence and obey God who is the giver and the judge of life.