

Wycliffe AD seminar: The Book of Ecclesiastes

Format and Goals

I have divided the Hebrew text of Ecclesiastes so as to fit into six sessions of roughly equal length. The goals of the seminar are:

- To read the MT of Ecclesiastes from beginning to end; this is tied up with ‘canonical shape’ issues and the question of the literary integrity and sense of the work as a whole.
- To read a sample of modern commentaries in English. There are more than ten circulating (see the bibliography below). Each week you will choose a different commentary. We will give priority to the technical commentaries marked with an * below. Enns, Treier, Whybray, and Davis are also interesting.
- To become acquainted with the earlier history of interpretation. The ACCS series is a decent resource. The homilies of Gregory of Nyssa are available (S. Hall, ed.). Luther’s sermons are available in the standard Concordia volume. How was it possible to read the Ecclesiast as a type of Christ? What was Luther’s adjustment of the tradition of Jerome?
- To evaluate secondary literature contributions on various aspects of the interpretation of Qoheleth

Assignment:

1. 1 Reflective paper. Attendance at Fall Colloquium on Apocalyptic required. In what sense can one identify in Ecclesiastes (or Wisdom Literature more broadly) apocalyptic themes? (10 pages, due 6 November)
2. 1 major technical paper whose format will be discussed. The paper will seek to show deep and judicious familiarity with the state of the question in scholarly research: the ability to engage that intelligently and make a research advance of some kind will make for a strong paper. Due as in accordance with the TST handbook.

Sessions

Prologue and Epilogue (Frame Narrative) and the Presentation of Koheleth

Ecclesiastes 1:1-11;12-18 and 12:8-14

At issue in this session is the relationship between implied author, narrator/presenter and Koheleth himself (as expressed in his first-person discourses). Comparison with Job. Who is Koheleth? Why is Solomon not named? ANE parallels to the Koheleth discourse.

How does the Epilogist’s take on Koheleth affect our interpretation of him?

- What is a 'koheleth' and what role does the depiction of Solomon in Kings and Chronicles play?
- How to render 'vanity of vanities'?
- The context of Proverbs and Song of Songs (Christian and Jewish interpretation)

Readings:

Fox ('Frame Narrative'), G. Wilson, Longman commentary (Epilogue issues); Introductory chapters of Barbour on the identity of Koheleth.

Chapter One: Gregory of Nyssa and modern commentaries.

Koheleth's Tests

Ecclesiastes 2:1—3:22

Is K's search for the good misguided? *Yitron* and *heleq*.

Repetition of *hebel* and chasing the wind.

'Et and *zemen*.

Proust, Faulkner, a 'whig account of history'

Readings: Jenni Barbour, Gregory of Nyssa, modern commentaries

Vanity and Instruction

Ecclesiastes 4:1—5:20

Readings: A. Wright, "The Riddle of the Sphinx"

J. Barbour, Chapter 3, Remembrance of Kings Past

Evil under the Sun

Ecclesiastes 6:1—7:29

R. Johnston, "Confessions of a Workaholic," *CBQ* 38 (1976)

N. Whybray, "Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy," *JSOT* 23 (1982) 87-98

Ecclesiastes 8:1—9:17

K. Dell, "Ecclesiastes as Wisdom: Consulting Early Interpreters," *VT* 45 (1994)

Origen, Preface to Song of Songs

Ecclesiastes 10:1—12:7

J. Barbour, Conclusion, 168-82

R. Knierim, "Cosmos and History," *HBT* (1981) 1-123

Bibliography

Modern commentaries:

C. Bartholomew* (Baker), E. Davis (Westminster Bible Companion), P. Enns (Two Horizons), M. Fox* (JPS), T. Krueger* (Hermeneia), N. Lohfink* (Continental), T. Longman* (NICOT), R. Murphy* (Word), L. Seow* (AB), Treier (Brazos), Whybray (NCB).

Studies:

Jennie Barbour, *The Story of Israel in the Book of Qohelet: Ecclesiastes as Cultural Memory* (OUP, 2012)

Katharine Dell, *Interpreting Ecclesiastes: Readers Old and New* (Eisenbrauns, 2013)

Michael Fox, *A Time to Tear Down, a Time to Build Up* (Eerdmans, 1999)

G. von Rad, *Wisdom in Israel* (SCM, 1972)

Stuart Hall, ed., *Gregory of Nyssa: Homilies on Ecclesiastes* (Berlin: de Gruyter, 1993)

Essays:

K. Dell, "Ecclesiastes as Wisdom," *VT* 45 (1994)

M. Fox, "Frame Narrative and Composition in the Book of Qoheleth," *HUCA* 48 (1977) 83-106

R. Johnston, "Confessions of a Workaholic," *CBQ* 38 (1976)

R. Knierim, "Cosmos and History," *HBT* (1981) 1-123

G. Wilson, "The Words of the Wise: The Intent and Significance of Qoheleth 12:9-14" *JBL* 103 (1984) 175-92.

N. Whybray, "Qoheleth, Preacher of Joy," *JSOT* 23 (1982) 87-98

A. Wright, "The Riddle of the Sphinx," *CBQ* 30 (1968) 313-34

Ecclesiastes Fall 2019

Schedule

11 September – Session One, 9-11 (via skype)

14 October – Session Two, 9-12

16 October – Session Three, 9-12

18 October – Session Four, 8.30-9.30 and 3.30-4.30

18 October Colloquium: Apocalyptic and Ecclesiastes 12 :1-8

11 November – Session Five, 9-12

13 November – Session Six, 9-12

15 November – Session Seven, 9-12