

Ecclesiastes Discussion Qs

1. Given that Solomon is not the author of the book of Ecclesiastes (IOT, 249-50), what important reading cue emerges from the “layers” of perspective in the book? While reading the book, we should remember that a narrator quotes a skeptic who in turn at times pretends to be Solomon.

2. What is a good outline of the book that highlights the framing of the skeptics viewpoint by the biblical viewpoint of the narrator? It is the prologue, monologue, and epilogue pattern:

1.1-11, prologue in the third person (the narrator presents the skeptics overall view that involves meaninglessness that is compound: the point is made, emphasized, and accented in the most sweeping way possible in the phrase: “vanity of vanities, says the teacher, vanity of vanities, all is vanity,” 1.2).

1.12-12.7, monologue in the first person (the skeptic is not an atheist but a sage with no hope of covenant redemption; he rambles without order to his thoughts in a way that reflects his despair of meaning in life)

12.8-14, epilogue in the third person (the narrator uses the wrong perspective of the skeptics wisdom as a foil or teaching device by which to instruct his son (12.12) and call him to reverent obedience to God in light of the reality of judgment (12.13-14). [The idea of a foil is a point of contrast to bring out the opposite]

3. What is the true lesson of the book? Man’s whole duty (as he wrestles with despair, vanity, and meaninglessness) is to fear God and keep His commandments knowing that God will judge every deed. This the key to true worshipful reverence to God: to keep His commandments; this is also basic to human significance.

4. What lesson can we draw from the narrator’s perspective in the book of Ecclesiastes for communion remembering? When the skeptical preacher’s remembering is put in the right perspective by the narrator, we learn about remembering our Creator in terms of covenant redemption instead of covenant alienation. In summary, we may say to ourselves, “while I live, while I have life and breath, while I have eyes to see the sun, moon, and stars, while I have eyes, ears, hair, and teeth that function properly, before the dust that I am returns to dust, and before my spirit returns to God (Ecc 12.1-7), I will focus my mind in a special way, communion service by communion service, on my Creator and redeemer, Jesus Christ the Lord of glory so that I may live for Him by His commandments (Ecc 12.13; Jn 14.15) day by day with reverence, joy, and love.”