

Equip: Resources on the Book of Ecclesiastes

June 16, 2025

The title “Ecclesiastes” is a translation of the Hebrew word Qoholet, meaning “gatherer” or “collector.” The author collected his varied life lessons, reflected on them, then gathered a crowd to hear his conclusions.

Qoholet addresses readers with a disturbing opening statement: “Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is meaningless!”

Although his assertion may cause some to avoid the book entirely, curious readers will want to understand Qoholet’s opinion.

“Meaningless” is a translation of the Hebrew word *hebel*, which can be translated at least four other ways: “frail,” “futile,” “brief” and “deceitful.” Throughout the book, the author weaves these meanings of the term into varied topics: wealth, wisdom and life, to name but a few.

Qoholet, then, is not saying life is meaningless. Instead, he reminds readers that life is undependable. Things in life can change dramatically in a relatively short time. Throughout the book, Qoholet shows God is the one upon whom readers should depend.

I first learned the joys of Ecclesiastes in 1993, and I was fascinated by the “time” poem in chapter 3. When teaching my Old Testament Survey and Wisdom Literature courses, I always look forward to sharing Ecclesiastes, as I find it one of the most relevant books in the Old Testament.

I recommend the following sources.

***Tyndale Old Testament Commentary: Ecclesiastes* by Michael Eaton**

When my students begin their research, I tell them to “start small, then move big.” The *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* series often is my first commentary to consult.

The series was created for ministers who want to study the Old Testament but may be intimidated by it. It is concise, yet it contains the most important aspects of a commentary: introduction to the book, outline and verse-by-verse comments.

Eaton’s contribution to the series is very good, and it provides a helpful primer to Ecclesiastes. I used Eaton’s commentary in the classroom for many years, and students found it worthwhile.

In his introduction, Eaton notes the book of Ecclesiastes avoids discussion of Old Testament covenant or Mosaic law. It is as if Qohelet’s audience had little to no knowledge of Israelite religion.

Comparing the book to Paul’s speech in Athens (Acts 17), Eaton shows Qohelet shared about life and God without using the normal arguments for faith.

Eaton constructs Ecclesiastes into a simple four-part outline.

***New International Commentary on the Old Testament: Ecclesiastes* by Tremper Longman**

The *New International Commentary on the Old Testament* is a good

commentary to continue where the *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* leaves off.

As one would expect from a larger commentary, the work gives more time to authorship, outline and dramatic flow than the *Tyndale Old Testament Commentary* does, yet it does so without using too many technical terms. The Hebrew is transliterated, allowing the commentary to be accessible to anyone.

Tremper Longman is one of the most widely read and respected conservative Old Testament scholars living today. His various lectures, articles and books cover a wide variety of topics, yet they reveal a profound attention to detail and a great love of the literature. Readers always will receive something worthwhile by reading Longman's works.

The strength of Longman's Ecclesiastes commentary is in its introduction, particularly regarding authorship. He disagrees with the tradition of Solomon as its writer, and he gives solid evidence within the book of Ecclesiastes to support his claim. His commentary has paved the way for others to follow his lead and to consider varied alternatives to authorship.

The rest of the commentary is equally solid in its research and views, yet Longman allows a spectrum of opinion.

***Word Biblical Commentary* by Roland Murphy**

The *Word Biblical Commentary* was my first choice when I was in seminary in the 1990s, and it often is found on ministers' bookshelves. The series has stood up well, and it is well worth the time to read. Yet, it is not consulted as often as others, as it is one of the more technical commentaries.

Roland Murphy, a Carmelite priest, was for many years professor of Old

Testament at Duke University. An evangelical Catholic with a keen interest in wisdom literature, Murphy's commentary provides helpful comments to some of the most difficult of Qoholeth's passages.

As readers work through the commentary, it becomes clear Murphy takes great joy in deciphering this book. He appreciates what Qoholeth's message was, and he hopes readers will share in his joy.

Other Noteworthy Volumes

***Exploring the Old Testament, Volume 3: A Guide to the Psalms and Wisdom Literature* by Ernest Lucas**

This small volume is a great asset for anyone starting to study Hebrew poetry. In Chapter 6, Lucas briefly walks through the various parts of Ecclesiastes, including authorship, construction and commentary. Although concise, he provides a helpful bibliography, assisting readers in further research.

***The Tree of Life* by Roland Murphy**

This was my first encounter with Murphy's love of wisdom literature. Murphy provides a wonderful introduction into the world of wisdom literature and shares how the genre complements the rest of the Old Testament. His chapter on Ecclesiastes is well done.

***Wisdom in Israel* by Gerhard von Rad**

Before this book was released in 1971, few scholars spent much time in the wisdom books. Von Rad's work, however, allowed wisdom to become its own genre. While it is not easy to read, it is consulted by everyone in the field.

Qoholeth may have opened the book by uttering, "Meaningless," but the

book is anything but irrelevant. May readers find the relevancy of his words in today's world.

Ken Gore is professor of [biblical studies](#) at [Dallas Baptist University](#). He is a graduate of Hannibal-La Grange College and Southwestern Baptist Theological Seminary. The views expressed in this resource article are those of the author.