

# Contentment in the Book of Ecclesiastes: interplay of the themes of death, the role of God, and contentment in Qoheleth's teaching

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## Contentment in the Book of Ecclesiastes: interplay of the themes of death, the role of God, and contentment in Qoheleth's teaching

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### ABSTRACT

The purpose of this thesis is to study the development of the theme of contentment in the book of Ecclesiastes and the relationship of this theme to the themes of death and the role of God. Qoheleth's autobiography (Eccl 1:12–2:26) serves as a lens to read and interpret his teaching on contentment throughout the book of Ecclesiastes. The theme of death informs and permeates Qoheleth's teaching and sets the stage for his exhortations of contentment. The brevity of human life and death as the natural end of life create an urgency to live every moment with vigor and zeal, especially when the possibility of the afterlife is uncertain. According to Qoheleth, the presence and active involvement of God in the existence of humanity brings meaning and fulfillment to life. Even though human beings cannot comprehend the activities of the inscrutable God, they should find contentment and satisfaction in the allotment that God bestows on them as his gift. Qoheleth's autobiography plays a significant role in his teaching. Qoheleth utilizes the genre of royal autobiography to convey his message throughout the book of Ecclesiastes and to connect his personal experiences and observations with his teaching on contentment in the face of death. Qoheleth teaches that contentment is an attitude that enables people to embrace life as a gift from God which may include both good and bad circumstances. Contentment empowers people to be fully engaged in every living moment in the face of death and the inscrutability of God. Life is full of contradictions and incongruities. This is why it is essential. Qoheleth admonishes, to develop an attitude of contentment which enables a person to find satisfaction in work and accept the allotment given by God. He promotes the need to give up attempts to comprehend God and his actions, and advocates the need to lead a life of generosity and hospitality, table fellowship and meaningful labour, the good life which pleases God.

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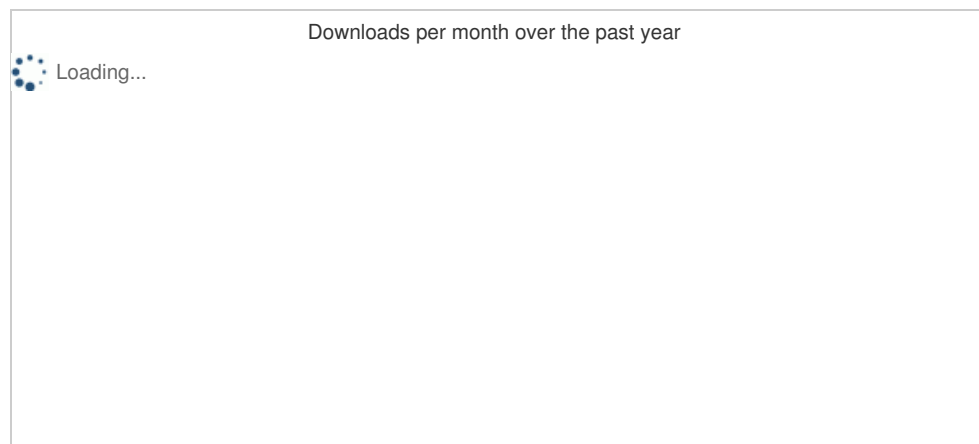


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the Bible as Holy Scripture. Given Qoheleth's negative view of human discourse, Ecclesiastes is the one book of the Bible that would seem to discourage, if not sabotage, any attempt at writing a commentary on it (e.g., 1:8-11; 5:23, 7 [Heb. vv. 12, 6]; 6:11; 12:12). Purpose and Teaching. The author of Ecclesiastes puts his powers of wisdom to work to examine the human experience and assess the human situation. His perspective is limited to what happens "under the sun" (as is that of all the wisdom teachers). He considers life as he has experienced and observed it between the horizons of birth and death—life within the boundaries of this visible world. Most significantly, it cannot find out the larger purposes of God or the ultimate meaning of human existence. With respect to these it can only pose questions. Nevertheless, he does take a hard look at the human enterprise—an enterprise in which he himself has fully participated. HERITAGE CHRISTIAN UNIVERSITY THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES SUBMITTED TO DR. EDMON L. GALLAGHER IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF OT421 CRITICAL INTRODUCTION TO THE OLD TESTAMENT BY TIMOTHY L. DOOLEY JULY 29, 2014 1 THE AUTHORSHIP OF THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES Ask the typical church member who authored the book of Ecclesiastes and the response will most certainly be, "Solomon." The traditional view of the authorship of Ecclesiastes is that the writer identified as "the Preacher" is Solomon, "the son of David, king in Jerusalem" (Eccl 1:1, NASB). While the identity of "the Preacher" is never