

## ***“I WAS KING OVER ISRAEL IN JERUSALEM”: INERRANCY AND AUTHORIAL AMBIGUITY IN ECCLESIASTES***

RUSSELL L. MEEK

Louisiana College  
[russell.meek@lacollege.edu](mailto:russell.meek@lacollege.edu)

*Solomon has been traditionally regarded as the author of Ecclesiastes; however, a review of the evidence for the book's authorship is inconclusive. Because the authorship of Ecclesiastes cannot be proved definitively and the book itself makes no explicit claims of authorship, it is crucial to disentangle the conversation over the book's authorship from the issue of inerrancy. In our defense of God's inerrant and infallible word, evangelical scholars must be careful not to argue more than the text itself will allow. There are compelling arguments for and against Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes, but ultimately the ambiguity of the biblical evidence cautions against dogmatism on this point. Therefore, the debate over Solomonic authorship should not be couched in terms of one's view of inerrancy.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Qohelet, Ecclesiastes, inerrancy, authorship, Solomon*

### INTRODUCTION

In a 1969 article in the *Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society*, Gleeson Archer succinctly highlighted the primary reason many evangelical scholars hold to Solomonic authorship and an early date for the book of Ecclesiastes: “. . . theological problems aris[e] from the denial of the genuineness of even one book of the Bible.”<sup>1</sup> Archer is certainly correct to point out the theological difficulties with holding to a position that undermines the integrity of the biblical text. Indeed, if a biblical book purports to be the work of a particular author, and yet is not, then evangelicals are in the unenviable position of relying on an unethical—and thus errant—text for their life and faith.<sup>2</sup> If the same

1. Gleeson L. Archer, “The Linguistic Evidence for the Date of ‘Ecclesiastes,’” *JETS* 12 (1969): 167.

2. Silva states, “If the author of a NT epistle, for example, claims to be the apostle Paul,

Scriptures that declare the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ are not trustworthy, then “we are of all people most to be pitied” (1 Cor 15:19 ESV). For this reason, we defend, for example, the authorship and early date of Daniel. The questioning of its date and authorship stems at least in part from the belief that Daniel could not have written the book that bears his name because it speaks of things that occurred long after his death (*vaticinium ex eventu*). Thus, the critical view is founded at least partially on anti-supernatural biases and disbelief in predictive prophecy. By calling into question the authorship of Daniel, one is calling into question the veracity and truthfulness of the witness of Scripture.

However, is this the case with Ecclesiastes? Is Archer correct when he states that “[Ecclesiastes] purports to be composed by the son and successor of King David, since it so affirms in its opening verse”?<sup>3</sup> Because many evangelicals agree with Archer’s assessment,<sup>4</sup> the argument regarding the authorship of Ecclesiastes has often been framed in terms of biblical inerrancy. However, does this put evangelicals in the place of having to argue a position that the Bible itself does not necessarily affirm? Does Ecclesiastes purport to have been written by Solomon? If not, does affirming non-Solomonic authorship undermine the integrity of biblical text?

This article examines the evidence for the authorship of Ecclesiastes in order to demonstrate that biblical inerrancy is not at stake, regardless of one’s view of the book’s authorship. Simply put, this article will show that the question of Ecclesiastes’s authorship is an in-house debate among evangelicals, not a litmus test to determine who is in and who is out. In order to accomplish this task, we will first overview the history of interpretation regarding Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes. Then we will closely examine the evidence for the book’s authorship. The analysis will show that there are compelling arguments on both sides of the issue, but ultimately the ambiguity of the biblical evidence cautions against dogmatism on this point, indicating that the debate over

---

we would be questioning the moral integrity of the author if we were to argue that the letter was not in fact written by Paul.” See Moisés Silva, “Old Princeton, Westminster, and Inerrancy,” *WTJ* 50 (1988): 75.

3. *Ibid.* See also Silva (“Old Princeton,” 75), who states that Solomonic authorship “appears to be the claim of the book itself.”

4. By no means do I intend to indicate that all evangelicals hold to Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes. Many notable evangelicals affirm that Solomon did not pen Ecclesiastes. See, among others, Craig Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes* (Baker Commentary on the Old Testament Wisdom and Psalms; Grand Rapids, MI: Baker, 2009), E. W. Hengstenberg, *A Commentary on Ecclesiastes with Other Treatises* (trans. D. W. Simon; Philadelphia: Smith, English, and Co., 1860), and E. J. Young, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1949).

Solomonic authorship should not be couched in terms of inerrancy. First, however, a word about inerrancy is in order.

### INERRANCY

The Chicago Statement on Biblical Inerrancy is widely considered among evangelicals to be the foremost expression of the doctrine of inerrancy. Its 18 articles outline what its proponents, myself included, affirm and deny regarding the inerrancy of Scripture. For the purposes of the present discussion, it can be simply stated that the Chicago Statement views inerrancy as the doctrine that the Bible, as revelation from God in its entirety, is inspired by God, authoritative, infallible, and without error, falsehood, or deceit. Further, while these affirmations apply specifically to the original autographs, the statement denies "that any essential element of the Christian faith is affected by the absence of the autographs. We further deny that this absence renders the assertion of Biblical inerrancy invalid or irrelevant" (Article X).<sup>5</sup>

This broad definition of inerrancy indicates that readers must treat the Scriptures with utmost respect in seeking to understand their meaning and apply its meaning to our lives. There is not space here to examine all manner of hermeneutical processes by which to interpret Scripture, but it can be safely assumed that those who hold to inerrancy likewise value authorial intent and therefore seek to understand the author's intended meaning in any given passage of Scripture. Further, it is also very often the case that these readers will employ the grammatical-historical method, whose goal "is simply to figure out what the biblical writer, under divine guidance, was saying."<sup>6</sup> The question we must ask, then, is whether there is sufficient evidence in the biblical text either to affirm or to deny Solomonic authorship. If the answer turns out to be "no," then Solomonic authorship simply cannot be an issue tied to the doctrine of inerrancy.

Thus, as we turn to examine the evidence for and against Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes, may we keep in mind the words of Moisés Silva and beware of turning this inter-evangelical debate into a means of excluding some from the table:

5. For an extended and more nuanced treatment of the issue of inerrancy, see Paul D. Feinberg, "The Meaning of Inerrancy," in *Inerrancy* (ed. Norman L. Geisler; Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1980), 267–306.

6. Silva, "Old Princeton," 70.

The doctrine of infallibility assures us that we can have total confidence in God's revelation to us. It does not mean, however, that we may have total confidence in our particular interpretations of the Bible. . . a commitment to inerrancy entails that we will believe such interpretations as are clearly demonstrable from the scriptural text, but inerrancy does not automatically settle interpretive debates . . .<sup>7</sup>

## HISTORY OF INTERPRETATION

### *Solomonic Authorship*

Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes has held sway among both Jewish and Christian interpreters for the majority of its history of interpretation. Eric Christianson points out that many scholars have interpreted the debate regarding its ability to “defile the hands” as being settled on account of Solomonic authorship.<sup>8</sup> However, he shows that even at this early date Solomonic authorship was not the book's saving grace. Instead, Ecclesiastes gained entrance into the canon because “Solomon or no, it is ‘argued well’ and that the words bring pleasure to the ear.”<sup>9</sup> Similar to the debate today, “[t]he significance of Solomon as author [grew] almost grotesquely out of proportion.”<sup>10</sup>

Among early Jewish interpreters, *Targum Qoheleth* affirms Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes. In typical Targumic fashion, it supplies a plausible explanation for Solomon's having written the book:

When King Solomon of Israel was sitting on his royal throne, his heart became very proud because of his wealth, and he transgressed the decree of the Memra of the Lord; he gathered many horses, chariots, and cavalry; he collected much silver and gold; he married foreign peoples. Immediately the anger of the Lord grew strong against him. Therefore, He sent Ashmedai king

7. *Ibid.*, 78–79.

8. Citing Svend Holm-Neilsen, “On the Interpretation of Qoheleth in Early Christianity,” *VT* 24 (1974): 168–77; R. B. Y. Salters, “Qoheleth and the Canon,” *ET* 86 (1975): 339–42; Norman Whybray, *Ecclesiastes* (NCB; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989). Eric Christianson, *Ecclesiastes through the Centuries* (Blackwell Bible Commentaries; Malden, MA: Blackwell, 2007), 89.

9. Christianson, *Ecclesiastes*, 90.

10. *Ibid.*

of the demons, against him who drove him from his royal throne and took his signet ring from his hand so that he would wander and go into exile in the world to chastise him. He went about in all the districts and towns of the Land of Israel. He wept, pleaded, and said, "I am Qohelet, who was previously named Solomon. I was king over Israel in Jerusalem."<sup>11</sup>

While early Christian interpreters may not have adopted the "evil demon" theory in full, they did hold that Solomon wrote the book in his old age, after having apostatized and then repented for his idolatry. For example, John Jarick indicates that Solomonic authorship was crucial for Gregory of Thaumaturgos, who notes that Solomon "lost and subsequently regained wisdom."<sup>12</sup> Other early Christian interpreters who affirm Solomonic authorship include Origen, "who began the tradition of a 'Solomonic Corpus,'" Gregory of Nyssa, Augustine, and John Chrysostom.<sup>13</sup> What these early interpreters have in common, other than their view of Solomonic authorship, is that they base their assessment on Eccl 1:1: דברי קהלת בן־דוד מלך ברושלים ("The words of Qoheleth, son of David, king in Jerusalem") and 1:12: אני קהלת הייתי מלך על־ישראל בירושלים ("I, Qoheleth, was king over Israel in Jerusalem"). These two phrases, along with the author's description of his opulence in chapter 2, convinced early interpreters that the book of Ecclesiastes indeed contained the words of Solomon.

Modern interpreters have been much less likely to attribute the book to Solomon, as the authorship of the book came under heavy criticism in post-Enlightenment scholarship.<sup>14</sup> Nevertheless, there are several evangelical scholars who hold to Solomonic authorship.<sup>15</sup> Gleason Archer supports his view of Solomonic authorship by arguing

11. *The Targum of Qohelet* (ed. and trans. Peter S. Knobel; The Aramaic Bible 15; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1991), 22.

12. John Jarick, ed. and trans., *Gregory Thaumaturgos' Paraphrase of Ecclesiastes* (SBL Septuagint and Cognate Studies 29; Atlanta: Scholars, 1990), 314 (as cited in Christianson, *Ecclesiastes through the Centuries*, 93).

13. Christianson, *Ecclesiastes through the Centuries*, 92–93.

14. For several eighteenth- and nineteenth-century scholars who held to Solomonic authorship, see G. A. Barton, *The Book of Ecclesiastes* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1959), 21–22.

15. In addition to the works examined here, see Walter Kaiser, Jr., *Ecclesiastes: Total Life* (EBC; Chicago: Moody, 1979); James Bollhagen, *Ecclesiastes* (Concordia Commentary; St. Louis, MO: Concordia, 2011); R. J. Kidwell and Don DeWelt, *Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs* (Bible Study Textbook Series; Joplin, MO: College Press, 1977).

that the linguistic irregularities in Ecclesiastes are best explained by Solomon's diplomatic exposure to Phoenicia during his reign as king over Israel. Archer relies heavily on the work of Mitchell Dahood, who argues that Phoenician influence indicates a fourth century date of composition, though Archer comes to a different conclusion:<sup>16</sup>

Much of the data assembled by Dahood shows a close relationship to the Ugaritic literature of Moses' time, and so there is every reason to deduce from this the suitability of the language of *Ecclesiastes* to a genre cultivated among the Phoenician-speaking peoples and adopted from them by a gifted tenth century Hebrew author, composing in a dialect of Canaanite (namely, Hebrew) very closely related to Phoenician itself. . . . No sound argument for the spuriousness of *Qohelet* as a work of Solomon's can be based upon its grammar, language, or style.<sup>17</sup>

Duane Garrett also argues forcefully that Ecclesiastes is the work of Solomon himself.<sup>18</sup> For Garrett, the book's counsel regarding how to relate to a monarch clinches Solomonic authorship. As Garrett points out, very few Jews in postexilic Judah would have had opportunity or concern to speak with their ruling monarchs.<sup>19</sup> Why would a book concerned with behavior before a king be written to an audience with no opportunity to heed the author's advice?

Daniel Fredericks also defends Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes, but he is unwilling to posit a date of composition in the tenth century.<sup>20</sup> Instead, he argues that the form of the book we now have can be dated no later than the preexilic period. Nevertheless, Fredericks holds that the book is the work of the historical person Solomon but was

16. Mitchell Dahood, "Canaanite-Phoenician Influence in Qoheleth," *Biblica* 33 (1952): 30–52, 191–221. See also, idem, "Language of Qoheleth," *CBQ* 14 (1952): 227–32; idem, "Phoenician Background of Qoheleth," *Biblica* 47 (1966): 264–82.

17. Archer, "Linguistic Evidence," 181.

18. Duane Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs* (NAC 14; Nashville, TN: B&H, 1993).

19. *Ibid.*, 261. Incidentally, one also wonders how many Israelites in preexilic Judah had opportunity to speak to Solomon. Nevertheless, the point remains—the number was certainly larger when the king actually lived in Jerusalem, rather than ruling from some distant land.

20. Daniel Fredericks and Daniel Estes, *Ecclesiastes and Song of Songs* (AOTC 16; Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity and Nottingham, England: Apollos, 2010), 1–263.

perhaps reworked by a later scribe or school.<sup>21</sup> Fredericks's 1988 monograph, *Qoheleth's Language: Re-Evaluating Its Nature and Date*, systematically deconstructs the linguistic arguments against Solomonic authorship, demonstrating that the book's ostensibly late features can be explained by its unique genre and other literary considerations.<sup>22</sup> For example, many of the book's grammatical features, such as the anticipatory pronominal suffix, discordant subject and predicate, and missing definite article, among some fourteen other characteristics, point to a North Israelite vernacular language for the book.<sup>23</sup> Beyond the unique literary qualities of the book, Fredericks also finds significant intertextual evidence that connects the book to the narrative of Solomon's reign in 1 Kings, as well as other portions of the so-called Solomonic Corpus, which further indicates Solomonic authorship.<sup>24</sup> He sums up his argument by stating that "[t]he large number of presumed evidences for a late date for Qoheleth's language is an accumulation of errors, errors made in the wake of the initial presupposition of a late date."<sup>25</sup>

Martin Shields is also hesitant to argue for a tenth-century date of composition for Ecclesiastes, but he insists that the book must be dated before the exile. Relying on the work of Ian Young, he argues that the book cannot be dated based on linguistic evidence because it is "far more ambiguous than most are willing to admit."<sup>26</sup> Consequently, Shields turns to historical references within the book to determine a date

21. Daniel Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language: Re-Evaluating Its Nature and Date* (Ancient Near Eastern Texts and Studies 3; Lewiston, NY: Edwin Mellen, 1988), 259; idem, *Ecclesiastes*, 32.

22. Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language*.

23. Ibid., 256–57.

24. Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 32–36. See also Thomas Krüger, *Qoheleth* (Hermeneia; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg Fortress, 2004), 27–28 upon whom Fredericks relies for the *Corpus Salomonicum*.

25. Ibid., 264.

26. Martin Shields, *The End of Wisdom: A Reappraisal of the Historical and Canonical Function of Ecclesiastes* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2006), 23. See also Ian Young, *Diversity in Pre-exilic Hebrew* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1993), 145–55; idem, "Concluding Reflections," in *Biblical Hebrew: Chronology and Typology* (ed. Ian Young; JSOTSup 369; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic, 2003), 276–311 in which Young "constructs a history of the Hebrew language in which Qoheleth's language could plausibly be preexilic" (Shields, *End of Wisdom*, 23,n.6). However, note Oswald Loretz, who argues that the language of Qoheleth is the *only* aspect of the book that provides any basis for dating (*Qohelet und der Alte Orient: Untersuchungen zu Stil und theologischer Thematik des Buches Qohelet* [Herder: Freiburg, 1964], 23–29, esp. 29]).

for its composition, which he also finds wanting due to their ambiguity.<sup>27</sup> However, royal references within the book indicate that it must have been composed for an audience who would have had occasion to interact with royalty, which limits the date and provenance to be either preexilic within Israel or postexilic outside of Israel.<sup>28</sup> Having established these two possible scenarios, Shields then argues that the “Solomonic Fiction” would only have had traction within Jerusalem and the reference in Eccl 4:17 “to the ‘House of God’ in which sacrifices are offered [is] indicative of the temple rather than a synagogue” indicating that Ecclesiastes was composed in preexilic Israel.<sup>29</sup>

### *Non-Solomonic Authorship*

Didymus the Blind is an important early interpreter who was not as certain about the authorship of the book, stating, “[a]ctually the Spirit is the author of the divinely inspired Scriptures . . . . Either the real author is Solomon, or some [other] wise men have written it. Maybe we should opt for the latter so that nobody may say that the speaker talks about himself.”<sup>30</sup> The Babylonian Talmud concurs, stating that “Hezekiah and his colleagues wrote (Mnemonic YMSHK) Isaiah, Proverbs, the Song of Songs and Ecclesiastes” (*b. Baba Bathra* 15a). Eric Christianson points out that this view is repeated in several other rabbinic commentaries, such as “Isaac ibn Ghiyath (1038–89) on Ecclesiastes, David Kimchi (1160–1235) on Proverbs and Samuel ibn Tibbon on Ecclesiastes, *c.* 1200.”<sup>31</sup>

Centuries later, Martin Luther echoed these sentiments to deny the Solomonic *penning* of Ecclesiastes. As Craig Bartholomew points out, Luther’s commentary on Ecclesiastes argues that the book was Solomonic in origin, though compiled by a later group of “disciples.”<sup>32</sup>

27. As does Kurt Galling, “Kohelet-Studien,” *ZAW* 50 (1932): 286–87.

28. Quoting Ian Young, “the most important difference between pre-exilic Jerusalem and post-exilic Jerusalem was quite simply that in pre-exilic Jerusalem there was a king, whereas in post-exilic Jerusalem there was not” (Young, *Diversity in Pre-exilic Hebrew*, 146–7); Shields, *End of Wisdom*, 26–7.

29. *Ibid.*, 27.

30. Didymus the Blind, *Commentary on Ecclesiastes* 7.9, in *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon* (ACCS IX; ed. J. Robert Wright; Downers Grove, IL: IVP, 2005), 192.

31. Christianson, *Ecclesiastes through the Centuries*, 96.

32. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 44.



However, in Luther's *Table Talk*, he takes this a step further, stating "[t]hus he [Solomon] himself did not write the book, but it was composed at the time of the Maccabees, by Sirach," thus anticipating the criticism of Hugo Grotius by over a century.<sup>33</sup> Grotius argued in the mid-seventeenth century that the book's language indicates a late date for its composition, thus precluding Solomonic authorship.<sup>34</sup> With this argument, Grotius laid the foundation for the denial of Solomonic authorship based on the book's language for the next several centuries.

### *Persian Period Date*

Many modern scholars place the provenance of Ecclesiastes in the Persian period, but C. L. Seow has presented the most convincing argument for a Persian period setting for the book of Ecclesiastes.<sup>35</sup> Before writing what has become one of the standard commentaries on Ecclesiastes,<sup>36</sup> he developed his view on the date of the book in two articles. Seow examined the "Socioeconomic Context of 'The Preacher's' Hermeneutic" in a 1996 article in which he argued that the economic condition of the postexilic period—most notably the rise of coinage in the early sixth century B.C—matched Qoheleth's concern with and description of money.<sup>37</sup> Seow states that Ecclesiastes as a whole

33. Martin Luther, *Luthers Werke*, 1:207, cited by Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 44. However, note Eric Christianson (*Ecclesiastes through the Centuries*, 95), who follows Theodore Preston in arguing that Luther does not in fact deny Solomonic authorship in this text (see Theodore Preston, *The Hebrew Text, and a Latin Version of the Book of Solomon Called Ecclesiastes; with Original Notes, Philological and Exegetical, and a Translation of the Commentary of Mendlessohn from the Rabbinic Hebrew; Also a Newly Arranged Version of Ecclesiastes* [London: John W. Parker, 1845], 12). See also the discussion by Al Wolters, "Ecclesiastes and the Reformers," in *The Words of the Wise are Like Goats: Qohelet for the 21st Century* (ed. Mark Boda, Tremper Longman, and Christian Rata; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, forthcoming), 62–64.

34. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 44. Citing C. D. Ginsburg (*Cohleth, Commonly Called the book of Ecclesiastes* [London: Longman, Green, Longman and Roberts, 1861], 146), who cited H. Grotius (*Annotationes in Vetus Testamentum*, 1:434–35).

35. See, for example, Moshe Weinberg, "Authorship and Author in the Ancient Near East and in the Hebrew Bible," *HS* 44 (2003): 160–9; James L. Kugel, "Qohelet and Money," *CBQ* 51 (1989): 32–49; Shannon Burkes, *Death in Qoheleth and Egyptian Biographies of the Late Period* (SBLDS 170; Atlanta, GA: SBL, 1999), 39.

36. C. L. Seow, *Ecclesiastes* (AB 18C; New York: Doubleday, 1997).

37. C. L. Seow, "The Socioeconomic Context of 'The Preacher's' Hermeneutic," *PSB* 17 (1996): 168–95. James L. Kugel also dates Ecclesiastes to the Persian period based on Qoheleth's discussion of money ("Qohelet and Money," *CBQ* 51 [1989]: 32–49).

“reflects a monetary and commercial economy, an environment that is different from the largely subsistence agrarian culture of preexilic and exilic Judah.”<sup>38</sup> Furthermore, Seow connects what he sees as Qoheleth’s pessimism with the pessimism regarding royal land grants that Persian period literature illustrates. Seow argues that such grants had been prohibited in Mesopotamia during an earlier period, but were rampant in Persian Judea.<sup>39</sup> These land grants provide the background for Qoheleth’s enigmatic statement against overlords in Eccl 8:8. Finally, Qoheleth’s theological solution to uncertainty—to trust God in an uncontrollable world—fits well within Persian Judea, a “perplexing new world of rapid political, social, and economic innovations.”<sup>40</sup>

In a second article, Seow outlines his argument for a Persian period date of Ecclesiastes based on linguistic evidence.<sup>41</sup> Building on the work of scholars such as Franz Delitzsch, Seow argues that the presence of Aramaisms and Persianisms make Solomonic authorship a virtual impossibility. Although Seow notes that the presence of *isolated* Aramaism “says nothing about its provenance,” he also points out that “a high frequency of Aramaic expressions in a book is a likely indication of a late date . . .”<sup>42</sup> Seow closely examines the linguistic features that could be considered late, ultimately conceding that many of them can be accounted for by an explanation other than a late date for the book’s composition. However, the presence of the two Persian loanwords in the book (פרדס and פתגם) and the use of שלט in a “legal/economic sense” make the Persian date a certainty for Seow.<sup>43</sup>

38 Ibid., 174.

39. Ibid., 180.

40. Ibid., 189.

41. C. L. Seow, “Linguistic Evidence and the Dating of Qohelet,” *JBL* 115 (1996): 643–66.

42. Seow, “Linguistic Evidence,” 651.

43. Ibid., 665. However, see Dominic Rudman, who argues that the book cannot be dated to the Persian Period based on these terms. Instead, Rudman places the book in the Hellenistic Period (“A Note on the Dating of Ecclesiastes,” *CBQ* 61 [1999]: 47–52).

*Hellenistic Period Date*

While Seow has developed a strong argument that is based both on linguistic and cultural factors, the majority of critical scholars today date the book to the Hellenistic period, with the *terminus ad quem* set in the early second century by the Qumran fragments of Ecclesiastes and Sirach's use of the book.<sup>44</sup> The arguments for the Hellenistic setting for Ecclesiastes are similar to the arguments used by Seow to posit a Persian setting for the book's composition. For example, Norman Whybray argues that the economic activity and social turmoil depicted by Ecclesiastes fits best within the Hellenistic context.<sup>45</sup> James Crenshaw argues that the book's vocabulary and grammatical features, as well as the implication that Qoheleth's readers would be able to implement his advice regarding "fine clothes and anointing themselves with expensive oils," indicate a certain peace and prosperity that was experienced during the Hellenistic Period.<sup>46</sup>

Other scholars point to philosophical similarities between Ecclesiastes and Greek philosophy to argue for a date in the Hellenistic period. For example, Michael V. Fox argues that the book's author exhibits the ideals of personal autonomy found in Greek philosophical thought.<sup>47</sup> Likewise, Rainer Braun avers that Ecclesiastes depends heavily on Greek philosophy.<sup>48</sup> John Gammie goes so far as to state that

We may conclude that the Stoics, along with other Hellenistic philosophies, had an impact on the ancient Israelite sage, not only in specific teachings of divine causation, the cyclical nature of events, the relative value of education/wisdom, etc., but also

44. Loretz, *Qoheleth und der Alte Orient*, 23–24. See also C. Robert Harrison, Jr., "Qoheleth in Social-Historical Perspective," Ph.D. diss., Duke University, 1991), 26. However, C. C. Whitley argues for the priority of Sirach over Ecclesiastes (*Koheleth: His Language and Thought* [BZAW 148; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1979], 129).

45. Norman Whybray, *Ecclesiastes* (NCB; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1989), 10–12.

46. James Crenshaw, *Ecclesiastes* (OTL; Philadelphia: Westminster, 1987), 50. Crenshaw dates the book precisely to 250–225 B.C. See also Frank Crüsemann, "Die unveränderbare Welt. Überlegungen zur 'Krisis der Weisheit' beim Prediger (Kohélet)," in *Der Gott der kleinen Leute* (ed. Willi Schottroff and Wolfgang Stegemann; Munich: Burckhardtthaus-Laetare, 1979), 80–104.

47. Michael V. Fox, "Wisdom in Qoheleth," in *In Search of Wisdom: Essays in Memory of John G. Gammie* (ed. Leo G. Perdue, Bernard Brandon Scott, and William Johnston Wiseman; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1993), 122–23.

48. Rainer Braun, *Kohelet und die frühhellenistische Popularphilosophie* (BZAW 130; Berlin/New York: de Gruyter, 1973), 14–171.

in form of argumentation and, because of its advanced philosophy of language, possibly also in making Qoheleth more sensitive to the range of connotations in his use of terms such as *hebel*.<sup>49</sup>

Among evangelical scholars, Craig Bartholomew is notable for his arguments in favor of a Hellenistic setting for Ecclesiastes. He places the book in the Hellenistic period based on its epistemology, calling the author of Ecclesiastes “a believing Israelite who has become aware of and attracted by tenets of Greek thought that were in the air.”<sup>50</sup> However, Bartholomew also states that “it is hard to be certain on this issue [the authorship of Ecclesiastes] and there is nothing at stake theologically either way” and that “the main concern must be to ascertain what the author has actually written, whoever he was.”<sup>51</sup>

Finally, many scholars point to the language of the book as a definitive indicator that it belongs in the Hellenistic period. H. W. Hertzberg, one of the first scholars to defend this position, contends that book’s language represents a transitional period in the development of Hebrew. Qoheleth’s affinities with Mishnaic Hebrew indicate that he wrote during a period in which the language was undergoing significant change.<sup>52</sup> Antoon Schoors agrees that the preponderance of linguistic evidence points to a late date, though he does note that Qoheleth’s language differs in some respects from Mishnaic Hebrew.<sup>53</sup>

More recently, Mark Sneed has argued for a Hellenistic date based on sociological factors within the book.<sup>54</sup> Sneed posits that the social stratification, system of taxation and other economic factors, and the administration of the Ptolemaic government provide the most likely setting for the book. In Sneed’s opinion, Qoheleth’s pessimism, based on his observations of the world of Ptolemaic Judea, accurately describes life experienced by Jews in Ptolemaic Judea.

49. John G. Gammie, “Stoicism and Anti-Stoicism in Qoheleth,” *HAR* 9 (1985): 185.

50. Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 58.

51. *Ibid.*, 48, 54.

52. H. W. Hertzberg, *Der Prediger* (Leipzig: A. Deichertsche Verlagsbuchhandlung D. Werner Scholl, 1932), 6–7.

53. Antoon Schoors, *The Preacher Sought to Find Pleasing Words: A Study of the Language of Qoheleth* (Leuven: Departement Oriëntalistiek, 1992), 15.

54. Mark Sneed, *The Politics of Pessimism in Ecclesiastes* (Ancient Israel and Its Literature 12; Atlanta: SBL, 2012), esp. 85–154.

## ANALYSIS OF THE EVIDENCE

The vast array of possibilities regarding the date and authorship of Ecclesiastes may lead one to wonder whether Solomonic authorship is still a viable option in light of the mounting evidence against the traditional interpretation. In what follows the evidence for the book's date and authorship will be examined to determine whether or not one can firmly support a particular position—either late or early—on this issue without going beyond the bounds of the text itself.

*Claim of Authorship?*

One of the weakest points of the argument in favor of Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes is that the book itself never explicitly purports to be the work of Solomon. This has led some to argue that it is a pseudonymous work,<sup>55</sup> which is perhaps the reason why evangelical scholars have been quick to defend Solomonic authorship. For, as Archer noted, if even one book of the Bible is intentionally misleading its readers, then the integrity of the entire canon is called into question.<sup>56</sup> However, a pseudonymous work is "by definition written under a false or assumed name, [and] is meant to conceal the identity of the writer."<sup>57</sup> Is this the case with Ecclesiastes?

The premier verse cited to argue for Solomonic authorship is Ecclesiastes 1:12: אָנִי קֹהֵלֶת הָיִיתִי מֶלֶךְ עַל יִשְׂרָאֵל בִּירוּשָׁלַיִם. This verse clearly states that a person named Qoheleth "was king over Israel in Jerusalem." This seems to indicate that the speaker was either David or Solomon, for there were no other kings who ruled over Israel from Jerusalem, save Rehoboam, who ruled over the United Monarchy only very briefly. The difficulty with making this the linchpin for the argument for Solomonic authorship is that there was never a time in Solomon's life when he "was" king over Israel. *Targum Qoheleth* recognized this problem early on and introduced the story regarding Ashmedai, the evil demon who ruled in Solomon's place, to account for a period in Solomon's life when he did not rule over Jerusalem.<sup>58</sup> To indicate that he was "king over Israel in Jerusalem" at the time of writing, the author could have used the

55. E.g., Martin Hengel, *Judaism and Hellenism I* (London: SCM, 1974), 129–30.

56. Archer, "Linguistic Evidence," 167.

57. Joyce G. Baldwin, "Is There Pseudonymity in the Old Testament?" *Themelios* 4 (1978): 6.

58. See above.

same nominal construction used in the previous clause: אַנִּי קֹהֶלֶת. However, by using a verbal clause the author introduced ambiguity into the identification of Qoheleth, which is perhaps the first clue of his literary artistry. By giving the reader enough information to cause him to think of that great king without actually claiming to *be* him, he invites the reader to examine the pursuit of wisdom from the perspective of an historical figure who, quite literally, had everything his heart desired. Nevertheless, even this argument is not solid, for as Fredericks has pointed out, the phrase used in 1:12 could also be translated as “I have been king over Jerusalem,” which would mitigate the difficulty of there never having been a time when Solomon “was” king over Israel in Jerusalem.<sup>59</sup>

Only four verses later, the author claims to have increased in wisdom beyond “all who were before me over Israel” (אַנִּי הִנֵּה הַגְּדֹלָתִי) (וְהוֹסַפְתִּי חִכְמָה עַל כָּל אֲשֶׁר הָיָה לִפְנֵי עַל יְרוּשָׁלַם). Such a statement seems strange coming from Solomon because the only ruler before him was David. Tremper Longman points out that he could be referring to the Jebusite kings who ruled before David conquered Jerusalem, “but that would be passing strange coming from an Israelite king. After all, these were pagan, alien kings, and hostile to Israel.”<sup>60</sup> Daniel Fredericks may help in this regard when he notes that the author “does not specify that he was greater in wisdom than just those who were kings before him, but included any predecessor in Jerusalem, such as elders, wise men, prophets and so on . . . so his statement is not to be applied simply to David, but to others such as Adoni-zedek (Josh. 10:3).”<sup>61</sup> Such a close reading of the text supplies a plausible explanation for the author’s statement, but the ambiguity remains.<sup>62</sup> Even though these verses can be explained, the need for explanation itself indicates that the book does not *explicitly* claim Solomonic authorship, thus Joyce Baldwin’s statement

59. Fredericks and Estes, *Ecclesiastes and the Song of Songs*, 77.

60. Tremper Longman, III, *Ecclesiastes* (NICOT; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1998), 5.

61. Fredericks, *Ecclesiastes*, 83.

62. Doug Ingram (*Ambiguity in Ecclesiastes* [LHBOTS 431; London: T&T Clark, 2006]) has argued that ambiguity exists throughout Ecclesiastes and is there intentionally. In the case of authorship, whether the ambiguity is intentional or not is a non-issue; it remains ambiguous nonetheless. Further, an important issue in inerrancy is determining authorial intent, and while readers may not be able to determine conclusively that the author intended to be ambiguous, it is at least clear that he did not make his identity known overtly (see Silva, “Old Princeton,” 69–73).

that "Qoheleth is no more pretending to be Solomon than Shakespeare is pretending to be Hamlet."<sup>63</sup>

### *Solomonic Texts?*

Having demonstrated that Ecclesiastes does not *explicitly* claim Solomonic authorship, the question must be raised whether or not it intends to be read as the work of Solomon. It is of extreme importance, however, to maintain the nuance of this question so as not to defend a position that the biblical text itself does not defend, namely overt attribution to Solomon. Duane Garrett points out that one of the primary arguments against Solomonic authorship is that the "Solomonic Fiction" lasts for only the first few chapters of Ecclesiastes.<sup>64</sup> If this argument is correct, then it seems that the author was not Solomon, for he shed the king's garb when it was no longer fitting for his thesis. However, Eric Christianson maintains that the Solomonic motif is an important part of the rhetorical strategy of Ecclesiastes that permeates the entire work.<sup>65</sup> Likewise, Jürgen van Oorschot argues that the association with Solomon legitimates the wisdom of Ecclesiastes by attaching it to a well-known authority.<sup>66</sup>

An important section in Ecclesiastes for Solomonic authorship is Eccl 2:1–11. In this passage, the author boasts about his accomplishments in this world, accomplishments that could only have been achieved by someone of royal capacities. The author states that he built houses, gardens and parks with all sorts of fruit trees and an irrigation system to water them (Eccl 2:4–6). He acquired many slaves and more heads of cattle than anyone else "before me in Jerusalem" (Eccl 2:7). To this, he added silver, gold, and treasure from other kings, along with entertainers and concubines (Eccl 2:8).

63. Baldwin, "Is There Pseudonymity," 8.

64. Garret, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, 225, citing R. B. Y. Scott, *Proverbs and Ecclesiastes* (AB 18; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1965), 200; and R. N. Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 4. See also Craig Bartholomew, *Ecclesiastes*, 47.

65. Eric Christianson, *A Time to Tell: Narrative Strategies in Ecclesiastes* (JSOTSup 280; Sheffield, England: Sheffield, 1998), 128–72.

66. Jürgen van Oorschot, "König und Mensch: Biografie und Autobiografie bei Kohelet und in der alttestamentlichen Literaturgeschichte," in *Mensch und König: Studien zur Anthropologie des Alten Testaments: Rüdiger Luz zum 60. Geburtstag* (ed. Angelika Berlejung and Raik Heckl; Herders biblische Studien 53; Freiburg: Herder, 2008), 109–22.

C. L. Seow, like many other interpreters, thinks that these verses are meant to establish a link between the author of Ecclesiastes and Solomon.<sup>67</sup> He states that “they call to mind the activities and fabulous wealth of Solomon in 1 Kgs 3–11. Indeed it is difficult not to think of Solomon when the author concludes in 2:9 that he ‘became great and surpassed’ all who preceded him in Jerusalem.”<sup>68</sup> The parallels between the account of Solomon’s reign and the author’s statements in this text leap off the page: both were exceedingly wealthy, both possessed scores of slaves and concubines, both completed building projects.

However, the open-and-shut case for Solomonic authorship is not so clear-cut. For example, it has been demonstrated elsewhere that the reference to parks, gardens, fruit trees, and irrigation may be an echo of the Garden of Eden in Gen 2.<sup>69</sup> Furthermore, Stuart Weeks has recently called into question the association with Solomon in every aspect in this passage. For example, Weeks states that “Solomon in 1 Kgs 10:23 ‘became greater than all the kings of the earth in wealth and wisdom,’ while Qohelet, more modestly, outdoes only his predecessors in Jerusalem.”<sup>70</sup> Weeks also shows that the types of activities that Ecclesiastes describes are not the stuff of royal inscriptions. Rather than focusing on the good that the king has done for his people, as was common in royal inscriptions, the activities listed in Eccl 2 focus on the good that is done *for the author*.<sup>71</sup> Also important for Weeks is the difference between the way that the author of Ecclesiastes accumulates wealth and the way that Solomon accumulates wealth. The latter does so through a special grant from God (1 Kgs 3:28; 5:9–10), along with trading partnerships (1 Kgs 9:26–28; 10:11, 14, 22), taxation (1 Kgs 10:15), and gifts (1 Kgs 10:25).<sup>72</sup> The author of Ecclesiastes seems to accumulate wealth through other means, such as “growing fruit trees or

67. Seow, *Ecclesiastes*, 150.

68. *Ibid.*

69. Arian J. C. Verheij, “Paradise Retried: On Qohelet 2:4–6,” *JSOT* 50 (1991): 113–15; Russell L. Meek, “The Meaning of *Hebel* in Qohelet: An Intertextual Suggestion,” in *The Words of the Wise are Like Goads: Engaging Qohelet in the 21st Century* (ed. Mark Boda, Tremper Longman, III, and Christian Rata; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 241–56.

70. Stuart Weeks, *Ecclesiastes and Scepticism* (LHBOTS 541; New York: T&T Clark, 2012), 26.

71. *Ibid.*, 26–27.

72. *Ibid.*, 27–28.



breeding cattle," though this is not entirely clear from the passage itself.<sup>73</sup> Therefore, it is still possible to associate Solomon with the author of Ecclesiastes based on this text, but even here the ambiguity regarding authorship remains: the author has given us just enough details to create a link with Solomon, but not enough to be definitive.

### *Non-Royal Texts?*

Longman lists several verses that are problematic for Solomonic authorship because they appear to be written from the perspective of someone who is not the supreme ruler in the land.<sup>74</sup> Ecclesiastes 4:1–3 is one such passage. In it, the author decries the oppression experienced by the less fortunate but indicates that nothing can be done to ameliorate their suffering: ואין להם מנחם ומיד עשקיהם כח ואין להם מנחם ("And there was no comforter for them. And in the hand of their oppressors was power, and there was no comforter for them").<sup>75</sup> As Longman states, "[Solomon] was the mightiest ruler of the land. He could easily have done more than bemoan the plight of the oppressed; he could have taken steps to alleviate it. From what we know of the biblical Solomon, he did the opposite . . . (1 Kings 12, especially v. 4)."<sup>76</sup> Even if one grants, with Christianson, that the passage is meant only to make the reader aware of injustice, the fact remains that,

If Qoheleth is counting himself among the 'upper class,' . . . his position is morally bankrupt according to the wisdom tradition and the connection to Solomon is thereby unlikely, for to relieve the suffering of the poor is to correct injustice (cf. Ps. 146.7; Prov. 14.31; 22.16; 29.13 etc.).<sup>77</sup>

Longman's analysis of this passage therefore should not be taken lightly, for if the author of this text is the biblical Solomon, then these words are in direct contradiction both to his recorded actions and to the values of the wisdom tradition. Thus, while non-Solomonic authorship based on

73. *Ibid.*, 28.

74. Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 4–6.

75. On the linguistic difficulties of Eccl 4:1, see Aron Pinker, "The Oppressed in Qoheleth 4:1," *VT* 61 (2011): 393–405.

76. Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 6.

77. Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 135. See Robert Gordis, *Koheleth: The Man and His World* (New York: Bloch, 1962), 77.

this text alone is not necessarily a foregone conclusion—people can and do change—the dissonance created by comparing this text with Solomon’s actions in 1 Kgs 4 (and the report of Rehoboam in 1 Kgs 12) makes the association with Solomon tenuous.

Ecclesiastes 5:7–8 provides a particularly problematic text for Solomonic authorship, for the author encourages his reader not to be surprised at injustice and unrighteousness because those with power look after their own best interests. The meaning of this passage is notoriously difficult to ascertain,<sup>78</sup> but with Michael Fox one can concur that “it is possible to get at its gist.”<sup>79</sup> Namely, the author’s point is that it is “[f]ar better for a country to be thoroughly agrarian rather than to be burdened with a stratified and self-serving bureaucracy.”<sup>80</sup> As Longman points out, this text reads as “protest literature against the king, not by him,” leaving one to wonder, as with Eccl 4:1–3, why the single person with the power to rectify injustice in bureaucracy would refuse to do so.<sup>81</sup>

A final verse that muddies the association with Solomon is Eccl 10:20, in which the author gives advice regarding appropriate thoughts and speech to the king:

גם במדעך מלך אל תקלק ובחדרי משכבך אל תקלל עשיר  
כי עוף השמים יוליד את הקול ובעל הדנפים יגיד דבר

Even in your thoughts do not curse the king, nor in your  
bedroom curse the rich. For a bird of the heavens will carry your  
voice and a master of wings will declare your word.

Such a statement regarding how to interact with a king “assumes that the king is a suspicious bully. Such a statement might be made about Solomon, but not by Solomon.”<sup>82</sup> Nevertheless, Christianson is perhaps correct in his assessment that such advice would be best received coming from a person with intimate knowledge of monarchical dealings, that is, a king.<sup>83</sup>

78. For the text’s history of interpretation and a potential solution to the problem, see Aron Pinker, “The Advantage of a Country in Ecclesiastes 5:8,” *JBQ* 37 (2009): 211–22.

79. Michael V. Fox, *A Time to Tear Down and a Time to Build Up: A Rereading of Ecclesiastes* (Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1999), 234.

80. *Ibid.*

81. Longman, *Ecclesiastes*, 6.

82. *Ibid.*, 6.

83. Christianson, *A Time to Tell*, 140.

That each of the interpretations presented above is plausible again illustrates the ambiguity that the author has weaved throughout his narrative and highlights the fact that the modern interpreter must hold loosely his position regarding authorship. These texts can be interpreted in ways that support Solomonic authorship, but the very fact that the reader must develop explanations seems to indicate special pleading.

### *Aramaisms*<sup>84</sup>

The language of Ecclesiastes has proved to be especially problematic with regards to Solomonic authorship. The book contains multiple Aramaisms, two Persianisms, and its grammatical constructions resemble that of other biblical books from the period of late biblical Hebrew (LBH). It was noted above that Grotius anticipated this criticism in the seventeenth century when he argued that the book's language precluded a tenth-century date for composition. In the nineteenth century Franz Delitzsch followed Grotius's statement with this famous remark that, "Wenn das B. Koheleth alsalomonisch wäre, so gäbe es keine Geschichte der hebräischen Sprache."<sup>85</sup> Was Delitzsch correct in his assessment of the language of Ecclesiastes?

The large number of Aramaic words in Ecclesiastes has led a few scholars, such as Frank Zimmerman and H. L. Ginsberg, to argue that the book was originally written in Aramaic, though their assessment has not been well received.<sup>86</sup> Nevertheless, the book's Aramaisms cause many to date it late, even if they do not go so far as Zimmerman and Ginsberg.

Daniel Fredericks has pointed out two important considerations that may account for the high frequency of Aramaisms in the book.<sup>87</sup>

84. For an exhaustive list of Aramaic features of Ecclesiastes, see Fredericks, *Qoheleth's Language*, 208–41.

85. Franz Delitzsch, *Koheleth*. 197.

86. Frank Zimmerman, "The Aramaic Provenance of Qohelet," *JQR* 36 (1945): 17–45; H. L. Ginsberg *Studies in Koheleth* (Texts and Studies of the Jewish Theological Seminary of America 17; New York: Jewish Theological Seminary of America, 1950), 17.

87. For a more recent argument that likewise disagrees that Ecclesiastes can be dated according to the appearance of "Aramaisms," see Eva Mroczek, "'Aramiasms' in Qohelet: Methodological Problems in Identification and Interpretation," in *The Words of the Wise are like Goads: Engaging Qohelet in the 21st Century* (ed. Mark J. Boda, Tremper Longman III, and Cristian G. Rata; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 343–63.

First, wisdom literature, “due to Aramaic being the possible origin and vehicle of many wisdom sayings that passed from nation to nation, and came to BH [Biblical Hebrew] is likely to have a higher concentration of Aramaisms than other biblical books.”<sup>88</sup> Second, poetry is likely to have more Aramaisms than prose because of “a poet’s normal use of a larger vocabulary to enrich his language, drawing upon recondite and archaic words,” which may indicate that the “Aramaisms” in Ecclesiastes “may not be real Aramaisms.”<sup>89</sup>

After establishing the above two principles, Fredericks works through each of the forty-eight Aramaisms in the book of Ecclesiastes and whittles the list down to seven legitimate Aramaisms based on a methodology that excludes from consideration words that occur equally in early biblical Hebrew (EBH), words that have cognates in EBH, words with Semitic cognates, words with identical forms, words whose frequency cannot determine lateness, and words that appear infrequently in EBH, then resurface in Ecclesiastes.<sup>90</sup> In Fredericks’s view, the genre and poetic features of Ecclesiastes account for the remaining seven Aramaisms.<sup>91</sup> Although some have sharply criticized Fredericks’s work,<sup>92</sup> he provides an adequate explanation for the Aramaisms in Ecclesiastes that demonstrates the book cannot be dated based on their presence.

### *Persianisms*

C. L. Seow’s argument for the Persian period date of Ecclesiastes rests heavily on his treatment of the two Persian loanwords found in the book: פָּרְדָּס (Eccl 2:5) and פִּתְגָּם (Eccl 8:11).<sup>93</sup> Seow lists all of the Persian loanwords found in the OT, noting that “it appears, then, that there is no

88. Fredericks, *Qoheleth’s Language*, 208. Following Avi Hurvitz, “The Chronological Significance of ‘Aramaisms’ in Biblical Hebrew,” *IEJ* 18 (1968): 236.

89. *Ibid.*, 209. Following G. R. Driver, “Hebrew Poetic Diction,” *VTS* 1 (1953): 26–39; and Max Wagner, *Die lexikalischen und grammatikalischen Aramaismen im alttestamentliche Hebräisch* (BZAW 96; Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1966), 158.

90. Fredericks, *Qoheleth’s Language*, 193–96.

91. *Ibid.*, 241.

92. E.g., Avi Hurvitz, Review of *Qoheleth’s Language: Re-Evaluating Its Nature and Date*, *HS* 31 (1990): 144–54.

93. See also, among others, Barton, 52; Aare Lauha, *Kohelet* (BKAT 19; Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1978), 7.

clear evidence of Persianisms prior to the Achaemenid period."<sup>94</sup> Importantly, the prophetic books associated with the first return to Judah—Haggai, Zechariah, and Malachi—contain no Persianisms.<sup>95</sup> Seow points out that the word פֶּרֶס is attested first in Old Persian in the Persepolis Fortification Tablets circa 500 B.C., in Akkadian in "several late Babylonian texts" from the second half of the sixth century, and in Greek in the early fourth century.<sup>96</sup> Likewise, פִּתְגָּם is first attested in Old Persian in the Persepolis Fortification Tablets, then later in "Aramaic documents from Elephantine and North Saqqâra in Egypt, all dated to the fifth century."<sup>97</sup>

Some scholars have been criticized for arguing that Persian words entered the Hebrew language only because of Persia's military expansion that began in the sixth century, but this is not Seow's argument.<sup>98</sup> His demonstration that these words appear *nowhere* prior to the sixth century, regardless of the imperializing force of Persia, must be taken seriously, though it may be the case that the words were known to the author of Ecclesiastes through sources that have not yet come to light. Therefore, while Seow's argument for the sixth century origin of these words is compelling, there remains enough uncertainty in light of the paucity of evidence to prevent definitively dating Ecclesiastes to such a late time period.

### *Grammatical Features*

Finally, there are several grammatical features of the book that indicate it may have been written at a relatively late date in the history of biblical Hebrew. For example, Antoon Schoors points out more than thirty features within Ecclesiastes that are similar to LBH.<sup>99</sup> These features include Ecclesiastes's use of the imperfect *waw*-consecutive, the co-

94. Seow, "The Dating of Qohelet," 647–48. The Persianisms appear in Song of Songs, Ezra, Chronicles, Esther, Daniel, Ecclesiastes, Sirach, and Nehemiah.

95. *Ibid.*, 648–49.

96. *Ibid.*, 649.

97 *Ibid.*, 650.

98. See, for example, Franz Dornseiff, *Antike und Alter Orient* (Leipzig: Koehler & Amelang, 1959), 200.

99. Schoors, *Pleasing Words*, 221–24. See also John A. Cook, "The Verb in Qohelet," in *The Words of the Wise are like Goats: Engaging Qohelet in the 21st Century* (ed. Mark J. Boda, Tremper Longman III, and Cristian G. Rata; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 309–42.

hortative, the infinitive construct used with the preposition *lamed*, and the use of the infinitive construct consecutive, among many others.<sup>100</sup> However, Fredericks has demonstrated that of all the grammatical features used to posit a late date of composition for Ecclesiastes, only one of these appears exclusively in Ecclesiastes and LBH: “the absence of the infinitive absolute to emphasize a finite cognate verb.”<sup>101</sup> As he aptly remarks, though, “[t]his is an argument from silence at best.”<sup>102</sup> Fredericks’s study indicates, at the very least, that the linguistic evidence cannot be used to fix a late date for the book of Ecclesiastes, and more recent scholars (noted above) have concurred.

### CONCLUSION

The book of Ecclesiastes has presented its interpreters, both ancient and modern, with a plethora of difficulties, not the least of which is the question of who penned its words. While most ancient interpreters held that Solomon wrote the book, there were detractors even then. Most modern scholars argue that the book could not have been written by the famously wise king of Israel, though many evangelical scholars hold that Solomon did in fact write Ecclesiastes, and as Gleason Archer showed us, Solomonic authorship has become entangled in the debate over biblical inerrancy. However, should this be the case? Must evangelicals affirm Solomonic authorship or else deny that the Bible is God’s inerrant word?

The analysis presented here demonstrated that the book itself makes no explicit claim to authorship and is certainly not pseudonymous. The internal evidence is too ambiguous to engender certainty regarding its authorship. Many features of the book seem to indicate Solomonic authorship, but just as many may indicate otherwise. And those features that do point to Solomon as the author can be interpreted in a way that undermines Solomonic authorship. Likewise, the features used to conclude that Solomon did not write Ecclesiastes can be explained in a way that seems to indicate Solomonic authorship. The book’s language is also an unfair measure of its authorship and date; it is simply too ambiguous to provide irrefutable evidence for either Solomonic or non-Solomonic authorship.

Despite the ambiguous nature of the evidence, the arguments presented above for a date of composition in the early period of Israel’s

100. For an exhaustive list, see Fredericks, *Qoheleth’s Language*, 125–69.

101. *Ibid.*, 155.

102. *Ibid.*

monarchy are more compelling than those that argue for a significantly later date. Most especially, as Garrett has argued, why would a book composed after the monarchy purport to give advice for dealing with the monarchy? And why would the author claim to rule over Israel from Jerusalem if he never did? Given the clear monarchical tone of the work, the book would certainly be disingenuous if it were written during a period when there was no monarchy in Israel. Furthermore, despite the ambiguity of the passages that imply Solomonic authorship, they are more clearly Solomonic than the "anti-royal" passages are non-Solomonic. Finally, one must not discount the strength of the argument from church history, which by and large held to an early date for the book's composition until very recently.

Ultimately, though, the author of Ecclesiastes cannot be proved definitively and the book itself makes no identifiable claims of authorship. For that reason, it is crucial that we disentangle the conversation over the book's authorship from the issue of inerrancy. In our defense of God's inerrant and infallible word, evangelical scholars must be careful not to argue more than the text itself will allow.