

# **“The End of the Matter: The Purpose of the Epilogue of Ecclesiastes”**

## **Thesis sAbstract**

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The epilogue of Ecclesiastes (12:9-14) is most often viewed by scholars as a secondary addition written by the hand of one or more editor(s). Because of this it has been often ignored by those who study Ecclesiastes. This study will seek to understand the epilogue and show its relation to the main body of Ecclesiastes. In examining the relationship between the epilogue and body of Ecclesiastes I will examine questions of authorship (does the epilogue reflect a different author or authors than the rest of the book?) as well as content (is the viewpoint of the epilogue different or contradictory to that of the rest of the book?).

In answering these questions I will seek to show that the epilogue and the body of Ecclesiastes both reflect the work of one author and that this author presents two different voices. One voice is the voice of Qohelet, a fictional persona, who speaks throughout the bulk of the book (1:3-12:7). The other is the voice of the epilogist or frame-narrator who speaks in the narrative frame of the book (1:1-2 and 12:8-14).

The epilogue, then, is used in several ways. First, it is used to present Qohelet as an exceptional sage, comparable with Solomon, thus giving creditability and authority to his message. Second, it is used to critique the wisdom tradition by showing the limits of wisdom. Third, it presents the book’s conclusions and shows the proper response to human limitation, which is a response of piety and obedience. This conclusion in no way contradicts the words of Qohelet, but is, in fact, shown to be important throughout Ecclesiastes.