

Ecclesiastes what insights can we gleam from it?

Post by "Eoghan Gardiner" of December 2, 2023 at 6:11 AM

What is it?

This book of the Bible is in the Jewish scripture aka the Christian Old Testament. It's genre is wisdom literature, it's purpose is to share insights into life. It's author traditionally has been King Solomon but that is [almost certainly not the case](#).

Below are some examples of potential Epicurean themes.

1. Enjoyment of Pleasures:

- Ecclesiastes 2:24-25: "There is nothing better for a person than that he should eat and drink and find enjoyment in his toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God, for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? **Clearly mention of God is not Epicurean in this verse due to God's being directly involved...Also it's generalized assessment of what is best for every person.**

2. Rejection of Excessive Labor for Material Gain:

- Ecclesiastes 5:10: "He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity." - **Unnatural and unnecessary desire?**

3. Emphasis on the Present Moment:

- Ecclesiastes 3:22: "So I saw that there is nothing better than that a man should rejoice in his work, for that is his lot. Who can bring him to see what will be after him?" **This one is a bit of a reach "for that is his lot" seems a bit deterministic but I could see the rejoicing while working as freedom from pain = highest pleasure**

4. Acknowledgment of Life's Uncertainties:

- Ecclesiastes 9:11-12: "Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all. For man does not know his time."

Maybe there are more well known examples and clearly this has much more of a religious influence than an Epicurean.

Other books of the Bible

I often found it funny reading the Song of Songs when I was in a monastery, a book clearly about passionate sex between lovers being studied by men (and women) who have taken vows of celibacy.

Anyway here are some verses.

Quote

1. **Song of Solomon 1:2:**

- o "Let him kiss me with the kisses of his mouth! For your love is better than wine."

2. **Song of Solomon 1:13:**

- o "My beloved is to me a sachet of myrrh resting between my breasts."

3. **Song of Solomon 4:5:**

- o "Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that graze among the lilies."

4. **Song of Solomon 4:16:**

- o "Awake, north wind, and come, south wind! Blow on my garden, that its fragrance may spread everywhere. Let my beloved come into his garden and taste its choice fruits."

5. **Song of Solomon 7:1-2:**

- o "How beautiful your sandaled feet, O prince's daughter! Your graceful legs are like jewels, the work of an artist's hands. Your navel is a rounded goblet that never lacks blended wine. Your waist is a mound of wheat encircled by lilies"

Now the song of songs itself has no Epicurean influence on it as far as I know BUT why I share it is this.

Two of the three books in the old testament dedicated to Wisdom have such an **emphasis on Pleasure*** and indeed even in the other wisdom book Proverbs there is signs of this too...

Quote

Proverbs 27:9: "Oil and perfume make the heart glad, and the sweetness of a friend comes from his earnest counsel."

*Even the wisest writers of a religious text knew that pleasure and wisdom go hand in hand...perhaps the Authors were hinting at the Epicurean truth, you can't have one without the other.

Overall I wrote this thread with this question in mind

Should we try to study Ecclesiastes from an Epicurean POV? Has it been done previously?

Post by “Cassius” of December 2, 2023 at 6:30 AM

Great post, thank you! I remember that DeWitt discussed Ecclesiastes relatively at length, but I'll have to go back and recall the references. Seems definitely worthwhile from my point of view.

Post by “Eikadistes” of August 18, 2025 at 12:27 AM

[Quote from Eoghan Gardiner](#)

Should we try to study Ecclesiastes from an Epicurean POV? Has it been done previously?

I'm re-visiting this now.

This question has a lot to do with dating.

The saturation of philosophical ideas *initially* lead me to believe that it should be dated to the Hellenistic period, but that may not be correct. For example, it doesn't contain any Greek loan words, but it *does* contain several Persian loan words, suggesting that it couldn't have been written earlier than the 5th-century BCE. If it were produced in this period, that negates any Greek influence.

At the same time, if the final form of the text were polished in the 2nd-century BCE, then I think it would be more appropriate to view Qoheleth as a sort of philosopher. That being said, though, I read the author to have more in common with the Cynics as opposed to the Epicureans.

Still there are a number of strong analogies to Epicurean Philosophy, most of which you have documented above (and thank you for doing so!)

I'm organizing some data [here](#).

Post by “Kalosyni” of August 18, 2025 at 7:40 AM

[Quote from Cassius](#)

I remember that DeWitt discussed Ecclesiastes relatively at length

I am surprised to hear that DeWitt made connections between Epicureanism and Ecclesiastes. In my mind there are some very opposite sentiments. Ecclesiastes has a tone of "existential depression"...which then leads to this:

Quote

17 I said in mine heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.

(Yes it is true...I have not read DeWitt cover to cover).

Post by “Kalosyni” of August 18, 2025 at 7:54 AM

This thread does bring up the opportunity for a "compare and contrast":

[Quote from Eoghan Gardiner](#)

Acknowledgment of Life's Uncertainties:

Ecclesiastes 9:11-12: "Again I saw that under the sun the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all. For man does not know his time."

From the Letter to Menoecus:

"He thinks that with us lies the chief power in determining events, some of which happen by necessity, and some by chance, and some are within our control; for while necessity cannot be called to account, he sees that chance is inconstant, but that which is in our control is subject to no master, and to it are naturally attached praise and blame."

[Quote from Eikadistes](#)

I'm organizing some data here

That looks like something which could be a jumping-board for comparing and contrasting, since some of these ideas are very much permeating our modern times.