

ΚΟΗΕΛΕΘ.

1. INTRODUCTION.

§ 1. *The Title.*

THE title קֹהֵלֶת (xii. 8 קוֹהֵלֶת) occurs seven times in the book¹. In xii. 8 it has the article, and probably also in vii. 27 (M.T. "אמרה ק"). If the emendation אמר הקהלת in the latter passage is correct, the word is definitely shewn to be masculine in all the seven passages. The author, therefore, was a man; and, writing under the guise of Solomon, adopted 'Kohleth' as a *nom de plume*.

The meaning of the word is somewhat uncertain. In form it is the feminine of the Kal participle of קהל. But of this root no other certain instance of the Kal occurs, though the Niphal and the Hiphil are not uncommon, the former = be summoned [i.e. come together] as an assembly—the latter = summon an assembly, for religious or military purposes.

The versions do not afford much help. Ἐκκλησιαστής, whence Hier. and Engl. 'Ecclesiastes,' is an attempt to represent the derivation of the word from קהל 'an assembly,' while Aq. Pesh. Tg. merely transliterate the Hebrew.

The following are the more probable of the explanations which have been suggested:

1. 'One who summons an assembly' (Gesenius). But this would probably require the Hiphil קֹהֵלֶת.

2. 'One who speaks in an assembly.' (Hier. *concionator*. Luther *Prediger*. A.V. R.V. 'Preacher.' Midr. Koh. "because his words are spoken in a קהל.") So Driver, *Intr. O.T.* 466. König, *Einl.* 428. Plumptre 'Debater.'

¹ i. 1, 2, 12, vii. 27, xii. 8, 9, 10.

3. 'A convener, or collector, of sentences' (Grotius, Mendelssohn, illustrating this meaning by reference to xii. 10, 11).

Opinions also differ as to the force intended to be conveyed by the feminine form of the word.

1. The fact that it is nearly always accompanied by a verb in the masculine renders improbable the view that the feminine refers to Wisdom (הכמה), who is represented in Prov. i. 20 f., viii. 1-4, as addressing men in places of assembly (Augustine, Rashi, Ibn Ezra: so Hitzig, Kuenen and others). Moreover the contents of the book as a whole are totally unlike the teaching which is usually put into the mouth of Wisdom in the rest of the Wisdom literature.

2. The use of the masculine of the verb is also opposed to Tyler's suggestion that the name denotes "she who is an assembly"—a personification of assemblies of men.

Two other, more probable, suggestions are:

3. That the feminine has an intensive force, as in Arabic,—'one who completely realises the idea of a קהיל' (R.V. mg. 'great orator.' W. Wright, *Arabic Grammar*, § 233, rem. c. C. H. H. Wright, *Ecclesiastes*.)

4. That the feminine indicates a title or designation of office, arising from its use to express abstract conceptions (Ges. K. § 122, 4 b). This may be illustrated by the proper names הַסִּפְרָה and הַפְּרָה Ezra ii. 55, 57. Aram.: קְנִיּוֹת 'colleagues' Ezra iv. 7. Arab.: *halifa*, 'allāma. Engl.: 'Excellency,' 'Highness' etc. This is adopted by the majority of modern writers (Driver, Delitzsch, Nowack, Cheyne and others)¹.

The meaning, therefore, of the title Kōheleth probably is 'a (recognised and official) speaker in an assembly'—the assembly, no doubt, being all men who give their hearts to wisdom, and who are metaphorically pictured as sitting at the feet of the wise man.

¹ In the art. 'Ecclesiastes' in *Encycl. Bibl.* the startling suggestion is made that הקהלת is a corruption of הכל הכל i. 2, and was interpolated in i. 12, vii. 27, xii. 8, and adopted by the scribe who prefixed i. 1 and by the writer of the epilogue. The writer of the article-proposes, further, to read הקהלת in Prov. xxx. 1.

Renan suggests that קהלת is a cryptogram, perhaps for שלמה, arrived at by some method analogous to 'Athbash' and 'Albam.'

CANONICITY

3

§ 2. *Canonicity.*

For the three-fold division of the Jewish Bible—Torah, N^ebi'im, K^ethubim—various explanations have been offered. A Rabbinic explanation, for instance, given by Moses Maimonides and David Kimchi is that the three divisions represent three grades of inspiration; the Torah was given פה אל פה (mouth to mouth), the N^ebi'im by the רוּחַ הַנְּבוּיָה (spirit of prophecy), and the K^ethubim by the רוּחַ הַקִּדְשׁ (spirit of holiness). And other suggestions are noted by Wildeboer (*A.T. Kanon* pp. 14–16). But it is now recognised that the divisions were the result of an historical process by which the books were accepted into the Canon in three groups, i.e. (i) from the end of the exile to Ezra, (ii) from Ezra to the time of the Maccabees, (iii) from the Maccabees till shortly before the time of Christ.

The third division consists of (a) the Psalms, Proverbs and Job—a group that was sometimes quoted by the initial letters written in the inverse order, אֲבִית; (b) the five M^egilloth or Rolls, i.e. Song of Songs, Ruth, Kⁱnoth¹ (or Lamentations), K^oheleth and Esther; (c) Daniel, Ezra-Nehemiah, and 1, 2 Chronicles². The only books among the K^ethubim that were read in the public services of the Synagogue were the 'five Rolls.' The Song of Songs was read on the 8th day of the Passover, Ruth on the 2nd day of Pentecost, Kⁱnoth on the 9th day of Ab³, K^oheleth on the 3rd day of the Feast of Booths, and Esther on the Feast of Purim.

The date of the reception of K^oheleth into the Canon is far from certain. The book is not alluded to in any canonical writing of the Old Testament. But there can be no doubt that it was known, not only in its primary but in its completed form⁴, to Ben Sira⁵ (c. 180 B.C.), and to the author of Wisdom⁵ (c. 130 B.C.). The use made of it, however, by the former writer proves only its existence—not its canonisation—prior to his date. He was well acquainted, as his work shews, with the literature of his country; but it is impossible to insist that his

¹ Also called 'Ēkah from its opening word.

² For varieties of order and grouping see Ryle, *O.T. Canon*, ch. xii. and Excursus C.

The traditional date of the destruction of the temple by the Chaldeans.

⁴ See § 5.

⁵ See § 7.

quotations could have been made only from such writings as were recognised as canonical. And the author of 'Wisdom,' so far from treating Koheleth as a sacred writing, seems to aim at confuting the advice contained in it with regard to the enjoyment of life.

There are Talmudic stories which, if true, would prove that Koheleth was quoted as authoritative scripture in the 1st century B.C. In Jer. B^rakoth vii. 2 it is related: "The king [Jannaeus¹] said to him [Simon ben Shetach the king's brother-in-law] 'Why didst thou mock me by saying that nine hundred sacrifices were required, when half would have been sufficient?' Simon answered 'I mocked thee not; thou hast paid thy share and I mine...as it is written בצל הכמה בצל הכסף' (Koh. vii. 12 a).

In Baba Bathra 4 a there is an account of Herod after he had put to death the members of the Sanhedrin, and deprived Baba ben Buṭa of his sight. It relates that he visited the latter *incognito*, and tried to extort from him some unguarded complaint against his own tyranny. But Baba b. Buṭa steadily refused to speak a word against the king. In his answers to Herod he quoted, with the formula "it is written," a passage from the Torah (Ex. xxii. 27), and one from the N^ebi'im (Is. ii. 2); and with the same formula he quoted, from the K^ethubim, Prov. vi. 23 and the three parts of Koh. x. 20².

A third narrative from Shabbath 30 b is given at length by Wright³, in which Gamaliel (flor. 44 A.D.) argues on the subject of the Messianic age with a disciple⁴. That disciple (אותו חלמיר) three times opposed the great teacher's arguments with the words אין כל חדש תחת השמש (Koh. i. 9), each time with 'as it is written.'

If these stories could be accepted as they stand, Simon b. Shetach would afford a fixed *terminus ad quem* for the canonicity of Koheleth. But since it is impossible to determine what is history in the Talmud, and what legend, the only certain deduction is that the Talmudic compilers accepted as genuine the tradition that Koheleth had been quoted as Scripture in the century before Christ.

¹ Jannaeus reigned 105–79 B.C.

² See Wright, *Ecclesiastes* pp. 19 f.

³ pp. 23 f.

⁴ Bloch maintains that this is none other than S. Paul.

CANONICITY

5

Little, in fact, can be gathered from verbal quotations¹.

Nor can much help be obtained from pre-Christian evidence other than that of direct quotation.

1. In the often quoted prologue to Ecclesiasticus, B. Sira's grandson clearly recognised a third division of Hebrew writings after the Law and the Prophets. But it is impossible to say with certainty that he included *Ḳoheleth* in this third division, or (if he did) to what extent he considered it as strictly canonical.

2. The 'Septuagint' translation adds no evidence at all. The prologue to Ecclesiasticus shews that some books in the group of the *K^ethubim* had been translated before 132 B.C. But the translation of a book proves nothing as to the date of its canonisation. Indeed, if the theory maintained below² is correct—that the extant Greek version of *Ḳoheleth* is (so far as the true text is attainable) from the pen of Aquila—it is uncertain whether there was a Greek version of it before his time.

3. Philo's evidence is only *e silentio*, and is precarious. He makes no reference to Ezekiel, Daniel, Song of Songs, Ruth, Lamentations and *Ḳoheleth*. If Ezekiel were not in this list, it might be argued with probability that Philo did not quote from the *K^ethubim* because he did not recognise them as canonical³. But seeing that Ezekiel was canonical more than a century and a half before his time, his lack of reference to it invalidates any argument drawn from his non-use of the *K^ethubim*.

¹ There are no verbal quotations from *Ḳoh.* in the N.T., though it is not impossible that S. Paul shews reminiscences of its language.

Compare i. 2 etc. with Rom. viii. 20; xii. 14 with Rom. ii. 16, 2 Cor. v. 10; xii. 3, 5 with 2 Cor. v. 1. See Taylor, *Sayings of the Jewish Fathers*, Add. notes pp. 159 f.

But no stress can be laid on the silence of the N.T. Ezra and Nehemiah are not quoted, but they were probably coupled with Chronicles which is. Obadiah and Nahum shew no influence on N.T. writers, because they were short and dealt with special circumstances of the moment; and Esther, Song of Songs and *Ḳoheleth* were scarcely of such a nature as to supply matter for quotation. (In Eph. v. 27 S. Paul may have been thinking of Song of Songs iv. 7: *ὄλη καλὴ εἰ πλησίον μου, καὶ μῶμος οὐκ ἔστιν ἐν σοί.*)

² Appendix i.

³ The passage in the *De Vita contemplativa* § 3, which clearly speaks of the three divisions of the Hebrew books, is of very doubtful genuineness.

Although there are no quotations from Koheleth in the New Testament, yet it is here that evidence is first forthcoming which is probably trustworthy. The passages which suggest that the tripartite division of the Hebrew books was recognised, afford, it is true, no clearer evidence as to the contents of the Canon than does the prologue to Ecclesiasticus¹. But a stronger argument can be drawn from the phrases and titles used in reference to the Old Testament, which convey a strong feeling that the Canon was thought of as a complete whole; e.g. ἡ γραφή occurs in John x. 35, xix. 36, xx. 9, 2 Pet. i. 20. In the first of these, reference is made to a passage in the Psalms which, in the preceding words, is also spoken of as ἐν τῷ νόμῳ ὑμῶν and ὁ λόγος τοῦ θεοῦ. The second passage is, perhaps, not to the point, since the following verse shews that γραφή may have the meaning of ‘a passage in writing,’ cf. 1 Pet. ii. 6. In the third, the word implies Old Testament prophecies in general. And in the last, the writer distinctly speaks of a well-defined body of “prophecies which stand in writing” (πᾶσα προφητεία γραφῆς) for which he claims divine inspiration. And other phrases such as αἱ γραφαὶ Mat. xxii. 29, Acts xviii. 24, γραφαὶ ἁγίαι Rom. i. 2², ἱερὰ γράμματα 2 Tim. iii. 15 (cf. v. 16 πᾶσα γραφή θεόπνευστος), all convey the same impression, that ‘Scripture’ meant to the Apostolic writers the same body of Old Testament writings that it means to us.

Two further references in the New Testament call for notice. Daniel, the latest book in the Jewish Canon, is expressly quoted by Jesus as an apparently authoritative writing (Mat. xxiv. 15). And His allusion to the death of Zacharias (Mat. xxiii. 35, Luke xi. 51) is usually understood to imply that the book of Chronicles was the last in order in the complete canonical collection. Wildeboer’s objection to this is not conclusive. He points out that very few persons, or even synagogues, were rich enough to possess the whole collection, and that in any case the books would be written on separate rolls. And he says that even if Jesus, as the later Jews, held Chronicles to stand last in the order of Old Testament books, Mat. xxiii. 35 affords no evidence as to which books were included at that

¹ See especially Luke xxiv. 44; also Mat. xxii. 40, John vi. 45, Acts vii. 42, xiii. 40, xxvi. 22, xxviii. 23.

² See Sanday and Headlam *in loc.*

CANONICITY

7

time in the third division of which Chronicles formed the close. But the fact that among a number of separate rolls Chronicles was universally reckoned as the last in order, surely goes to shew that the number of the rolls had become a fixed quantity. Wildeboer adds that it is much more probable that the Lord was thinking of the historical books in a narrower sense which excluded Jeremiah. But how could the hearers of Jesus be expected to understand that he was thinking of the 'historical books' which were never reckoned as a distinct group, when the martyrdom of Urijah (Jer. xxvi. 23), which was chronologically later than that of Zacharias, would be well known to all¹?

It seems highly probable, therefore, that all the K^ethubim had obtained some sort of recognition by the beginning of the 1st century B.C., and that the three divisions of the Hebrew books were looked upon as one complete body of sacred writings by the beginning of the Christian era. Indeed, as Ryle points out (pp. 174 ff.), it is scarcely conceivable that any new book could have been introduced into the canon during the century in which the nation was divided into the opposite factions of the Pharisees and Sadducees, or during the period in which the great Rabbinic schools of Hillel and Shammai took their rise. "The Doctors whose glory it was 'to make a fence round the law' were not likely to advocate the introduction of fresh writings within the limits of the Canon; nor, if one were bold enough to advise such a step, would he have escaped vehement attacks from rival teachers."

If this conclusion be correct, and K^oheleth had won its acceptance as canonical by c. 100 B.C., it is unnecessary to dwell on the evidence that is available at the close of the 1st century A.D.² 4 Esdras (c. 90 A.D.) and Josephus (c. 100 A.D.) both shew conclusively that K^oheleth had been accepted as canonical before their date. The former (according to the

¹ Wildeboer's statement (p. 47) that "a number of reminiscences and citations from apocryphal writings prove that the N.T. writers acknowledged no canon of the O.T. which corresponds with ours" is tantamount to saying that no N.T. writers were capable of quoting anything but their Bible! They did not use extra-canonical works for the purpose of establishing doctrines; but there is no reason why they should not have used them for purposes of illustration. (See Ryle pp. 153 f.)

² See Ryle (pp. 156-166), and Wildeboer (pp. 37-43).

most probable reading) reckons the sacred books as 24, which is the number borne out by the Talmudic title "the four-and-twenty holy writings" (Jer. Sanh. x. 1). The latter reckons them as 22, Ruth and Lamentations being combined with Judges and Jeremiah respectively. This numbering is also found in Melito's canon (Eus. *H.E.* iv. 26), and in that of Origen (Eus. *H.E.* vi. 25).

The official Jewish pronouncement with regard to the Canon was made at, or about the time of, the Synod of Jamnia (Jabne) c. 100 A.D. Some discussion preceded the final agreement, of which the clearest account for English readers is given in Wright's *Ecclesiastes*, Excursus II. The discussion turned on the question whether *Ḳoheleth* did, or did not, "defile the hands." This expression is explained in Shabbath 14 a. Copies of the Scriptures had been kept in the same place as the heave-offerings, and some had been thereby injured. As a precaution against this danger in future, the Scriptures were pronounced 'unclean,' i.e. unfit to be included among the offerings to the priests. The principal Talmudic passages which refer to the discussion are *Yadaim* iii. 5, *Eduyoth* v. 3, *Megillah* 7 a¹. The synod was apparently convinced by R. Simon ben 'Azzai, who stated that he had "received by tradition from the mouth of the seventy-two elders in the day when they inducted R. Eliezer b. 'Azariah into the seat of patriarch, that the Song of Songs and *Ḳoheleth* defile the hands." The books under dispute were *Ḳoheleth*, Song of Songs and Esther. And a final decision was arrived at—not that these books were henceforth to be included among the canonical books, but—that those who had for many years received them as canonical had been right in so doing.

§ 3. *The circumstances of the writer.*

A writer in the *Spectator*² has aptly styled the book of *Ḳoheleth* "A Hebrew *Journal intime*." The fascination of it arises from the fact that it advances no theories; it is not a thesis or a study, it is not a sermon or a collection of moral aphorisms. It is the outpouring of the mind of a rich Jew, who

¹ See S. Schiffer, *Das Buch Kohelet, nach der Auffassung der Weisen des Talmud und Midrasch*, Theil 1. pp. 1-10.

² Feb. 28, 1903.

OF THE WRITER

9

has seen much of the sad side of life, and who is intensely in earnest. But while he reveals his mind and character, he tells little of his personal circumstances¹. He states that he was wealthy, and able to provide for himself every possible luxury (ii. 4–10). He seems to have lived in or near Jerusalem², for he clearly implies that he was an eyewitness of facts which occurred at the “holy place” (viii. 10). He must have been an old man at the time of writing; not only because his language seems to have lost the buoyancy of youth (for that is a point on which different students of his book might think, and have thought, differently), but because his feverish attempts (i. 12–ii. 11) to find the *summum bonum* of life in pleasure, and in wisdom, cannot have been abandoned in a few years, while they were now far enough in the past to be looked at as by-gone memories. He had had experience not only of youth but also of manhood’s prime, שְׁרִיטָה³ (xi. 10). And apparently he had lived long enough to find himself alone in the world, without son or brother (iv. 8: the following words seem to shew that he is referring to himself). Lastly, he had had private sorrows and disappointments. Here and there—“one of a thousand”—he might find “a man,” but he had never found a woman who was worthy of her name;—which probably means (to translate his bitter generalisation into facts) that his life had been saddened by a woman, who had been “more bitter than death,” whose heart had been “snares and nets, and her hands fetters” (vii. 26–28).

This is all that can be gathered with any certainty. But it is not unreasonable to suppose that his great wealth might place him in some official position in the country. Winckler⁴ suggests

¹ Plumptre, *Eccles.* pp. 35–52, draws an elaborate, but purely fanciful, biography, which is severely criticised by Bois, *Origines de la Philosophie Judéo-Alexandrine* pp. 83–108.

² The reference to the corn trade (xi. 1), as an illustration of a busy and energetic path of life, does not necessarily point to Alexandria as the place of writing. The mention of the temple and the priesthood (iv. 17, v. 5, E.V. v. 1, 6) appears to be the work of another writer, who also lived at Jerusalem. See § 5.

³ i.e. the age of black hairs, as opposed to שֵׁיבָה the age of grey hairs.

⁴ *Altorientalische Forschungen*, 2nd series, pp. 143–159. The expression in i. 12 “king over Israel in Jerusalem” cannot indicate this official position, for the guise of Solomon is not dropped till ii. 12. See, however, note on i. 16—“all that were before me over Jerusalem.”

that he was either king or high-priest, for his writing was so unorthodox that nothing but his high station could have enabled him to disregard public opinion. It is very improbable that he was in any sense a king, in view of the scathing criticisms which he passes on the government. But if he was a member of a high-priestly family, and perhaps himself a religious official, it is easier to account for the zealous care with which his work was annotated, and made more acceptable in religious circles¹. And it is just possible that the feminine form of the pseudonym *Ḳoheleth* points in the same direction².

But if *Ḳoheleth* does not reveal much of his personal surroundings, he paints a lurid picture of the state of his country. Wickedness usurped the place of judgment and righteousness (iii. 16); and, in consequence, the powerful classes who had the law in their hands crushed the common people with an oppression from which there was no escape (iv. 1). And this perversion of justice was due to the irresponsible officialism under which the country groaned; an inferior official was under the thumb of a higher one, and he under a higher still; none of them could make any move in the cause of justice, for the highest of them was a creature of the tyrannous king (v. 7). The king raised slaves and common people, at his caprice, to high positions, while the rich and noble might be degraded (x. 5–7); he was despotic (viii. 2 a, 4), and when he was in an angry mood the only prudent course was to pacify him by yielding to his wishes (x. 4). The reason for this tyranny lay in the fact that the king was “a child”—far too young for his responsible position—and his courtiers spent their days in drunken revelry (x. 16). *Ḳoheleth* sadly contrasts the unhappy state of his country with the prosperity that it might enjoy under a good ruler (x. 17). With a young and tyrannous king and corrupt officials, espionage was rife; a word spoken secretly in the bedchamber, nay even a thought, would reach the king's ears through unknown channels (x. 20).

In addition to this general description of the state of the country, two passages must be noticed which appear to contain allusions to contemporary history—(a) iv. 13–16, (b) ix. 13–15³.

¹ See § 5.

² See § 1.

³ viii. 10 has also been usually understood to refer to an historical event. But this is improbable. See note *in loc.*