The Five Scrolls
(Megilloth)

The Song of Songs = Passover
Ruth = Feast of Weeks
(Pentecost) (Barley Harvest)
Lamentations = Destruction of Temple
Ecclesiastes = Feast of Booths
Esther = Feast of Purim
Song of Songs: Introduction

Associated with Solomon; maybe about Solomon

Allegorical Interpretations—God’s love for Israel and God’s love for the church.

A love poem. Sex, or passion, or eros, or marital love, is what Song of Solomon is about. It’s about two young lovers who are always looking for opportunities to be alone together. The Song gives expression to their love, their desires, their fears, and their concerns as only two young lovers can put it. It tells us that we do have normal, God-given sexual desires. These desires are part of what it means to be a normal and healthy human being.

Two extremes have distorted what God intended for us as human beings to experience: 1. Prudish 2. Promiscuous. To the prudish, sex is, at best, the dark side of marriage, necessary for procreation, but nothing else good about it. Don’t talk about it, don’t enjoy it. On the other hand, the promiscuous would argue that we should have sex anytime with w/anyone we want—as long as the two are consenting, why not?

Wisdom—association with Solomon—the art of living well—our marriages will dictate to a high degree whether we live well or not.

**Love is a gift that is given**—love cannot be taken

7:10 I am my beloved’s,
    and his desire is for me.
11 Come, my beloved,
    let us go forth into the fields,
    and lodge in the villages;
12 let us go out early to the vineyards,
    and see whether the vines have budded,
    whether the grape blossoms have opened
    and the pomegranates are in bloom.
There I will give you my love.
13 The mandrakes give forth frag

**There is an appropriate time for love**

2:7 I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
    by the gazelles or the wild does:
    do not stir up or awaken love
    until it is ready!

8:8 We have a little sister,
    and she has no breasts.
What shall we do for our sister,
on the day when she is spoken for?
9 If she is a wall,
we will build upon her a battlement of silver;
but if she is a door,
we will enclose her with boards of cedar.
10 I was a wall,
and my breasts were like towers;
then I was in his eyes
as one who brings peace.
11 Solomon had a vineyard at Baal-hamon;
he entrusted the vineyard to keepers;
each one was to bring for its fruit a thousand pieces of silver.
12 My vineyard, my very own, is for myself;
you, O Solomon, may have the thousand,
and the keepers of the fruit two hundred!

The reciprocal nature of love
2:6 My beloved is mine and I am his;

Love is elusive
3 Upon my bed at night
   I sought him whom my soul loves;
I sought him, but found him not;
   I called him, but he gave no answer.
2 ‘I will rise now and go about the city,
in the streets and in the squares;
I will seek him whom my soul loves.’
   I sought him, but found him not.

6:3 I am my beloved’s and my beloved is mine;
   he pastures his flock among the lilies.

Love is to be celebrated
7:6 How fair and pleasant you are,
O loved one, delectable maiden!
7 You are stately as a palm tree,
and your breasts are like its clusters.
8 I say I will climb the palm tree
and lay hold of its branches.
O may your breasts be like clusters of the vine,
and the scent of your breath like apples,
9 and your kisses like the best wine
that goes down smoothly,
gliding over lips and teeth.
Our Love for God

The admiration of the human body

The Wasf

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<tr>
<th>The Man Describes the Woman</th>
<th>The Woman Describes the Man</th>
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<tr>
<td>4 How beautiful you are, my love, how very beautiful! Your eyes are doves behind your veil. Your hair is like a flock of goats, moving down the slopes of Gilead. 2 Your teeth are like a flock of shorn ewes that have come up from the washing, all of which bear twins, and not one among them is bereaved. 3 Your lips are like a crimson thread, and your mouth is lovely. Your cheeks are like halves of a pomegranate behind your veil. 4 Your neck is like the tower of David, built in courses; on it hang a thousand bucklers, all of them shields of warriors. 5 Your two breasts are like two fawns, twins of a gazelle, that feed among the lilies. 6 Until the day breathes and the shadows flee, I will hasten to the mountain of myrrh and the hill of frankincense. 7 You are altogether beautiful, my love; there is no flaw in you.</td>
<td>5:10 My beloved is all radiant and ruddy, distinguished among ten thousand. 11 His head is the finest gold; his locks are wavy, black as a raven. 12 His eyes are like doves beside springs of water, bathed in milk, fitly set. 13 His cheeks are like beds of spices, yielding fragrance. His lips are lilies, distilling liquid myrrh. 14 His arms are rounded gold, set with jewels. His body is ivory work, encrusted with sapphires. 15 His legs are alabaster columns, set upon bases of gold. His appearance is like Lebanon, choice as the cedars. 16 His speech is most sweet, and he is altogether desirable. This is my beloved and this is my friend, O daughters of Jerusalem.</td>
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Garden Imagery

4:16 Blow upon my garden that its fragrance may be wafted abroad. Let my beloved come to his garden, and eat its choicest fruits.
Song of Songs: Reciprocal Desire

7:10 I am my beloved’s, 
and his desire is for me.

Genesis
3:16 To the woman he said, 
‘I will greatly increase your pangs in childbearing; 
in pain you shall bring forth children, 
yet your desire shall be for your husband, 
and he shall rule over you.’

5 I come to my garden, my sister, my bride; 
I gather my myrrh with my spice, 
I eat my honeycomb with my honey, 
I drink my wine with my milk.

5:1 Eat, friends, drink, 
and be drunk with love.
8:6 Set me as a seal upon your heart,
   as a seal upon your arm;
for love is strong as death,
   passion fierce as the grave.
Its flashes are flashes of fire,
   a raging flame.
8:7 Many waters cannot quench love,
   neither can floods drown it.
If one offered for love
   all the wealth of one’s house,
it would be utterly scorned.
Song of Songs: The Elusive Presence

3:1 Upon my bed at night
    I sought him whom my soul loves;
I sought him, but found him not;
    I called him, but he gave no answer.

5:6 I opened to my beloved,
    but my beloved had turned and was gone.
My soul failed me when he spoke.
I sought him, but did not find him;
    I called him, but he gave no answer.

5:2 I slept, but my heart was awake.
Listen! my beloved is knocking.
‘Open to me, my sister, my love,
    my dove, my perfect one;
for my head is wet with dew,
    my locks with the drops of the night.’

3 I had put off my garment;
    how could I put it on again?
I had bathed my feet;
    how could I soil them?

4 My beloved thrust his hand into the opening,
    and my inmost being yearned for him.

5 I arose to open to my beloved,
    and my hands dripped with myrrh,
my fingers with liquid myrrh,
    upon the handles of the bolt.

6 I opened to my beloved,
    but my beloved had turned and was gone.
My soul failed me when he spoke.
I sought him, but did not find him;
    I called him, but he gave no answer.

7 Making their rounds in the city
    the sentinels found me;
they beat me, they wounded me,
    they took away my mantle,
those sentinels of the walls.

8 I adjure you, O daughters of Jerusalem,
    if you find my beloved,
tell him this:
    I am faint with love.
Ruth: Introduction

Canonical placement:

**Christian tradition**—after Judges—reflects the setting of the book prior to the monarchy (genealogy in 4:18-22)—ending of Judges rough for women. **Hebrew Bible**—after the book of Proverbs—read Proverbs 31:10 and Ruth 3:11—“a woman of noble character”--

Scene 1—in the plains of Moab--famine has driven family of Naomi from Bethlehem to Moab--husband dies, sons marry Moabite girls--Ruth one of them--sons die--Naomi laments

Scene 2—in the fields of Boaz--Boaz a landowner and kinsman of Naomi--**Goel**

Scene 3—at the threshing floor--Ruth proposes that Boaz fulfill his obligation as a kinsmen--Levirate Marriage

Scene 4—at the city gate--nearest kinsman refuses to marry Ruth--Ruth ancestress of David

**Key Elements or Themes:**

**Hospitality:**

*Deuteronomy 23:3* No Ammonite or Moabite shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord. Even to the tenth generation, none of their descendants shall be admitted to the assembly of the Lord, *because they did not meet you with food and water on your journey out of Egypt,* and because they hired against you Balaam son of Beor, from Pethor of Mesopotamia, to curse you.

*Ruth 1:* In the days when the judges ruled, there was a famine in the land, and a certain man of Bethlehem in Judah went to live in the country of Moab, he and his wife and two sons.

**Gleaning:**

*Deuteronomy 24:19* When you reap your harvest in your field and forget a sheaf in the field, you shall not go back to get it; it shall be left for the alien, the orphan, and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all your undertakings.

20 When you beat your olive trees, do not strip what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow.

21 When you gather the grapes of your vineyard, do not glean what is left; it shall be for the alien, the orphan, and the widow. 22 Remember that you were a slave in the land of Egypt; therefore I am commanding you to do this.

**Goel:**
Leviticus 25:25 If anyone of your kin falls into difficulty and sells a piece of property, then the next-of-kin shall come and redeem what the relative has sold. If the person has no one to redeem it, but then prospers and finds sufficient means to do so, the years since its sale shall be computed and the difference shall be refunded to the person to whom it was sold, and the property shall be returned. But if there are not sufficient means to recover it, what was sold shall remain with the purchaser until the year of jubilee; in the jubilee it shall be released, and the property shall be returned.

Levirate Marriage:

Deuteronomy 25:5 When brothers reside together, and one of them dies and has no son, the wife of the deceased shall not be married outside the family to a stranger. Her husband's brother shall go in to her, taking her in marriage, and performing the duty of a husband's brother to her, and the firstborn whom she bears shall succeed to the name of the deceased brother, so that his name may not be blotted out of Israel. But if the man has no desire to marry his brother's widow, then his brother's widow shall go up to the elders at the gate and say, 'My husband's brother refuses to perpetuate his brother's name in Israel; he will not perform the duty of a husband's brother to me.' Then the elders of his town shall summon him and speak to him. If he persists, saying, 'I have no desire to marry her', then his brother's wife shall go up to him in the presence of the elders, pull his sandal off his foot, spit in his face, and declare, 'This is what is done to the man who does not build up his brother's house.' Throughout Israel his family shall be known as 'the house of him whose sandal was pulled off.'

Marriage to Foreign Women

Ezra 9:1After these things had been done, the officials approached me and said, 'The people of Israel, the priests, and the Levites have not separated themselves from the peoples of the lands with their abominations, from the Canaanites, the Hittites, the Perizzites, the Jebusites, the Ammonites, the Moabites, the Egyptians, and the Amorites. For they have taken some of their daughters as wives for themselves and for their sons. Thus the holy seed has mixed itself with the peoples of the lands, and in this faithlessness the officials and leaders have led the way.' (Deuteronomy 7.)

Then Ezra the priest stood up and said to them, 'You have trespassed and married foreign women, and so increased the guilt of Israel. Now make confession to the Lord the God of your ancestors, and do his will; separate yourselves from the peoples of the land and from the foreign wives.'

Ruth 1:3But Elimelech, the husband of Naomi, died, and she was left with her two sons. These took Moabite wives; the name of one was Orpah and the name of the other Ruth.
Ruth: Finding Security

1:7 So she set out from the place where she had been living, she and her two daughters-in-law, and they went on their way to go back to the land of Judah. 8 But Naomi said to her two daughters-in-law, ‘Go back each of you to your mother’s house. May the Lord deal kindly with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. 9 The Lord grant that you may find security, each of you in the house of your husband.’ Then she kissed them, and they wept aloud. 1

3:1 Naomi her mother-in-law said to her, ‘My daughter, I need to seek some security for you, so that it may be well with you.

Divine/human partnership

2:12 May the Lord reward you for your deeds, and may you have a full reward from the Lord, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come for refuge!’ 13 Then she said, ‘May I continue to find favour in your sight, my lord, for you have comforted me and spoken kindly to your servant, even though I am not one of your servants.’

3:9 He said, ‘Who are you?’ And she answered, ‘I am Ruth, your servant; spread your cloak over your servant, for you are next-of-kin.’ 10 He said, ‘May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich. 11 And now, my daughter, do not be afraid; I will do for you all that you ask, for all the assembly of my people know that you are a worthy woman.

‘eshet chayil compare with Boaz who is a ‘ish gibbor chayil

Notice the growth of Ruth:
- A Moabitess
- A servant
- A worthy woman—an equal to Boaz
Ruth: Demonstrating *chesed*

1:8b May the Lord *deal kindly* with you, as you have dealt with the dead and with me. 

11 But Naomi said, 'Turn back, my daughters, why will you go with me? Do I still have sons in my womb that they may become your husbands? 12 Turn back, my daughters, go your way, for I am too old to have a husband. Even if I thought there was hope for me, even if I should have a husband tonight and bear sons, 13 would you then wait until they were grown? Would you then refrain from marrying? No, my daughters, it has been far more bitter for me than for you, because the hand of the Lord has turned against me.' 14 Then they wept aloud again. Orpah kissed her mother-in-law, but Ruth clung to her.

Orpah means something like “back of the neck”—notice the contrast between the two daughters-in-law.

2:11 But Boaz answered her, 'All that you have done for your mother-in-law since the death of your husband has been fully told me, and how you left your father and mother and your native land and came to a people that you did not know before.

3:10 He said, 'May you be blessed by the Lord, my daughter; this last instance of your loyalty is better than the first; you have not gone after young men, whether poor or rich.
Ruth: Being Honest with God

1:19 So the two of them went on until they came to Bethlehem. When they came to Bethlehem, the whole town was stirred because of them; and the women said, ‘Is this Naomi?’ 20 She said to them, ‘Call me no longer Naomi, call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt bitterly with me. I went away full, but the Lord has brought me back empty; why call me Naomi when the Lord has dealt harshly with me, and the Almighty has brought calamity upon me?’

4:13 So Boaz took Ruth and she became his wife. When they came together, the Lord made her conceive, and she bore a son. 14 Then the women said to Naomi, ‘Blessed be the Lord, who has not left you this day without next-of-kin; and may his name be renowned in Israel! He shall be to you a restorer of life and a nourisher of your old age; for your daughter-in-law who loves you, who is more to you than seven sons, has borne him.’ 16 Then Naomi took the child and laid him in her bosom, and became his nurse. 17 The women of the neighborhood gave him a name, saying, ‘A son has been born to Naomi.’ They named him Obed; he became the father of Jesse, the father of David.

Naomi’s grievance—lays it at God’s feet—no priest to speak on her behalf

Yahweh’s faithfulness

A dialogue
Lamentations: Introduction

**Setting**: written after destruction of Jerusalem.

**Author**: traditionally Jeremiah; reality—unknown

**Form**: Five laments put together in one book; chapters Chapters 1-4 are acrostics—22 verses, chapter 3 66 verses; funeral dirge Jerusalem compared to a widow who is destitute.

**Lament**

1 How lonely sits the city
   that once was full of people!
How like a widow she has become,
   she that was great among the nations!
She that was a princess among the provinces
   has become a vassal.

2 She weeps bitterly in the night,
   with tears on her cheeks;
   among all her lovers
   she has no one to comfort her;
   all her friends have dealt treacherously with her,
   they have become her enemies.

**Dialogic theology**—“provides humanity an avenue for speaking honestly to God about their experience of him.” Provides a voice for the “lesser party” and by doing so “can have real-life repercussions for how we attend to our own lesser parties.” Mandolfo, p. 19-20. Especially important for Lamentations 1-2.

**Destitution**:

4:4 The tongue of the infant sticks
   to the roof of its mouth for thirst;
   the children beg for food,
   but no one gives them anything.

**Daughter Zion/Widow Metaphor**

1:6 From daughter Zion has departed
   all her majesty.
   Her princes have become like stags
   that find no pasture;
   they fled without strength
   before the pursuer.
12 Is it nothing to you, all you who pass by?
Look and see
if there is any sorrow like my sorrow,
which was brought upon me,
which the Lord inflicted
on the day of his fierce anger.

**Ending/Reponse:**

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<tr>
<th>Lamentations 5</th>
<th>Isaiah 49</th>
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<td>But you, O Lord, reign for ever; your throne endures to all generations.</td>
<td>14 But Zion said, ‘The Lord has <strong>forsaken</strong> me, my Lord has <strong>forgotten</strong> me.’</td>
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<td>Why have you <strong>forgotten</strong> us completely?</td>
<td>15 Can a woman forget her nursing-child, or show no compassion for the child of her womb?</td>
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<td>Why have you <strong>forsaken</strong> us these many days?</td>
<td>Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20 Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored; renew our days as of old—</td>
<td>21 <strong>See,</strong> I have inscribed you on the palms of my hands; your walls are continually before me.</td>
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<td>21 unless you have utterly rejected us, and are angry with us beyond measure.</td>
<td>22 <strong>unless</strong> you have utterly rejected us, and are angry with us beyond measure.</td>
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Lamentations: Talking Back

1:18 The Lord is in the right, for I have rebelled against his word; but hear, all you peoples, and behold my suffering; my young women and young men have gone into captivity.

1:20 See, O Lord, how distressed I am; my stomach churns, my heart is wrung within me, because I have been very rebellious. In the street the sword bereaves; in the house it is like death.

2:1 How the Lord in his anger has humiliated daughter Zion! He has thrown down from heaven to earth the splendour of Israel; he has not remembered his footstool on the day of his anger.

2:11 My eyes are spent with weeping; my stomach churns; my bile is poured out on the ground because of the destruction of my people, because infants and babes faint in the streets of the city.

2:20 Look, O Lord, and consider! To whom have you done this? Should women eat their offspring, the children they have borne? Should priest and prophet be killed in the sanctuary of the Lord?

21 The young and the old are lying on the ground in the streets; my young women and my young men have fallen by the sword; on the day of your anger you have killed them, slaughtering without mercy.
Lamentations: Finding a Comforter

1 How lonely sits the city
   that once was full of people!
How like a widow she has become,
   she that was great among the nations!
She that was a princess among the provinces
   has become a vassal.

2 She weeps bitterly in the night,
   with tears on her cheeks;
among all her lovers
   she has no one to comfort her;
all her friends have dealt treacherously with her,
   they have become her enemies.

1:17 Zion stretches out her hands,
   but there is no one to comfort her;
the Lord has commanded against Jacob
   that his neighbours should become his foes;
Jerusalem has become
   a filthy thing among them.

2:13 What can I say for you, to what compare you,
   O daughter Jerusalem?
To what can I liken you, that I may comfort you,
   O virgin daughter Zion?
For vast as the sea is your ruin;
   who can heal you?

2:20 Look, O Lord, and consider!
   To whom have you done this?
Should women eat their offspring,
   the children they have borne?
Should priest and prophet be killed
   in the sanctuary of the Lord?

21 The young and the old are lying
   on the ground in the streets;
my young women and my young men
   have fallen by the sword;
on the day of your anger you have killed them,
   slaughtering without mercy.
Lamentations: God

2:17 The Lord has done what he purposed,
he has carried out his threat;
as he ordained long ago,
he has demolished without pity;
he has made the enemy rejoice over you,
and exalted the might of your foes.

3:1 I am one who has seen affliction
under the rod of God's wrath;
2 he has driven and brought me
into darkness without any light;
3 against me alone he turns his hand,
again and again, all day long.

3:22 The steadfast love of the Lord never ceases,
his mercies never come to an end;
23 they are new every morning;
great is your faithfulness.
24 'The Lord is my portion,' says my soul,
'therefore I will hope in him.'
25 The Lord is good to those who wait for him,
to the soul that seeks him.
26 It is good that one should wait quietly
for the salvation of the Lord.
27 It is good for one to bear
the yoke in youth,
28 to sit alone in silence
when the Lord has imposed it,
29 to put one's mouth to the dust
(there may yet be hope),
30 to give one's cheek to the smiter,
and be filled with insults.

3:31 For the Lord will not reject for ever.
32 Although he causes grief, he will have compassion
according to the abundance of his steadfast love;
33 for he does not willingly afflict or grieve anyone.

But you, O Lord, reign for ever;
your throne endures to all generations.
Why have you forgotten us completely?
Why have you forsaken us these many days?
Restore us to yourself, O Lord, that we may be restored;
renew our days as of old—
unless you have utterly rejected us,
and are angry with us beyond measure.
Esther: Introduction

Set in Persia during the days of King Xerxes, Ahasuerus (486-65 BC)

Canonical status: had a hard time getting in. Why? God is never named or mentioned in the book; secular tone to the book.

Vashti--Queen of Persia who is deposed

Mordecai--a Jew, of the tribe of Benjamin, son of Kish—rises in the court of a foreign king

1 Samuel 9:1 There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish son of Abiel son of Zeror son of Becorath son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of wealth.
2 He had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man.

Hadassa or Esther, cousin or niece of Mordecai, he adopts and raises her-- Compare also with Joseph and Daniel.

Haman, the Agagite—the “Prime Minister” of Persia, Mordecai refuses to bow down to him.

Exodus 17:14 Then the Lord said to Moses, ‘Write this as a reminder in a book and recite it in the hearing of Joshua: I will utterly blot out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven.’

Deuteronomy 25: 17 Remember what Amalek did to you on your journey out of Egypt, how he attacked you on the way, when you were faint and weary, and struck down all who lagged behind you; he did not fear God.

1 Samuel 15: 1 Saul said to Samuel, ‘The Lord sent me to anoint you king over his people Israel; now therefore listen to the words of the Lord. 2 Thus says the Lord of hosts, “I will punish the Amalekites for what they did in opposing the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt. 3 He took King Agag of the Amalekites alive, but utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword.

Feast of Purim--festival celebrating Jewish victory over their enemies, the 14th day of Adar

9:16 Now the other Jews who were in the king’s provinces also gathered to defend their lives, and gained relief from their enemies, and killed seventy-five thousand of those who hated them; but they laid no hands on the plunder. 17 This was on the thirteenth day of the month of Adar, and on the fourteenth day they rested and made that a day of feasting and gladness.
18 But the Jews who were in Susa gathered on the thirteenth day and on the fourteenth, and rested on the fifteenth day, making that a day of feasting and gladness.

20 Mordecai recorded these things, and sent letters to all the Jews who were in all the provinces of King Ahasuerus, both near and far, enjoining them that they should keep the fourteenth day of the month Adar and also the fifteenth day of the same month, year by year, as the days on which the Jews gained relief from their enemies, and as the month that had been turned for them from sorrow into gladness and from mourning into a holiday; that they should make them days of feasting and gladness, days for sending gifts of food to one another and presents to the poor.

*Esther 4:14: “For such a time as this”
*Esther 6:13: “Since Mordecai is of Jewish origin,“

Chapter 1--Vashti is deposed
Chapter 2:1-18--Esther becomes queen
Chapter 2:19-23--Mordecai saves the king
Chapter 3--Haman plots to annihilate the Jews
Chapter 4--Mordecai persuades Esther to help
Chapter 5:1-8--Esther’s throws the first banquet
Chapter 5:9-14--Haman plots to kill Mordecai
Chapter 6--The king honors Mordecai
Chapter 7--Esther exposes Haman
Chapter 8:1-9:17--The Jews defend themselves
Chapter 9:18-32--The Feast of Purim is instituted
Chapter 10--Mordecai rises to second in rank

Genre

A Diapsora Story—discusses life for the Jews in exile. Compare with Daniel 1-6; also Tobit and Judith from the Apocrypha might be helpful reading to a sense of the genre.

Within the story are elements of comedy—a festive comedy. There is plenty of humor in the book and the preacher/teacher may well want to include this element in the preaching/teaching of the book. See Adele Berlin, Esther, The JPS Bible Commentary, 2001, for a helpful discussion on the genre of the book.
Esther: Identity

The term Jew plays an important role in the book. Mordecai is referred to as a Jew in 2:5; 5:13; 6:10; 8:7; 9:29, 31; 10:3 (Berlin, p. 24).

Shame of being in exile as a Jew in the vast Persian empire.

2:5 Now there was a Jew in the citadel of Susa whose name was Mordecai son of Jair son of Shimei son of Kish, a Benjaminite. 6Kish had been carried away from Jerusalem among the captives carried away with King Jeconiah of Judah, whom King Nebuchadnezzar of Babylon had carried away. 7Mordecai had brought up Hadassah, that is Esther, his cousin, for she had neither father nor mother; the girl was fair and beautiful, and when her father and her mother died, Mordecai adopted her as his own daughter.

2:10 *Esther did not reveal her people or kindred,* for Mordecai had charged her not to tell. 11Every day Mordecai would walk around in front of the court of the harem, to learn how Esther was and how she fared.

3:4 When they spoke to him day after day and he would not listen to them, they told Haman, in order to see whether Mordecai's words would avail; for he had told them that he was a Jew. 5When Haman saw that Mordecai did not bow down or do obeisance to him, Haman was infuriated. 6But he thought it beneath him to lay hands on Mordecai alone. So, having been told who Mordecai's people were, Haman plotted to destroy all the Jews, the people of Mordecai, throughout the whole kingdom of Ahasuerus.

4:3 In every province, wherever the king's command and his decree came, there was great mourning among the Jews, with fasting and weeping and lamenting, and most of them lay in sackcloth and ashes.

6:13 When Haman told his wife Zeresh and all his friends everything that had happened to him, his advisers and his wife Zeresh said to him, 'If Mordecai, before whom your downfall has begun, is of the Jewish people, you will not prevail against him, but will surely fall before him.'

7:3 Then Queen Esther answered, 'If I have won your favour, O king, and if it pleases the king, let my life be given me—that is my petition—and the lives of *my people*—that is my request. 4For we have been sold, I and my people, to be destroyed, to be killed, and to be annihilated. If we had been sold merely as slaves, men and women, I would have held my peace; but no enemy can compensate for this damage to the king.'

Opportunity to deal with prejudices such as anti-semitism.
Esther: God

No explicit reference to God.

LXX corrects that problem. Additions to Esther.

Difficulty of Esther making it into the canon.

12When they told Mordecai what Esther had said, 13Mordecai told them to reply to Esther, ‘Do not think that in the king's palace you will escape any more than all the other Jews. 14For if you keep silence at such a time as this, relief and deliverance will rise for the Jews from another quarter, but you and your father's family will perish. Who knows? Perhaps you have come to royal dignity for just such a time as this.’ 15Then Esther said in reply to Mordecai, 16‘Go, gather all the Jews to be found in Susa, and hold a fast on my behalf, and neither eat nor drink for three days, night or day. I and my maids will also fast as you do. After that I will go to the king, though it is against the law; and if I perish, I perish.’ 17Mordecai then went away and did everything as Esther had ordered him.
Esther: Divine/Human Partnership

8:15 Then Mordecai went out from the presence of the king, wearing royal robes of blue and white, with a great golden crown and a mantle of fine linen and purple, while the city of Susa shouted and rejoiced. 16 For the Jews there was light and gladness, joy and honour. 17 In every province and in every city, wherever the king’s command and his edict came, there was gladness and joy among the Jews, a festival and a holiday. Furthermore, many of the peoples of the country professed to be Jews, because the fear of the Jews had fallen upon them.

9:29 Queen Esther daughter of Abihail, along with the Jew Mordecai, gave full written authority, confirming this second letter about Purim. 30 Letters were sent wishing peace and security to all the Jews, to the one hundred and twenty-seven provinces of the kingdom of Ahasuerus, 31 and giving orders that these days of Purim should be observed at their appointed seasons, as the Jew Mordecai and Queen Esther enjoined on the Jews, just as they had laid down for themselves and for their descendants regulations concerning their fasts and their lamentations. 32 The command of Queen Esther fixed these practices of Purim, and it was recorded in writing.

10:1 King Ahasuerus laid tribute on the land and on the islands of the sea. 2 All the acts of his power and might, and the full account of the high honour of Mordecai, to which the king advanced him, are they not written in the annals of the kings of Media and Persia? 3 For Mordecai the Jew was next in rank to King Ahasuerus, and he was powerful among the Jews and popular with his many kindred, for he sought the good of his people and interceded for the welfare of all his descendants.

Chapter 10 sounds a bit like Kings.

Establishing a feast/festival outside the Torah.

Salvation/Deliverance—Mosaic in tone
Ecclesiastes: Introduction

Traditional author is Solomon. At the least we can say it is associated w/Solomon.

Negative Themes:
1. **The Futility of life**
   "Meaningless"—hevel, mist or vapor, futility, absurdity
   1:2 and 12:8—book begins and ends with circularity

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ecclesiastes 1:2</th>
<th>Ecclesiastes 12:8</th>
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<tr>
<td>2 Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.</td>
<td>8 Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher; all is vanity.</td>
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   Futility of finding meaning in this life:
   A. Pleasure—2:1-3, only a momentary break from monotony.
   B. Accomplishments—2:4-11, nothing gained by our accomplishments
   C. Wisdom—2:12-14, the wise and the fools all die
   D. Money—5:10-12, money never satisfies

2. **The Limitations of life**
   "Under the Sun" (29 times) describes our limited perspective (5:2).
   Corollary is the freedom of God (11:5).
   A. We are bound by the cycle of time: 3:1-8
   B. We all share the same fate: 7:1-2 (3:18; 9:2)
   C. We do not understand life
      8:14—righteous get what wicked deserve
      8:16-17—normal processes of life beyond our comprehension
   D. We cannot be perfect (7:16-17)
   E. We grow old—12:1-8

Positive Themes:

1. **Making the most of life**
   Recognizing futility and limitations of life, we should enjoy the good times.
   Sitting around the table with friends, memories of conversation and good times (8:15).
   A. Find satisfaction in your labor
      2:24; 3:13; 5:18-19—enjoy good times and be satisfied with your work
   B. Find a good friend—two are better than one
      4:9-12 companionship is important/loneliness
   C. Enjoy your spouse
      9:9 Rest of life is meaningless, don't make your marriage meaningless too (9:10).
   D. Enjoy your youth
      11:9—a level of responsibility in midst of your good times.
2. **Reverence for God**
   
   Don’t forget the presence of God. Good to get in habit while you’re young and feel good.
   
   A. **Remember Creator in the days of your youth** (12:1). Easier to foster relationship w/God while young, life can become a bitter experience.
   
   B. **Fear God and keep his commandments** 12:13 Only God has the freedom to give life; our task is to accept this reality and worship God.
Ecclesiastes: Death

3:16 Moreover, I saw under the sun that in the place of justice, wickedness was there, and in the place of righteousness, wickedness was there as well. 17 I said in my heart, God will judge the righteous and the wicked, for he has appointed a time for every matter, and for every work. 18 I said in my heart with regard to human beings that God is testing them to show that they are but animals. 19 For the fate of humans and the fate of animals is the same; as one dies, so dies the other. They all have the same breath, and humans have no advantage over the animals; for all is vanity. 20 All go to one place; all are from the dust, and all turn to dust again. 21 Who knows whether the human spirit goes upwards and the spirit of animals goes downwards to the earth? 22 So I saw that there is nothing better than that all should enjoy their work, for that is their lot; who can bring them to see what will be after them?

7:1 A good name is better than precious ointment, and the day of death, than the day of birth. 2 It is better to go to the house of mourning than to go to the house of feasting; for this is the end of everyone, and the living will lay it to heart. 3 Sorrow is better than laughter, for by sadness of countenance the heart is made glad. 4 The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning; but the heart of fools is in the house of mirth.

12 Remember your creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come, and the years draw near when you will say, ‘I have no pleasure in them’; 2 before the sun and the light and the moon and the stars are darkened and the clouds return with the rain; 3 on the day when the guards of the house tremble, and the strong men are bent, and the women who grind cease working because they are few, and those who look through the windows see dimly; 4 when the doors on the street are shut, and the sound of the grinding is low, and one rises up at the sound of a bird, and all the daughters of song are brought low; 5 when one is afraid of heights, and terrors are in the road; the almond tree blossoms, the grasshopper drags itself along and desire fails; because all must go to their eternal home, and the mourners will go about the streets; 6 before the silver cord is snapped, and the golden bowl is broken, and the wheel broken at the cistern, 7 and the dust returns to the earth as it was, and the breath returns to God who gave it. 8 Vanity of vanities, says the Teacher; all is vanity.
Ecclesiastes: Meaning

2:24 There is nothing better for mortals than to eat and drink, and find enjoyment in their toil. This also, I saw, is from the hand of God; for apart from him who can eat or who can have enjoyment? For to the one who pleases him God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy; but to the sinner he gives the work of gathering and heaping, only to give to one who pleases God. This also is vanity and a chasing after wind.

3:12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to be happy and enjoy themselves as long as they live; moreover, it is God's gift that all should eat and drink and take pleasure in all their toil. I know that whatever God does endures for ever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it; God has done this, so that all should stand in awe before him. That which is, already has been; that which is to be, already is; and God seeks out what has gone by.

5:18 This is what I have seen to be good: it is fitting to eat and drink and find enjoyment in all the toil with which one toils under the sun the few days of the life God gives us; for this is our lot. Likewise all to whom God gives wealth and possessions and whom he enables to enjoy them, and to accept their lot and find enjoyment in their toil—this is the gift of God. For they will scarcely brood over the days of their lives, because God keeps them occupied with the joy of their hearts.

9:7 Go, eat your bread with enjoyment, and drink your wine with a merry heart; for God has long ago approved what you do. Let your garments always be white; do not let oil be lacking on your head. Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that are given you under the sun, because that is your portion in life and in your toil at which you toil under the sun. Whatever your hand finds to do, do with your might; for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going.

Finding Joy in the simple gifts that come along our way. Ellen Davis, Getting Involved with God.

Toil—’amal—Fox, Qohelet and His Contradictions, 54-56, suggests that this word means toil and the earnings one get from one’s toil, which, in turn, allows one to enjoy some of life’s simple pleasures.

We should not be slaves to our work (toil’s sake), but we should derive some sense of meaning and pleasure.
Ecclesiastes: God

5 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God; to draw near to listen is better than the sacrifice offered by fools; for they do not know how to keep from doing evil. Never be rash with your mouth, nor let your heart be quick to utter a word before God, for God is in heaven, and you upon earth; therefore let your words be few.

3 For dreams come with many cares, and a fool’s voice with many words.

4 When you make a vow to God, do not delay fulfilling it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Fulfil what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not fulfil it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin, and do not say before the messenger that it was a mistake; why should God be angry at your words, and destroy the work of your hands?

7 With many dreams come vanities and a multitude of words; but fear God.

7:14 On the day of prosperity be joyful, and on the day of adversity consider; God has made the one as well as the other, so that mortals may not find out anything that will come after them.

7:15 In my vain life I have seen everything; there are righteous people who perish in their righteousness, and there are wicked people who prolong their life in their evildoing. Do not be too righteous, and do not act too wise; why should you destroy yourself? Do not be too wicked, and do not be a fool; why should you die before your time? It is good that you should take hold of the one, without letting go of the other; for the one who fears God shall succeed with both.

8:16 When I applied my mind to know wisdom, and to see the business that is done on earth, how one’s eyes see sleep neither day nor night, then I saw all the work of God, that no one can find out what is happening under the sun. However much they may toil in seeking, they will not find it out; even though those who are wise claim to know, they cannot find it out.

12:1a Remember your creator in the days of your youth,

12:13 The end of the matter; all has been heard. Fear God, and keep his commandments; for that is the whole duty of everyone. For God will bring every deed into judgement, including every secret thing, whether good or evil.

1. God does exist and is just
2. Limits of wisdom in understanding God
3. Fear is the appropriate posture before God
4. God provides joy as well as adversity