
*“Equipping believers for **growth** and **service** by encountering God through his word.”*

The Bible for Today

November 4, 2009



Our Context for Ecclesiastes

Content: Concerns questions like the meaning of existence and the relationship between God and people.

- The transitory nature of present life
- A challenge to live wisely in a world where the only certain thing is death and judgment
- All human pursuits are futile, especially those that do not take into account the “fear of the Lord”
- The world is not neat and tidy as we would like it to be

Divisions of Ecclesiastes

- Introduction to the Theme (1:1-11)
- Attempts to Gain at Labor (1:12-2:26)
- A Time for Everything (3:1-22)
- The Individual and Success/ Oppression (4:1-16)
- On Approaching God (5:1-7)
- Wealth and Oppression (5:8-6:12)
- The Advantage of Wisdom (7:1-29)
- Dealing with the Unjust World (8:1-17)
- Living in the Face of Death (9:1-12)
- The Way of Wisdom (9:13-10:20)
- On Not Understanding God's Ways (11:1-8)
- A Final Word to the Young (11:9-12:8)
- Epilogue: Qohelet as a Wise Man (12:9-14)

Introduction to the Theme (1:1-11)

- All is vapor/ midst (*hebel*) “an exhaled breath”
- The Question: “What is the profit of human toil/ labor?” (v.3)
- Nothing humanly designed is permanent or new; only the earth and history are long and permanent
- “under the sun” [used 29 times in Ecclesiastes, but nowhere else in the Bible]
- The cycles of generations, labor, experiences are wearisome; these are all finite in the face of the permanent place of the earth

Attempts to Gain at Labor (1:12-2:26)

- A mixture of positive and negative statements in this section
- Wisdom is useful, but also brings us sorrow because we know all things are vapor (1:18)
- An experiment: Qohelet tried to live in wisdom while testing pleasure and wealth (2:3-11)
- Qohelet considered wisdom: it is good to live wisely, but in the end, the same fate awaits the foolish and the wise (2:12-16)
- Work and pleasure are vapor (2:17-23)
- **Conclusion: view one's earthly gain as a gift from God and enjoy it (2:24-26)**

A Time for Everything (3:1-22)

- There are seasons throughout life (3:1-8); Seasons “just are;” no moral consequence in them
- Humans are caught between temporal things and a sense of eternity (the earth/ seasons will go on without us); difficult for humans to understand; Seasons can be a heavy burden because we do not know the mind of God (3:9-15) [*‘olam*’-eternity; Qohelet is skeptical that humanity can figure out what God has ordained (difficult text in Hebrew)]
- We can adapt to seasons if we see them as a gift from God and live in reverence for what God is doing (3:13-15)
- Judgment will come; only God knows when (3:16-17)
- Humanity’s fate/ Fate of one’s labor? Only God knows (3:18-22)

Some things are not for us to know; only God has the ultimate insight (1 Cor. 13:12-13)

The Individual/ Success and Oppression (4:1-16)

Qohelet picks up theme of justice from 3:16-17

- Oppression and use of power is a horrible state for humanity; it is better not to be born into it (4:1-3)
- Oppression comes from envy (4:4-6)/ [unsure verses]
- Striving for gain itself is lonely (4:7-8)
- It is good to live in relationship instead of being alone (4:9-12)
- Poverty and wisdom are better than wealth and foolishness (4:13-16)
- The successor will also find the same fate (in the end) as the one they succeeded/ no one cares about a king's power/ prestige after they are gone

On Approaching God (5:1-7)

Caution about going into God's house

- Go to listen, not to make rash/ foolish sacrifices (5:1)
- Be careful in quickly jumping into worship without thinking of what you are doing; how are you honoring God in worship; be humble (5:2-3; cf. Mt. 15:1-20)
- Care in making vows/ promises to God you will not keep (5:4-7a; Mt. 5:33-37)
- “Therefore fear God;” have reverence and awe of God when you go into his house (5:7b; Proverbs)

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- Know that we are but dust; humility in knowing this—the grandeur of the universe (Psalm 8).
- Enjoy what God has given to us; be stewards of the gifts
- Value every season of life as a gift; an opportunity to trust in God for his direction and outcomes
- Consider our worship; when we come into the sanctuary, think about what we are doing—reverence for God