

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

"What Time Is It?"

Ecclesiastes 3:1-15

Introduction

1. Solomon is the author of this book (1:1, 12). As the king, he has resources which others did not have (2:12). This made him, according to his view, more capable to give information than anyone else. His efforts cannot be improved, he feels.
2. The conclusion of Solomon is that all is vanity, a word meaning breath, wind, worthlessness (1:2). He adds another phrase to support the nothingness of this present scheme of things: "vexation of spirit" (2:26). These words mean that all is a "striving after wind" or just one big bubble!
3. Solomon has come to this conclusion with his own view of things. No one taking the Scriptures into account and the universe as an integral part of God's infinite purpose would ever say some of the things which Solomon does. We feel forced to affirm that he sees things as the natural man. He does not make conclusions with divine revelation as his source.
4. However, Solomon does show that various areas of human strategy do not provide the satisfaction which is thought possible. The whole present scene is changing (1:3-11). There is nothing here which has permanency, so it is vanity. He adds to this the area of education (1:12-18), pleasure (2:1-11), and wisdom which is linked with honest toil (2:12-26). His arguments are strong and are done with research (1:13). He is not to be easily rejected. It is only as one takes God into account that life is worthwhile at all and events find eternal significance.
5. This chapter deals with additional material for Solomon's melancholy approach to events. The present section concerns the humdrum of activities as a fatalist views them. By definition, a fatalist is one who believes all events are determined by fate or necessity. There is no view of a providential personal God as theism would advance. Hence, in this section, Solomon shows that a fatalistic viewpoint cannot provide a satisfaction of any sort.

1. The notation of APPOINTED TIMES vv. 1-8.

a. Generally v. 1.

Indicating the fatalistic position, Solomon notes that everything in the universe has its appointed "season." This word speaks of a period of time. Similarly, he states that everything has its predetermined "time." Thus the idea of an apparent chance arrangement for every part of the universe is advanced. This is fatalism.

b. Specifically vv. 2-8.

In these verses, Solomon sets down in an orderly fashion a list of 28 different items in 14 pairs. Solomon says that these things are there and nothing can intervene. Satisfaction within this view of the universe does not come. Here are the pairs of events: 1) birth-death, 2) plant-pluck up, 3) kill-heal, 4) break down-build up, 5) weep-laugh, 6) mourn-dance, 7) cast stones-gather stones, 8) embrace-refrain from embrace, 9) get-lose, 10) keep-cast away, 11) tear-sew, 12) keep silence-speak, 13) love-hate, 14) war-peace. It is an imposing list of items which cover the gamut of human experience. Nothing fits the need of the human heart for satisfaction!

2. The notation of UNFULFILLED TIMES vv. 9-11.

In the light of the view that there are the above times and seasons with all of their individual situations, Solomon records the unfilled human heart that abides. He does this in three ways:

a. Work

All the labor a man may be engaged in brings no security of continuance. Everything is conditioned by the changes around him over which he has no control. In effect, all one's wearisome hours are fruitless apart from God. It is a serious conclusion of terrific consequence.

b. Travail

The verb "see" suggests the results of one's research (cf. 1:13). Hence, the considered opinion of the author is that he has seen all the wearisome trouble

which an occupation may cause. The whole scheme of endeavor does not bring the intended or expected satisfaction.

c. Eternity

Here is a new dimension to the argument. Solomon shows that God has made everything beautiful. That is, it falls out in its own appointed time so as to be a connected part of the entire whole. Further, God has put eternity in man. By this he means that man's wants cannot be satisfied by that which is temporal. Again, man cannot get to understand fully the whole of God's work as an all-embracing view of things.

NOTE: It seems inescapable that life as Solomon sees it is as concluded earlier (1:3). With all that is going on, there is nothing which is capable of heart satisfaction. Is there any answer for the dilemma? Apparently not in man's view apart from God.

3. The notation of ENJOYABLE TIMES vv. 12, 13.

The good life for Solomon is not an eternal life. It is rather to rejoice and to do good in this life. It is for man, here and now, to eat, drink, and enjoy the labor which he has experienced. He should take this as a gift of God and let it be.

Conclusion If there is any section in this book which gives evidence that satisfaction is difficult to find in this life, here it is. All available seems to bring work, travail, and unfulfillment. The best thing, then, is to get what you can out of life and hope for God to give you the privilege of such enjoyment. How different is the hope of the true child of God. He knows he is here for a purpose (Eph. 2:10). He knows there is a life to come with Christ (Phil. 1:21-26). May God fill our vision with Him and ever cause the light of His countenance to shine upon us.