

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES
"More On Life's Futility"
Ecclesiastes 4:1-16

Introduction

1. The argument of this book is waged from man's point of view. It is not the revelation from God which is provided. Rather, God gives the privilege for a very wealthy and wise man, Solomon, to show the dead ends of human search for satisfaction. It gives the ground for looking to the Word of God for the final and ultimate answer to life's complex problems.
2. Up to this point, Solomon examined human history (1:4-11), education (1:12-18), amusements (2:1-11), wisdom and employment (2:12-26), fatalism (3:1-13), and the bleakness of the afterlife (3:14-22). Now a further area is reviewed. Is there any answer in this mysterious world to satisfy the human soul? This is the burdened question.
3. Four items are mentioned here to demonstrate that life is futile without God. Resources available to man are limited in their ability to provide what man seeks. Only God can fill the heart for which the heart has been created. The four issues are given:

1. OPPRESSION in the world vv. 1-3.

Here is a mystery which baffled Solomon. He saw the oppression experienced by so many. He saw their tears. In the face of this moral dilemma, the problem Solomon observed was that there was no one to comfort. This harasses him. On the other hand, on the side of the opposition was power. That could not be reconciled. It was a mystery.

In view of the above, Solomon indicated it was better to be dead. This at least would take one out of the realm of the manifold problems of life. Human miseries would not be experienced under such circumstances! Indeed, he makes one further move: the unborn are better off than the dead. Why? He never has any experience with the wicked actions of people. There is no solution to the problem of oppression. The only one offered: be dead or unborn!

2. RIVALRY in the world vv. 4-6.

This is another mystery of life. A man may give expenditure of his strength and involve himself in artful things, but it seems that even this is only to surpass a

neighbor. It is like a poison sting. Hence, he feels it is only vanity and a bubble.

The opposite, of course, of real work is the man who is indolent. But, this says, Solomon is self-destructive. Instead of providing for his own flesh needs, he feeds on his flesh. Thus he wastes away.

So, with the envy on the one hand and the self-destruction on the other, what do you do? He has no answer. He seems to indicate that the fool consumes his life away. But, a little rest is better than labor of a windy sort if it is urged on by rivalry. It is an impasse. So, effort or indolence does not provide an answer to the problem of life.

3. MISERLINESS in the world vv. 7-12.

This man is given a full description. He is alone. He does not have a wife nor children. He is friendless and childless. But, in spite of this situation, his labor never ends. His eye is never satisfied with all his gain. He is never satisfied with all that he possesses. In fact, he asks himself questions about his labor and the restlessness of his soul. He finds it all is just vanity and heavy travail.

Solomon concludes it is better not to be alone. This is true in labor (v. 9), times of need (v. 10), in sleep (v. 11), and in times of violence (v. 12). So, a miser's life alone is not satisfying either.

4. POPULARITY in the world vv. 13-16.

It is almost like a personal testimony in this text. Solomon points out that it is better to be a young wise child than an old imbecilic king. The old king can no longer run his affairs nor be helped (v. 13).

To the above situation, a man comes out of prison and reigns. The true king is deposed and becomes poor. But this did not last long with the fickle people. It was not long when the new king also fell to disfavor (vv. 15-16). The point is obvious: popularity seems to run its course like everything else. The banners soon fall and disgrace ensues.

Conclusion Solomon has surveyed four major areas of possible satisfaction: oppression, rivalry, miserliness, and popularity. Each one proves vanity. It is all a bubble. Oh, to be found "IN CHRIST" with all of His blessings (Eph. 1:3). This is heaven on earth. Glory to God!