

THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

"The Great Contradiction"

Ecclesiastes 6:1-12

Introduction

1. We cannot remind ourselves too often that this book was written by Solomon (1:1, 12). It is an expression of his own observations on life. He finds everything to be worthless and a striving after wind (bubbles!).

2. To this point in the book, Solomon has shown the emptiness of human history (1:4-11), education (1:12-18), amusements (2:1-11), wisdom and employment (2:12-26), fatalism (3:1-13), the bleakness of the afterlife (3:14-22), oppression, rivalry, miserliness, and popularity (4:1-16), religious practices and money (5:1-20). The list is long, but the unmerciless considerations of Solomon leave nothing unturned. He runs the gamut of man's argument for satisfaction. Nothing is adequate.

3. In one sense, Solomon sees a sort of contradiction. The "good" there is in life (5:18-20) poses some problems. It is dealt with under three potent statements:

1. The POSITION of materialism vv. 1-6a.

a. It is common v. 1.

Solomon sees an evil under the sun. It is something which is common to many. The word for "mèn" is "Adam." The thought is: the situation concerns the race of humanity.

b. It is concerned v. 2.

Three words are used for the materialism gained: riches, wealth, and honor (abundance). The person who has this lacks nothing. But he has no energy to participate in it all. Rather, another takes it. This is likened to a disease which robs a man of participating in what he possesses.

c. It is considered vv. 3-6a.

Another person is mentioned here. This one has besides his wealth, children, old age (some Jews felt up to a million years!), but no fulfillment and no burial of an honorable nature. Indeed, he departs in vanity, and his name is covered in darkness. The result of such a horrible situation is that it would be better not to have lived at all. The word "untimely birth" notes a fetus which is born

lifeless from the womb. Such a one is better off than a joyless life of someone just described who yet has everything as his possessions. It is a sad experience for one who had this life's goods but gained nothing from them!

2. The DECISION of materialism vv. 6b-9.

Various statements already indicated in the book are now rehearsed. Their repetition enforces his thoughts:

a. All go to one place v. 6b. The concepts of the afterlife are extremely dim. There is little here for comfort.

b. All labor for the mouth v. 7. The thought of mere existence is forwarded here. It is difficult to get beyond the satisfaction of the self life.

c. All wise have no advantage v. 8a. The fool is no less situated than the wise man. There is no difference between them.

d. All poor are like the rich vv. 8b-9. In fact, the argument here is that the poor man is better than the rich. At least his eyes are not wandering after some unfulfilled desire. The whole is just a lump of worthlessness and striving after wind.

3. The SUMMATION of materialism vv. 10-12.

a. Experience relates to man (Adam) v. 10. Things are as they are due to humanity. There is no way by which humanity can change what God has decreed. He alone is mightier than man.

b. Experience relates to vanity v. 11. Since things advance vanity, man is not out of the circle of the events. He has no advantage over any creation.

c. Experience relates to mysteries v. 12. There is no one who can unravel the mysteries of this life, let alone the one to come. The present life is a vain one and spent as a shadow. None knows what will be in the future.

Conclusion This is a dark chapter of the book. But this should lead one to something better. It is Christ (1 Cor. 1:18-25). When this is gained, then one can go on to the next section (1 Cor. 1:26-31) and see how God provides all that a soul needs in the person and work of Christ our Lord. Every other apparent satisfying situation falls before that which is in Christ our Lord. So be it.