

## THE BOOK OF ECCLESIASTES

### "What About Life After Death?"

Ecclesiastes 9:1-12

#### Introduction

1. This book is divided into two major sections (1-6; 7-12). The second section is a summary of conclusions on the basis of the observations and experiences of the first. Solomon has much philosophical comment to make.

2. One factor bleeds through well: wisdom is to be exalted. There is no doubt but what wisdom is a preferred item. However, wisdom is not always totally satisfying. There remain mysteries (7:23; 8:17).

3. It is from this point that the present chapter moves. With wisdom not absolute, what next? There are still many inquiries. Here are some of them:

1. About the COMMON FATE vv. 1-6.

a. Determinism v. 1. The verb for "declare" is only used here in the Old Testament. It means to search, examine, prove. Hence, the words here are not off the cuff, but pondered. It is affirmed that the righteous, wise, and their works are all in the hand of God. This is divine determinism (cf. Psa. 31:15; Prov. 21:1). Even the matters of morality, such as love and hate, are not within man's powers. These ethical items are laid out, but unknown to man.

b. Equality v. 2. Various groups are mentioned: righteous, wicked, good, clean, sinner, sacrificer, non-sacrificer, those who swear and those who give no oath. All, says Solomon, are the same. The moral conditions of man, therefore, do not divide men. All of every sort have every sort of event. There is a human leveling advanced here.

c. Life vv. 3, 4. Whereas previously (4:2; 7:1) death had been promoted, here life is given priority. Since evil in this world is not visibly punished, men become confident and bold in sinning. They satisfy their own inclinations and lusts. This is madness! After such a lifetime, the end comes! If you live, there is hope, but death is nothing. The dog, a common animal, if alive is better than a lion, the king of animals, who is dead. Solomon is in despair about death.

d. Death vv. 5, 6. Here is a strong and sarcastic verification of the choice of life over death, of the living dog over the dead lion. This is probably the most comfortless statement about death to be found. Dead have no reward and no memory. Moral and ethical items are gone. It

is indeed a dismal picture. It is all a pitch to have life over death. The only way to explain this dark picture is to see it in the light of progressive revelation and its view of things from natural man. There is utter pessimism here. It remains for the New Testament to give the full orb of life after death. Yet, even in the Old Testament there are rays of light which set forth the glory of that life to come (e.g. Job 19:25).

2. About the COMMON GOAL vv. 7-10.

a. Involves God. The phrase "for God now accepteth thy works" is considered to mean that God wills that the conduct described here be permitted. Therefore, there is no reason for scruples about it. True, there are moral limits, but it is not to be denied.

b. Involves life. An entire series of events is noted here: eating, drinking, wearing of garments, oil for the head, family life, and a capacity to work. This is all in which one should engage himself. It is the return to a familiar theme (cf. 8:15).

c. Involves death. Once again the darkness of death is noted. It is a place of no work, device, knowledge, wisdom. On these grounds, it is better to live up the present life.

3. About the COMMON UNCERTAINTY vv. 11, 12.

a. Stated v. 11. Solomon gives a long list of circumstances: fleetness, strength, wisdom, understanding, and favor, but to none of these is there surety of victory. The reason for this uncertainty is that the times and circumstances related to them lie beyond the control of man. He is not the master of his own life.

b. Illustrated v. 12. The reason for man not having mastery over his situation is that ere the result is reached of which he appears able to obtain, suddenly his time expires and his term of life is exhausted. This suddenness of being overtaken with a catastrophe is seen by comparison with fish who are suddenly caught in the net or the birds who are suddenly caught in a snare. A Biblical example of this concerns Ahab who was fatally wounded by an arrow which was not aimed at him (2 Chron. 18:33, 34).

Conclusion So, once again Solomon has forced the true child of God to see the utter wastefulness of this life and that to come, if understood on purely natural grounds. But there is hope for the now and the future. How? Through the Lord Jesus Christ, the Messiah of Israel and the Savior of the world (1 Cor. 15:12-19).