

## Background on Ecclesiastes

Ecclesiastes is a book that at first appears mysterious and pessimistic. The Hebrew name for the book means simply teacher and though most think the author is King Solomon especially with the references to wisdom and kingly living. The book reads sort of like a diary of someone who tries everything the world has to offer. The majority of the book speaks about the emptiness or vanity of life, but is concluded with a firm call to trust God and be obedient. It is important that we read Ecclesiastes in the context of all of Scripture. In the verses, for example, where Solomon seems to speak as one who is without hope it's paramount that we remember the affirmation of our hope in Christ (see Romans 5:1-6). Below is an explanation of the purpose of Ecclesiastes from the Expositor's Commentary:

The theme of the book appears in the prologue: "Meaningless! Meaningless! Everything is meaningless." The general conclusion comes in the epilogue, which speaks of fearing God and keeping his commandments because we must one day give account to him. The meaning and purpose of the book must be discovered within this framework. Life in the world is subject to frustration; but man can

still accept his circumstances, even enjoy them, and find strength to live life as it comes.

Where does one start to build a way of life that transcends the meaninglessness of the world? Can purpose for life be found in nature, money, self-indulgence, property, position, intelligence, philosophy, and religious observances? Obviously, some of these pursuits are better than others, but all encounter some crowning frustration that invalidates them as solutions to the problem of living. The world does not contain the key to itself. It can be found only in God. Roughly speaking, this is the theme of chapters 1-6.

### Ecclesiastes 3:1-8

<sup>1</sup> *There is a time for everything, and a season for every activity under heaven:*  
<sup>2</sup> *a time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot,*  
<sup>3</sup> *a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build,*  
<sup>4</sup> *a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance,*  
<sup>5</sup> *a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain,*  
<sup>6</sup> *a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away,*  
<sup>7</sup> *a time to tear and a time to mend, a time to be silent and a time to speak,*  
<sup>8</sup> *a time to love and a time to hate, a time for war and a time for peace.*

This is probably the most familiar passage in Ecclesiastes and it does set up the framework of the whole book. Read it a second time before going to the questions.

### QUESTIONS

1. What role do we have in "every activity under Heaven?" (See Ephesians 2:10).
2. "plant and uproot" has both a literal and figurative sense. For the literal sense look at Eccl. 11:6 for the figurative sense see Jer. 4:3 and Matt. 13:24-30. In the literal sense what does this verse say? about the importance of work and rest?
3. In the figurative sense what are things in your life that need to be uprooted?
4. How does, if at all, God use His people for the activities mentioned in v. 3?
5. Look at V. 7. Are you more likely to be silent or to speak at the right time?
6. How do you

determine what that time is?

7. When is the "time to hate?" (see Romans 12:9, 1 John 4:20)

### Ecclesiastes 3:9-15

<sup>9</sup> *What does the worker gain from his toil?*  
<sup>10</sup> *I have seen the burden God has laid on men.*  
<sup>11</sup> *He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end.*  
<sup>12</sup> *I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live.*  
<sup>13</sup> *That everyone may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all his toil—this is the gift of God.*  
<sup>14</sup> *I know that everything God does will endure forever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that men will revere him.*  
<sup>15</sup> *Whatever is has already been, and what will be has been before; and God will call the past to account.*

### QUESTIONS

1. Why do we struggle with wanting to know God's whole plan?
2. In our fallen state we can't know it all. So according to God's word what should we do? (see v. 12-13 and Matt. 6:33)

3. How should we properly enjoy life?
4. In general are Christians good at Biblical life enjoyment? Why or Why Not?
5. What beautiful things have you seen God do in His time in your life?
6. According to V. 15, why should we learn from the past?

### **Ecclesiastes 3:16-22**

<sup>16</sup> *And I saw something else under the sun: In the place of judgment—wickedness was there, in the place of justice—wickedness was there.*

<sup>17</sup> *I thought in my heart, “God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed.”*

<sup>18</sup> *I also thought, “As for men, God tests them so that they may see that they are like the animals.*

<sup>19</sup> *Man’s fate is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: As one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath; man has no advantage over the animal. Everything is meaningless.*

<sup>20</sup> *All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.*

<sup>21</sup> *Who knows if the spirit of man rises upward and if the spirit of the animal goes down into the earth?”*

<sup>22</sup> *So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work, because that is his lot. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him?*

### **QUESTIONS**

1. How should we respond when those who do wrong are rewarded? (See Romans 12:17-21).
2. How are man and animals the same, how are they different?
3. What is the goal of your life?

### **APPLICATION**

The most familiar song associated with Ecclesiastes 3 is probably the popular rock song “Turn, Turn, Turn,” but the most applicable reflection on the message of this chapter comes from a hymn of the faith:

#### **In His Time**

*Author Unknown*

In His time, in His time.

He makes all things beautiful, in His time.

Lord, please show me every day,  
As You are teaching me Your way,  
That You do just what You say,  
In Your time.

In Your time, in Your time,  
You make all things beautiful, in  
Your time.

Lord, my life to You I bring,  
May each song I have to sing  
Be to You a lovely thing,  
In Your time.

**Trust the Lord and serve Him everyday. And while you are at it, enjoy ever waking moment.**

## **FAITH SUNDAY** **SCHOOL LESSON**

**July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

**“In His Time”**

**Focal Passage: Ecclesiastes 3**

**Cross References: Ecclesiastes 8, 12:9-14, John 10:10, Romans 8**

**Historical Context:** If the Book of Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon (this is the common agreement among the majority of scholars and the indication of the text “son of David in 1:1), the occasion of its writing was in his last years. In **2:1-11** he describes a lifetime of accumulating wealth, and in chapters **11-12** he writes as one beginning to experience the onset of old age. He writes for young men who might learn from his experiences (**11:9; 12:1**; cf. **Prov 1:8** et al.).

Wright, J. Stafford. “Occasion of Ecclesiastes” In *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*: Volume 5. 1144. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, © 1991.

**Central Idea:** The circumstances of life come and go and are common to every person. If we fail to recognize God’s hand and activity life can seem meaningless and is ultimately pointless. When life is viewed from God’s perspective it has great promise and purpose.

**Lesson Idea:** It is imperative that we know and remember that God is working and is in control. His aim is for people to see Him and He does this with true beauty and mastery. We must align ourselves with God if

desire to have enjoyment and fulfillment.

### **Bible in a Year Daily Readings**

**July 5<sup>th</sup>- July 11<sup>th</sup>, 2010**

July 5 <sup>th</sup>	Proverbs 18-20
July 6 <sup>th</sup>	Proverbs 21-23
July 7 <sup>th</sup>	Proverbs 24-26
July 8 <sup>th</sup>	Proverbs 27-29
July 9 <sup>th</sup>	Proverbs 30-31
July 10 <sup>th</sup>	Ecclesiastes 1-4
July 11 <sup>th</sup>	Ecclesiastes 5-8

### **Highlights of the Week**

**Proverbs 19: “zeal without knowledge.”**

**Proverbs 20: Led astray**

**Proverbs 22:17-24:22: Sayings of the Wise**

**Proverbs 25:11 “A word aptly spoken”**

**Proverbs 28:13 The importance of confession**

**Proverbs 31 The wife of noble character**

**Ecclesiastes 1 “Everything is Meaningless”**

**Ecclesiastes 2 The emptiness of pleasure**

**Ecclesiastes 5:1-6 Standing in Awe of God**

**Ecclesiastes 8:15-17 Enjoyment of life and the greatness of God**