

Sermon, June 26, 2011
“Time”, Ecclesiastes 3:1-14
Pastor Thomas P. Bellhy

The Books of Poetry and Wisdom¹

- Job, Psalms, Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, and Song of Solomon are regarded as books of poetry; Job, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes are also books of wisdom.
- Job: cosmic struggle between the Lord and angelic enemies
- Psalms: the full range of emotions
- Proverbs: a father’s and mother’s wisdom sayings to their son
- Ecclesiastes: musings about the human condition
- Song of Solomon: love song of a bride and groom

Overview of Ecclesiastes:

- The English title, Ecclesiastes, comes from the Greek and Latin translations of Solomon’s book and means “preacher.”²
- Solomon was writing, probably in his latter years (no later than ca. 931 B.C.), primarily to warn others to avoid walking through life on the path of human wisdom; he exhorted them to live by the revealed wisdom of God (12:9-14).³
- The word “vanity” or “meaningless” in some versions is used 38 times in the 12 chapters. Other allusions to meaningless life include statements like “chasing after the wind”, or “what profit is there?”
- הֶבֶל *hebel* **Meaning:** vapor, breath; delusion, emptiness, fleeting, fraud, futility, vanity, worthless, meaningless.
- While Proverbs is the wisdom of the Father, Ecclesiastes is the meaninglessness of the wisdom of the world.
- You do not have to go outside the Bible to find the merely human philosophy of life. God has given us in the book of Ecclesiastes the record of all that human thinking and natural religion has ever been able to discover concerning the meaning and goal of life. The arguments in the book, therefore, are not God’s arguments, but God’s record of people’s arguments.⁴
- **Overall Outline Ecclesiastes:**
 - I. Prologue introducing some of the themes of the “Preacher’s thought (1:1-11)
 - II. Long monologue of the “preacher” (1:12-12:8)
 - III. Epilogue (12:8-14)

Major Themes of Ecclesiastes:

- Worldly goals when pursued in and of themselves lead to emptiness.
- Careful attention must be paid to the context in order to understand that what the preacher is saying is for the most part vain human wisdom apart from the Godly wisdom we saw in Proverbs. It is similar to the worldly advice given by the friends of Job.
- It contains “dubious teachings when judged in the light of the rest of Scripture”⁵
- The last verses (12:13-14) summarize the conclusion and correct perspective that we have learned in the Old Testament readings so far; have a right relationship with God, obedience to the Father, and a proper understanding of the future judgment.

Ecclesiastes cautions you about depending on worldly wisdom and relying instead on the wisdom of God.

1. From birth to death you continue to learn about the seasons of life

- **Ecclesiastes 3:1-2**
- In this brief 10 word sentence of 1:2 a lifetime is spent
- In the years of living you will see, gather, digest a multitude of experiences

¹ Mears, H., “What the Bible is All About”, p.182

² MacArthur Study Bible

³ MacArthur Study Bible

⁴ Mears, H., “What the Bible is All About”, p.214

⁵ Dillard, Raymond, An Introduction to the Old Testament, p.253.

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2. They are summarized by the preacher in Ecclesiastes...

- **Ecclesiastes 3:2-8**
- In all of the paths you take, decisions you make, life you lead you will be tempted to understand them in the dim light of the world
- The preacher concludes in Ecclesiastes 3:16-22
- The nihilistic philosophy of the preacher still rages in our time.

3. Philosophy (love of wisdom) has taken a similar course in bringing us to the predominant current “worldview” of atheistic materialism.

- The Reformation of the 16th Century taught us that God has spoken in the Scriptures and that Scripture represents the true, objective revelation of God in heavenly and natural things.
- The classic philosophy of the 18th Century (Bacon & others), taught thesis/antithesis, truth/falsehood, absolute truth.
- Until Kant injected the possibility of other choices, the difference and dependence upon reason and experience.
- 19th Century Hegel propounded upon thesis/antithesis/synthesis, then Kierkegaard
- 20th Nietzsche, nihilism (nothing) eat/drink/be merry there is no truth
- 21st Thomas Kuhn, Sartre (existentialist), relativism no absolute truth, truth is truth for you
- Relativism tied with nihilism = atheistic materialism... eat/drink/be merry, there is no truth, and if there is, it is only true to you, not me
- **Modern thought in its effort to rid itself from God made great strides in separating the wisdom of God from absolute truth.**

4. The preacher does seem to try to grasp the sovereign nature of God, but...

- **Ecclesiastes 3:11-14**
- Only to revert to the meaninglessness of life (3:16-22)

5. There is promise in a willing heart who seeks the wisdom of the Father

- **Proverbs 1:8-9**
*8 Hear, my child, your father's instruction, and do not reject your mother's teaching;
9 for they are a fair garland for your head, and pendants for your neck.*
- **Ecclesiastes 12:12-14**
12 But beyond this, my son, be warned: the writing of many books is endless, and excessive devotion to books is wearying to the body. 13 The conclusion, when all has been heard, is: fear God and keep His commandments, because this applies to every person. 14 For God will bring every act to judgment, everything which is hidden, whether it is good or evil.
- The willing heart who seeks wisdom in Christ will be lifted up and placed at the table of the King.

Conclusion

- Today's worldly wisdom of atheistic materialism will never lead you to life only death.
- Life is not meaningless, vanity, useless, a vapor that disappears
- Ecclesiastes cautions you about depending on worldly wisdom and relying instead on the wisdom of God in Christ.
- Roger McGuinn relied on earthly wisdom, but eventually turned to Jesus. In 1977 he became a Christian.
- Christ was and is wisdom personified.
- Christ is the Word incarnate (made alive)
- He lived a life pleasing His Father
- He embodies wisdom and knowledge.
- He is the way, the truth and the light.
- In Christ life has the true meaning intended by God, not man.