

## **Ecclesiastes Chapters 3:1 - 4:6**

Brentwood Oaks Teacher Prep.

Tue, Mar 7, 2006

### **I. Review of last week: summary statement #1 in 2:24-26: The enjoyment of life.**

- A. *The redemption of Qohelet's pessimism: enjoy life, but know that there is a wild card: God's sovereignty.*
- B. *compare with 3:22 and 5:18-19 — these sayings end sections.*
- C. *True enjoyment from God.*
  - 1. eat, drink, and work--nothing better than this.
  - 2. But, be aware that to the one God pleases he gives this stuff, and to whom he is not pleased, they are withheld.
    - a. Note and caveat: God is sovereign and may not be held by our standards of fairness.
  - 3. His recommendation: enjoy life, if you can.
- D. *But, in the final analysis, even this enjoyment, if it is pursued for its own sake, is a striving after wind.*

### **II. Time and work: 3:1-4:6.**

- A. *This section is a single unit due to the presence of hebel (vapor, vanity) and "grazing on wind."*
  - 1. It can be broken down into major sections at 1-15 (poem on time), 16-22, 4:1-3 and 4:1-6.
  - 2. Everything deals with *human time*; 4:1-6 deals more with life, death, and toil, but even this comes under human life and death.
  - 3. Notice "I saw": 3:10, 16, 4:1, 4:4. Human observation, under the sun. Wisdom is the practical wisdom of observation, but subject to the limitations of human frailty and mortality.
- B. *God's time as in Job.*
  - 1. The repetition of earlier themes: note the themes of time and mortality in chapter 1:1-11..
  - 2. Job wanted to know when the times of God are—when will God act to justify the righteous and punish the wicked?
  - 3. Qohelet has the answer: God has all the times.
    - They are fixed and determined, and we can't know what they are.
- C. *Poem on time: 3:1-15.*
  - 1. God fixes and controls all the activities of human life.
  - 2. Human endeavour and striving are therefore futile v. 9 says there is no *yithrôn.*, no advantage, remainder, or profit.
  - 3. Time and work: 14-15.

- a. The Hebrew word for eternity (*ʿôlam*) = world, eternity, duration, "the all."
  - b. Whether this is positive or negative is not important—we cannot comprehend it, whether it is good or bad.
  - c. v.
    - 14: God's actions are in the realm of the eternal, the forever and unchangeable, to the end that people fear him.
  - d. The only proper response on the part of humans in light of the eternal is reverential fear.
- D. *Time, death, and injustice: 3:16-22.*
- 1. God's time and justice.
    - a. Injustice prevails when right should.
    - b. God is apparently just and a judge in Qohelet, but this justice pertains to the realm of the eternal, and we cannot grasp it.
  - 2. We are either being tested or separated by death, but the result is that we die just like the animals.
- E. *4:1-3: better off dead than oppressed.*
- 1. Seems to contradict what he says about the preference of life (9:4-5).
  - 2. Life and justice are not what they ought to be, therefore it can be preferable to be dead or unborn.
- F. *The ambiguity of toil: 4:4-6.*
- 1. Labor may achieve prosperity, but promotes rivalry and envy.
  - 2. The next line seems to be favorable to labor.
  - 3. The next line seems to again favor rest, or at least moderation.