

Ecclesiastes: The Teacher's Reflections – Part 1 (c. 937t–932t BC)**Ecclesiastes 1–3****Introduction**

1:1 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem.

- 2 “Vanity of vanities,” says the Preacher,
“Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.”
- 3 What advantage does man have in all his work
Which he does under the sun?
- 4 A generation goes and a generation comes,
But the earth remains forever.
- 5 Also, the sun rises and the sun sets;
And hastening to its place it rises there *again*.
- 6 Blowing toward the south,
Then turning toward the north,
The wind continues swirling along;
And on its circular courses the wind returns.
- 7 All the rivers flow into the sea,
Yet the sea is not full.
To the place where the rivers flow,
There they flow again.
- 8 All things are wearisome;
Man is not able to tell *it*.
The eye is not satisfied with seeing,
Nor is the ear filled with hearing.
- 9 That which has been is that which will be,
And that which has been done is that which will be done.
So there is nothing new under the sun.
- 10 Is there anything of which one might say,
“See this, it is new”?
Already it has existed for ages
Which were before us.
- 11 There is no remembrance of earlier things;
And also of the later things which will occur,
There will be for them no remembrance
Among those who will come later *still*.

On the Activities of Men

12 I, the Preacher, have been king over Israel in Jerusalem.

13 And I set my mind to seek and explore by wisdom concerning all that has been done under heaven. *It* is a grievous task *which* God has given to the sons of men to be afflicted with.

14 I have seen all the works which have been done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and striving after wind.

15 What is crooked cannot be straightened and what is lacking cannot be counted.

On the Benefits of Wisdom

16 I said to myself, “Behold, I have magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before me; and my mind has observed a wealth of wisdom and knowledge.”

17 And I set my mind to know wisdom and to know madness and folly; I realized that this also is striving after wind.

18 Because in much wisdom there is much grief, and increasing knowledge *results in* increasing pain.

On Self-Indulgence

2:1 I said to myself, “Come now, I will test you with pleasure. So enjoy yourself.” And behold, it too was futility.

2 I said of laughter, “It is madness,” and of pleasure, “What does it accomplish?”

3 I explored with my mind *how* to stimulate my body with wine while my mind was guiding *me* wisely, and how to take hold of folly, until I could see what good there is for the sons of men to do under heaven the few years of their lives.

On Possessions and Personal Accomplishment

4 I enlarged my works: I built houses for myself, I planted vineyards for myself;

5 I made gardens and parks for myself and I planted in them all kinds of fruit trees;

6 I made ponds of water for myself from which to irrigate a forest of growing trees.

7 I bought male and female slaves and I had homeborn slaves. Also I possessed flocks and herds larger than all who preceded me in Jerusalem.

8 Also, I collected for myself silver and gold and the treasure of kings and provinces. I provided for myself male and female singers and the pleasures of men—many concubines.

9 Then I became great and increased more than all who preceded me in Jerusalem. My wisdom also stood by me.

10 All that my eyes desired I did not refuse them. I did not withhold my heart from any pleasure, for my heart was pleased because of all my labor and this was my reward for all my labor.

11 Thus I considered all my activities which my hands had done and the labor which I had exerted, and behold all was vanity and striving after wind and there was no profit under the sun.

On the Difference Between Wisdom and Folly

12 So I turned to consider wisdom, madness and folly; for what *will* the man *do* who will come after the king *except* what has already been done?

13 And I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness.

14 The wise man’s eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. And yet I know that one fate befalls them both.

On the Transitory Nature of Life

15 Then I said to myself, “As is the fate of the fool, it will also befall me. Why then have I been extremely wise?” So I said to myself, “This too is vanity.”

16 For there is no lasting remembrance of the wise man *as* with the fool, inasmuch as *in* the coming days all will be forgotten. And how the wise man and the fool alike die!

17 So I hated life, for the work which had been done under the sun was grievous to me; because everything is futility and striving after wind.

18 Thus I hated all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun, for I must leave it to the man who will come after me.

19 And who knows whether he will be a wise man or a fool? Yet he will have control over all the fruit of my labor for which I have labored by acting wisely under the sun. This too is vanity.

20 Therefore I completely despaired of all the fruit of my labor for which I had labored under the sun.

21 When there is a man who has labored with wisdom, knowledge and skill, then he gives his legacy to one who has not labored with them. This too is vanity and a great evil.

22 For what does a man get in all his labor and in his striving with which he labors under the sun?

23 Because all his days his task is painful and grievous; even at night his mind does not rest. This too is vanity.

On Finding Contentment in Pleasing God

24 There is nothing better for a man *than* to eat and drink and tell himself that his labor is good. This also I have seen that it is from the hand of God.

25 For who can eat and who can have enjoyment without Him?

26 For to a person who is good in His sight He has given wisdom and knowledge and joy, while to the sinner He has given the task of gathering and collecting so that he may give to one who is good in God's sight. This too is vanity and striving after wind.

On the Ebb and Flow of Human Activities

3:1 There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven—

- 2 A time to give birth and a time to die;
A time to plant and a time to uproot what is planted.
- 3 A time to kill and a time to heal;
A time to tear down and a time to build up.
- 4 A time to weep and a time to laugh;
A time to mourn and a time to dance.
- 5 A time to throw stones and a time to gather stones;
A time to embrace and a time to shun embracing.
- 6 A time to search and a time to give up as lost;
A time to keep and a time to throw away.
- 7 A time to tear apart and a time to sew together;
A time to be silent and a time to speak.
- 8 A time to love and a time to hate;
A time for war and a time for peace.

On the Occupation of Men

9 What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils?

10 I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves.

11 He has made everything appropriate in its time. He has also set eternity in their heart, yet so that man will not find out the work which God has done from the beginning even to the end.

12 I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime;

13 moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor—it is the gift of God.

14 I know that everything God does will remain forever; there is nothing to add to it and there is nothing to take from it, for God has *so* worked that men should fear Him.

15 That which is has been already and that which will be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by.

On Injustice and God's Final Judgment

16 Furthermore, I have seen under the sun *that* in the place of justice there is wickedness and in the place of righteousness there is wickedness.

17 I said to myself, "God will judge both the righteous man and the wicked man," for a time for every matter and for every deed is there.

On the Fate of Men and Animals

18 I said to myself concerning the sons of men, "God has surely tested them in order for them to see that

they are but beasts.”

19 For the fate of the sons of men and the fate of beasts is the same. As one dies so dies the other; indeed, they all have the same breath and there is no advantage for man over beast, for all is vanity.

20 All go to the same place. All came from the dust and all return to the dust.

21 Who knows that the breath of man ascends upward and the breath of the beast descends downward to the earth?

22 I have seen that nothing is better than that man should be happy in his activities, for that is his lot. For who will bring him to see what will occur after him?

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