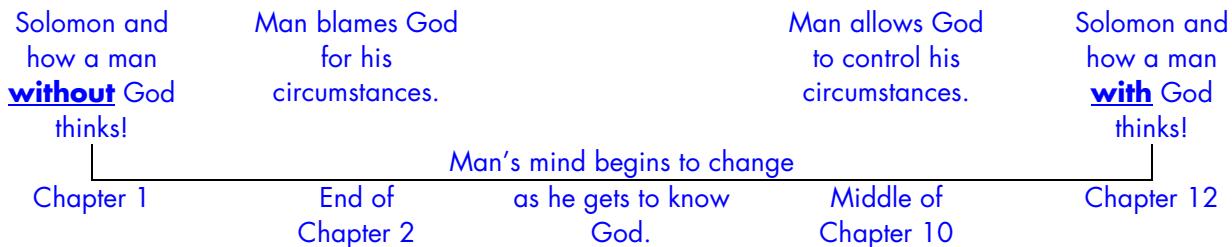


## Ecclesiastes<sup>2</sup> The Words of the Preacher

### Lesson 2 Ecclesiastes Chapters 3 - 4

#### THE PROGRESSION OF HOW A MAN WITHOUT GOD THINKS TO HOW A MAN WITH GOD THINKS IN ECCLESIASTES



#### Man's Thoughts – A Time for Everything

**Ecclesiastes 3:1** There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven—<sup>2</sup> A time to give birth, and a time to die; A time to plant, and a time to uproot what is planted. <sup>3</sup> A time to kill, and a time to heal; A time to tear down, and a time to build up. <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 throw stones, and a time to gather stones; A time to embrace, and a time to shun embracing. <sup>6</sup> A time to search, and a time to give up as lost; A time to keep, and a time to throw away. <sup>7</sup> A time to tear apart, and a time to sew together; 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. <sup>9</sup> What profit is there to the worker from that in which he toils? <sup>10</sup> I have seen the task which God has given the sons of men with which to occupy themselves. <sup>11</sup> 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.

Adding to Solomon's despair is his realization that God has added to the burden of an appointed time for everything under the sun. Here is the famous list used by many when all other wisdom and understanding cannot answer the questions in the hearts of the people. People ask why? Here's your answer. It covers all the facets of life. The one problem with this is that it is man's list, not God's. It is from man's perspective, not God's. After completing the task of searching for wisdom and understanding, the result is simply a list of appointed times. But where is the advantage for man and where is the profit in his labor? Did God make it so that man had to work? The choice was actually man's. God had provided a Garden of Eden with one rule. Man broke the rule and was forced to till the ground by the sweat of his brow and Solomon blames that on God.

Solomon states that God has set "eternity in man's heart." What a tremendous thought to have man's future implanted in his heart by God. The problem in this passage is in the second phrase that says "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." But this cannot be so! Paul, in Romans 1 contradicts this thought. Romans 1 speaks the truth of

<sup>2</sup> All Scriptures in this lesson entitled "The Ecclesiastes, the Words of the Preacher" are taken from the NEW AMERICAN STANDARD BIBLE, Copyright (C) 1960, 1962, 1963, 1968, 1971, 1972, 1973, 1975, 1977, 1988, by The Lockman Foundation. Used by permission.

God.<sup>3</sup> Ecclesiastes 3 speaks the thoughts of man and there is a difference between the two. Something is wrong here!

**Ecclesiastes 3:12** I know that there is nothing better for them than to rejoice and to do good in one's lifetime;<sup>13</sup> moreover, that every man who eats and drinks sees good in all his labor- it is the gift of God. <sup>14</sup>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. <sup>15</sup>That which is has been already, and that which will be has already been, for God seeks what has passed by.

Because we do not know the works of God, Solomon concludes that we should just do our best. Just rejoice and do good, eat and drink, for this is the evidence of one's good labor. He concludes that this is the gift of God. What is the gift of God? Food and drink?

Nothing more can be added to the work and deeds of God in Solomon's mind. The past is set. The future is set. What has already been is done and over. What is still in the future is already accomplished and over in God's eyes according to Solomon. There's nothing new with God. All events are "as good as done" with God. So what's the sense in trying to change or rearrange anything? Nothing can be changed. God has done all He is going to do.

### Man's Thoughts – All Go to the Same Place

**Ecclesiastes 3: 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. <sup>17</sup>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.

To Solomon, man is corrupt and wicked. Where justice and right should prevail, wickedness is found. Where righteousness should reign supreme, wickedness is also there! A place cannot be found in this world where wickedness does not show its ugly head. Not to worry, Solomon says, God will judge them both. Every man will stand in judgment for every deed and every matter. Time is set and the judgment will happen. But are they judged at the same time, or do the righteous and the wicked see different judgments? Paul says,

**1 Cor. 11:32** But when we are judged, we are disciplined by the Lord in order that we may not be condemned along with the world.

There is a difference! The writer of Ecclesiastes has come to the wrong conclusion. His thoughts are not the thoughts of God.

**Ecclesiastes 3: 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."

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<sup>3</sup> **Romans 1:18-23** For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who suppress the truth in unrighteousness, because that which is known about God is evident within them; for God made it evident to them. For since the creation of the world His invisible attributes, His eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly seen, being understood through what has been made, so that they are without excuse. For even though they knew God, they did not honor Him as God, or give thanks; but they became futile in their speculations, and their foolish heart was darkened. Professing to be wise, they became fools, and exchanged the glory of the incorruptible God for an image in the form of corruptible man and of birds and four-footed animals and crawling creatures.

Solomon says that God tests us just to prove that we are no different from all the other beasts of God's creation. Does God test man just to put him in his rightful place under the sun? God does not allow this thought to stand alone in the Scripture. Consider the words of the Creator Himself as He speaks to His disciples.

**Luke 12:22-28** And He said to His disciples, "For this reason I say to you, do not be anxious for your life, as to what you shall eat; nor for your body, as to what you shall put on. 23"For life is more than food, and the body than clothing. 24"Consider the ravens, for they neither sow nor reap; and they have no storeroom nor barn; and yet God feeds them; how much more valuable you are than the birds! 25"And which of you by being anxious can add a *single* cubit to his life's span? 26"If then you cannot do even a very little thing, why are you anxious about other matters? 27"Consider the lilies, how they grow; they neither toil nor spin; but I tell you, even Solomon in all his glory did not clothe himself like one of these. 28"But if God so arrays the grass in the field, which is *alive* today and tomorrow is thrown into the furnace, how much more *will* He clothe you, O men of little faith!

No, we are not just like the beasts of the field. We are different in God's eyes. The author of this book is sadly wrong in his theology.

### **Man or Beast - Their Fate is the Same**

**Ecclesiastes 3: 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** And 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?

Solomon says, "All go to the same place." Is this the eternity that has been placed in the heart of man, that he and the beast are just the same? They both have the same fate according to the writer. To him, the afterlife for both is found in the words "All came from the dust and all return to the dust." No advantage or profit can be found in being a man instead of a beast. All go to the same place!

Therefore, what should a man do? Eat, drink, and be merry, for after this life, there is nothing. Solomon thinks that this life is our heaven or our hell. Being a man provides no advantage. A beast ends up just as good as a man and in the same place. Who knows if a "man ascends upward" and a "beast descends downward"? Neither help nor hope is offered here! Solomon says that, because there is no hope, we must do the best we can to be happy! That kind of thinking is so sad. Oh the emptiness of life lived under that kind of theology!

### **Acts of Others**

**Ecclesiastes 4:1** Then I looked again at all the acts of oppression which were being done under the sun. And behold I saw the tears of the oppressed and *that* they had no one to comfort *them*; and on the side of their oppressors was power, but they had no one to comfort *them*. **2** So I congratulated the dead who are already dead more than the living who are still living. **3** But better off than both of them is the one who has never existed, who has never seen the evil activity that is done under the sun. **4** And I have seen that every labor and every skill which is done is *the result of* rivalry between a man and his neighbor. This too is vanity and striving after wind. **5** The fool folds his hands and consumes his own flesh. **6** One hand full of rest is better than two fists full of labor and striving after wind. **7** Then I looked again at vanity under the sun.

Solomon speaks of the oppressive acts of others in a sad passage that gives absolutely no hope to man. He speaks about the oppressed person with no one to comfort him. The oppressors enjoy total power; the oppressed have no comfort. Verses 2 and 3, among the saddest passages in the entire Scripture, convey the message that it is better to be dead than alive. In fact, it would have been better never to have lived and seen the evil acts of oppression under the sun. How sad and hopeless! Labor and skill are seen as means to an end which begin in rivalry and jealousy between men. It is not true! In Geneses 3, the Lord makes it clear that labor is required of man because of the original sin of man and woman. However, the labor spoken of by Solomon pertains to the vain labor of trying to gain happiness through "out-doing" one's neighbor. Again, this kind of labor is meaningless. The fool folds his hands but the Scripture states that he who does not work, should not eat; he is a fool. To think that a hand "full of rest" is better than "two fist full of labor and striving after wind" shortchanges the design of life. Under God's plan, hard labor will be rewarded.

### **Alone or Together**

**Ecclesiastes 4:8** There was a certain man without a dependent, having neither a son nor a brother, yet there was no end to all his labor. Indeed, his eyes were not satisfied with riches *and he never asked*, "And for whom am I laboring and depriving myself of pleasure?" This too is vanity and it is a grievous task. <sup>9</sup> Two are better than one because they have a good return for their labor. <sup>10</sup> For if either of them falls, the one will lift up his companion. But woe to the one who falls when there is not another to lift him up. <sup>11</sup> Furthermore, if two lie down together they keep warm, but how can one be warm *alone*? <sup>12</sup> And if one can overpower him who is alone, two can resist him. A cord of three *strands* is not quickly torn apart.

To Solomon, it is sad for someone to work hard when he has no children to inherit the fruits of his labor. He works and works day and night trying to gain wealth. Yet, what he has is not satisfying and he wants more. This cycle leads to emptiness in the preacher's eyes. Man is social in nature and for the most part, most people do not like to be alone. They like to work in the security of groups. When accidents happen, there is someone to help. Man feels that he can overcome adversity when someone is working with him. Two are better than one, but three are better than two according to man's thinking.

### **Vanity of the King and His Son**

**Ecclesiastes 4:13** A poor, yet wise lad is better than an old and foolish king who no longer knows how to receive instruction. <sup>14</sup> For he has come out of prison to become king, even though he was born poor in his kingdom. <sup>15</sup> I have seen all the living under the sun throng to the side of the second lad who replaces him. <sup>16</sup> There is no end to all the people, to all who were before them, and even the ones who will come later will not be happy with him, for this too is vanity and striving after wind.

About whom is the preacher speaking? It could not be Solomon. He was not born poor. His father was born poor, but was he ever put in prison? Which king started out poor and rose to be king? Perhaps he was thinking of Joseph. Joseph was poor, yet wise, and rose to be second in command of Egypt. People were unhappy with Joseph, both during and after his reign. So it is with us! Some will always be unhappy with what we have done. It happens! Time also plays a big role in our legacies. In one hundred years, people will not know about most of us. Yes, our lives have had purpose in carrying on the generations as the Lord has planned, but what have we done that is lasting, except to raise our children who will raise their children, and so on. Perhaps it is true that advancement and getting to the top of our game result only in meaninglessness. Perhaps popularity and position are poor goals for our lives because they have no real substance. Oh, how quickly people change and turn on others while they climb the ladder of success. It is meaningless.