



Day 6: January 6

People may think Ecclesiastes, the title of this book of the Bible, means it's going to be a heavy church discussion, but it is perhaps the most relevant book to everyday secular living "under the sun", a term the English speaking world inherited from this book of the Bible.

The title is from Greek translation of the Hebrew name *Kohelet*, meaning "one who gathers" in this case, wisdom. (As an aside 'ecclesiastical' has come to be related to religious matters but in ancient Greek all it meant was a gathering of people). The gatherer of wisdom in this case is Solomon, son of King David and arguably the greatest king of ancient Israel reigning from 970-930BC. Solomon had great power, wealth and learning. He writes from experience.

This chapter from the book has been popularised by a well known song. The words are so powerful they can speak, just as they were written nearly 3000 years ago, even in modern culture. The whole point to the collection of wisdom is understanding the meaning of life, and how the world may look without knowing God's plan.

Ecclesiastes 3

- (1) To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven¹:
- (2) A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;
- (3) A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break 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 cast away stones, and a time to gather stones together; a time to embrace, and a time to refrain from embracing;
- (6) A time to get, and a time to lose; a time to keep, and a time to cast away;
- (7) A time to rend², and a time to sew; a time to keep silence, and a time to speak;
- (8) A time to love, and a time to hate; a time of war, and a time of peace.
- (9) What profit has he that works in that which he labours³?
- (10) I have seen the labour⁴, which God has given to the sons of men to be exercised in it.
- (11) He has made every thing beautiful in his time: also he has set the world⁵ in their heart, so that no man can find out the work that God makes from the beginning to the end.
- (12) I know that there is no good, but for a man to rejoice, and to do good in his life.
- (13) And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it is the gift of God.
- (14) I know that, whatsoever God does, it shall be for ever: nothing can be put to it, nor any thing taken from it: and God does it, that men should fear before him.
- (15) That which has been is now; and that which is to be has already been; and God searches out that which is past.
- (16) And moreover I saw under the sun the place of judgment, that wickedness was there; and the place of righteousness, that iniquity⁶ was there.
- (17) I said in my heart, God shall judge the righteous and the wicked: for there is a time there for every purpose and for every work.

(18) I said in my heart concerning the matters of the sons of men, that God might manifest⁷ them, and that they might see that they themselves are beasts.

(19) For that which befalls the sons of men befalls beasts; even one thing befalls them: as the one dies, so dies the other; yea, they have all one breath; so that a man has no pre-eminence above a beast⁸: for all is vanity⁹.

(20) All go unto one place; all are of the dust, and all turn to dust again¹⁰.

(21) Who knows the thought¹¹ of man that rises upward, and the thought of the beast that goes downward to the earth?

(22) Wherefore I perceive that there is nothing better, than that a man should rejoice in his own works; for that is his portion: for who shall bring him to see what shall be after him?¹²

(King James Version updated with reference to the Hebrew text)

1 'Under the heaven' means he is speaking about the things related to humans. Psalm 115:16 *The heaven, even the heavens, are the LORD'S: but the earth has he given to the children of men.*

2 To tear the fabric. Old fabric may be easily be torn in strips along the warp thread as weft is often less strong.

3 Labour is *âmêl* or toiling with sorrow.

4 Business, employment.

5 Hebrew *olam* meaning that which is concealed at the 'vanishing point of what is seen, the beginning, or what has been, and the end, or what will be.

6 He saw moral wrong in the place where justice was given.

7 To examine and reveal for the purpose of purifying.

8 This is observation, reflecting ancient Hebrew belief and is a theme that occurs a few times in the psalms.

9 This translation popularised the word in English, but it has now shifted to refer more to beauty. The Hebrew word, *hebel* means emptiness, or something transitory. It is related to a word for going from the path and therefore not arriving at a destination, or being aimless.

10 This is both observation which anyone who has been involved in an archaeological dig may confirm and repeats Genesis 3:19 *In the sweat of your face shall you eat bread, till you return unto the ground; for out of it were you taken: for dust you are, and unto dust shall you return.*

11 The Hebrew word is *ruach and* indicates our spirit or our ideals. Humans aspire to great things and will look up for inspiration, animals heads are downward while eating.

12 This is the fundamental question of the whole book. Solomon is saying we cannot, by looking around us, see what will happen tomorrow, let alone after we die.