

Ecclesiastes extracts

The Problem: Hebel

From The Message

Chapter 1: 1 These are the words of the Quester, David's son and king in Jerusalem²
¹¹Smoke, nothing but smoke. [That's what the Quester says.]There's nothing to anything—it's all smoke. What's there to show for a lifetime of work, a lifetime of working your fingers to the bone? One generation goes its way, the next one arrives, but nothing changes—it's business as usual for old planet earth.

Themes: (readings from NIV)

Time:

1:4 Generations come and generations go,
but the earth remains for ever.

1:11 No one remembers the former generations,

and even those yet to come
will not be remembered
by those who follow them.

I refused my heart no pleasure.

Chapter 3 There is a time for everything,
and a season for every activity under the heavens:

² a time to be born and a time to die,
a time to plant and a time to uproot,

³ a time to kill and a time to heal,
a time to tear down and a time to build,

⁴ a time to weep and a time to laugh,
a time to mourn and a time to dance,

⁵ a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them,

a time to embrace and a time to refrain
from embracing,

⁶ a time to search and a time to give up,
a time to keep and a time to throw away,

⁷ a time to tear and a time to mend,
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.

3:11 ¹¹ He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity in the human heart; yet^[a] no one can fathom what God has done from beginning to end.

Death

3:19-20. ¹⁹ Surely the fate of human beings is like that of the animals; the same fate awaits them both: as one dies, so dies the other. All have the same breath^[c]; humans have no advantage over animals. Everything is meaningless. ²⁰ All go to the same place; all come from dust, and to dust all return.

5:15 ¹⁵ Everyone comes naked from their mother's womb,

and as everyone comes, so they depart.

They take nothing from their toil
that they can carry in their hands.

7:2 It is better to go to a house of mourning
than to go to a house of feasting,
for death is the destiny of everyone;
the living should take this to heart.

Striving to gain at any price

4:1 Again I looked and saw all the oppression that was taking place under the sun:

I saw the tears of the oppressed –
and they have no comforter;

power was on the side of their oppressors –

4:4 ⁴ And I saw that all toil and all achievement spring from one person's envy of another. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

5:8-9 (NLT) Don't be surprised if you see a poor person being oppressed by the powerful and if justice is being miscarried throughout the land. For every official is under orders from higher up, and matters of justice get lost in red tape and bureaucracy. ⁹ Even the king milks the land for his own profit.

9:3 ³ This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of people, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterwards they join the dead.

The unfairness and unpredictability of life:

8:14 There is something else meaningless that occurs on earth: the righteous who get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked who get

what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless.

9:1 So I reflected on all this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, but no one knows whether love or hate awaits them.

9:11,12

I have seen something else under the sun:

The race is not to the swift

or the battle to the strong,

nor does food come to the wise

or wealth to the brilliant

or favour to the learned;

but time and chance happen to them all.

¹² Moreover, no one knows when their hour will come:

As fish are caught in a cruel net,

or birds are taken in a snare,

so people are trapped by evil times

that fall unexpectedly upon them.

The Answer

2:24 ²⁴ A person can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in their own toil. This too, I see, is from the hand of God, ²⁵ for without him, who can eat or find enjoyment?

3:12-13 I know that there is nothing better for people than to be happy and to do good while they live. ¹³ That each of them may eat and drink, and find satisfaction in all their toil – this is the gift of God. ¹⁴ I know that everything God does will endure for ever; nothing can be added to it and nothing taken from it. God does it so that people will fear him.

3:22 So I saw that there is nothing better for a person than to enjoy their work, because that is their lot. For who can bring them to see what will happen after them?

4: 9-12 Two are better than one,

because they have a good return for their labour:

¹⁰ if either of them falls down,

one can help the other up.

But pity anyone who falls

and has no one to help them up.

¹¹ Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm.

But how can one keep warm alone?

¹² Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves.

A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

5:18-20 This is what I have observed to be good:

that it is appropriate for a person to eat,

to drink and to find satisfaction in their

toilsome labour under the sun during the few

days of life God has given them – for this is

their lot. ¹⁹ Moreover, when God gives

someone wealth and possessions, and the

ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and

be happy in their toil – this is a gift of God.

²⁰ They seldom reflect on the days of their life,

because God keeps them occupied with

gladness of heart.

9: 7-10 Go, eat your food with gladness, and

drink your wine with a joyful heart, for God

has already approved what you do. ⁸ Always

be clothed in white, and always anoint your

head with oil. ⁹ Enjoy life with your wife,

whom you love, all the days of this

meaningless life that God has given you under

the sun – all your meaningless days. For this is

your lot in life and in your toilsome labour

under the sun. ¹⁰ Whatever your hand finds to

do, do it with all your might, for in the realm

of the dead, where you are going, there is

neither working nor planning nor knowledge

nor wisdom.

12: 1 Remember your Creator

in the days of your youth,

before the days of trouble come

and the years approach when you will say,

12:13,14

Now all has been heard;

here is the conclusion of the matter:

fear God and keep his commandments,

for this is the duty of all mankind.

¹⁴ For God will bring every deed into

judgment,

including every hidden thing,

whether it is good or evil.