

Wise Preacher Offers Insights on Life's Meaning

This is part two of a two-part article. Find part one at [this link](#).

The book of Ecclesiastes is a profound piece of wisdom literature in the Old Testament, attributed to Solomon (referred to as “the Preacher” or “the Teacher”). It delves into the meaning of life and the vanity (meaninglessness) of worldly pursuits without God.

The theme of vanity, or *hebel* in Hebrew, which can be translated as “vanity,” “futility,” “breath” or “vapor,” permeates the entire book and reflects on the transient nature of human endeavors.

1. Vanity of earthly efforts. “Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity” (Eccl. 1:2, ESV). “What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?” (1:3). This section questions the ultimate value or gain of human labor, echoing the overarching theme of existential inquiry.

“A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever” (1:4) This also highlights the transient nature of human existence compared to the enduring earth, emphasizing the vanity of human efforts.

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2. Pleasure and achievement's emptiness. “I said in my heart, ‘Come now, I will test you with pleasure; enjoy yourself.’ But behold, this also was vanity” (2:1). This showcases the Preacher's endeavors to find meaning in labor and accomplishment, only to find them lacking true fulfillment.

“And I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun” (2:11).

3. Time for all and eternity in hearts. “He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also, he has put eternity into man’s heart, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from the beginning to the end” (3:11). This section reveals the deep eternal void in the human soul that only God can fill, along with a realization of divine orchestration aligned with His eternal plans.

“To everything there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven” (3:1). This highlights the ordered variety of life’s seasons, suggesting a divine timing for events beyond human control.

4. Isolation’s misery and companionship’s value. “Two are better than one, because they have a good reward for their toil” (4:9).

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“Again, if two lie together, they keep warm, but how can one keep warm alone? And though a man might prevail against one who is alone, two will withstand him—a threefold cord is not quickly broken” (4:11-12).

The preacher uses a straightforward example to demonstrate the benefits of companionship and the futility of living without community, highlighting the strength and advantage of covenantal relationships.

5. Greed’s folly and joy in contentment (Eccl. 5). “He who loves money will not be satisfied with money, nor he who loves wealth with his income; this also is vanity” (5:10). “When God

gives someone wealth and possessions, and the ability to enjoy them, to accept their lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God” (5:19). This section suggests that joy and contentment in one’s possessions and labor are gifts from God rather than through the mere accumulation of wealth.

“As he came from his mother’s womb, he shall go again, naked as he came, and shall take nothing for his toil that he may carry away in his hand” (5:15). It also highlights the ultimate futility of greed, as one cannot take earthly possessions beyond this life.

6. Unfulfilled desires’ vanity. “All the labor of man is for his mouth, yet his appetite is not satisfied” (6:7). “Better is the sight of the eyes than the wandering of the appetite: this also is vanity and a striving after wind” (6:9).

This section highlights the irony and tragedy of hoarding wealth without enjoying it, underscoring the vanity and frustration of such a life. It reflects the perpetual cycle of unmet desires, emphasizing that true satisfaction remains elusive without God, reflecting the theme of unfulfilled desire and the vanity of self-centered achievement.

7. The wisdom of humility and balance. “Be not overly righteous, and do not make yourself too wise. Why should you destroy yourself? ... Surely, there is not a righteous man on earth who does good and never sins”(7:16, 20). This section cautions against self-righteousness and excessive wisdom, advocating for balance in life. The Preacher emphasizes the need for humility and understanding to gracefully handle life’s complexities with others.

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