

Ecclesiastes

“Whatever Your Hand Finds To Do”

Lesson #10 for March 10, 2007

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 9.

1. In this chapter Solomon bemoans several things which seem unfair to him:
 - Even though the good and the wise are in God’s hand, they never know for sure what’s coming next;
 - Whether one is good or bad, righteous or wicked, one fate awaits us all: death;
 - Since we are all headed for death, grab what you can, while you can, enjoy your life; but misfortune will hit all of us sooner or later.
 - Wisdom is better than muscle but money seems to have even more influence than wisdom.
2. Is human life really that unfair? Why do the poor and minority groups distrust government agencies? Do you trust the government? Do you believe that life is against you?
3. Was Solomon too concerned about things in the “here and now,” or was he really that ignorant about the future life and the resurrection?
4. Why does Solomon seem to blame God for all the evil that occurs? Did he know anything about the great controversy? Was this only a reflection of his “monotheistic” thinking?
5. All of us could cite examples of bizarre things that have happened to people for no apparent reason. Is that just pure luck—bad luck? Do those who trust God have a better time in this life?
6. **Christians believe that God takes care of them. Is that just wishful thinking? To what extent are we controlled by our own choices? To what extent are our lives affected by the Devil’s activities? If we are indeed approaching the end of this earth’s history, will things continue to get worse and worse? If so, who is responsible? Is Satan at fault because he does all those awful things? Or is God at fault because he allows Satan to do them?** (See Job 1&2)
7. As Paul waited for the “Roman ax” to cut off his head, he wrote in 2 Timothy 3:12,13:

“Anyone who wants to live all out for Christ is in for a lot of trouble; there’s no getting around it. Unscrupulous con men will continue to exploit the faith. They’re as deceived as the people they lead astray. As long as they are out there, things can only get worse.” (*The Message*)

Should Christians be afraid? Will the Devil create more havoc and cause more persecution, suffering, and loss of life at the end of time than he did even in the days of Jesus and Paul?
8. Did Joseph in Egyptian prison, John the Baptist, Job, Daniel in the lion’s den, and Paul awaiting execution believe that they were being tempted to doubt God’s care?
9. How many modern Seventh-day Adventists are prepared for real persecution? Are you ready to go to jail? Are you ready to be tortured? Will God allow that to happen to us in our day? What can we do to prepare?
10. Do you feel certain that having the most powerful being in the universe as your friend will sustain you no matter what happens? Do you think you could continue to trust God if you had to go through a Gethsemane-type experience?

11. What has God promised us about his care for his people during the final days of this earth's history? (Psalms 23; 34:7; 91:4; 1 Peter 4:12-16)

12. Read Ecclesiastes 9:2,3:

Anything is possible. It's one fate for everybody—righteous and wicked, good people, bad people, the nice and the nasty, worshipers and non-worshipers, committed and uncommitted. I find this outrageous—the worst thing about living on this earth—that everyone is lumped together in one fate. Is it any wonder that so many people are obsessed with evil? Is it any wonder that people go crazy right and left? Life leads to death. That's it. (*The Message*)

Do you agree with those sentiments? Why was Solomon so obsessed with this issue? One could easily take this passage and assume that God has abandoned us or doesn't care. What do you think the passage is supposed to mean in context? What is Solomon trying to say? If we take the short view of history, Solomon seems to be right. Can Christians survive our world only by taking the long view? Do we need to believe in "pie-in-the-sky, bye-and-bye" in order to survive the everyday problems that we live with now? Elsewhere in the Bible, we are told very clearly that there is to be a judgment, (Matthew 25:32-41; Revelation 20:6-15) a resurrection, (John 5:29; Daniel 12:2) and eternal life. (John 3:16)

13. **Are you absolutely certain that we each choose our own destiny? How do we do that? Is our character molded primarily by large decisions that we make at certain critical points in our lives or is it molded more by the individual, smaller, day-by-day decisions we make about honesty, fairness, love, and God?**

14. The ancient Hebrews believed that God would never let down those who were serving him. And the way that God would bless them was through prosperity and riches. So it was very easy to identify the good people because they were the rich people! Do we believe that in our day? How do we correlate that with the comments by Jesus about the impossibility of a rich man being saved? (Matthew 19:14; Mark 10:25; Luke 18:25)

15. **When you face problems in your daily life, do you blame the Devil? God? Chance? Yourself? Does God cooperate with the devil by backing off and allowing the Devil to trouble us? Did God do that with Job?**

16. One of the things that seemed to trouble Solomon greatly is the fact that sometimes righteous people suffer what seem to be consequences of wickedness and the wicked seem to reap the rewards of the righteous! He discusses this in several locations! Is this fair? If we cannot identify God's true people by how much money they have, then how do we know who is righteous? Does God give us any clues? (Matthew 7:15-20)

17. Are you depressed by the fact that even if you still are alive, you are headed for death? Was Solomon really depressed by the prospect of death, or was he perhaps depressed by the fact that he had spoiled his kingdom?

18. Should we fear death? (Hebrews 2:14,15)

19. Read Ecclesiastes 9:4-6. To what extent is your attitude toward life molded by your belief or lack of belief in an afterlife? As Seventh-day Adventists we believe that Jesus is coming again soon. We are not like the Sadducees of Jesus' day who believed that there was nothing beyond this life. (Matthew 22:23; Luke 20:27; Acts 23:8) **So let me ask you three questions: Do you want to die before Jesus comes? Do you want to live through the plagues? Do you really want to be translated?**

20. What is it that gives ultimate meaning to your life? Try to imagine how you would feel if you woke up in the resurrection and discovered that you were at the third coming and you were among the wicked. Can we be certain which resurrection we will arise in? How do you feel about these two thoughts from famous writers of the past:

Here let me die: for to give birth to those
who can but suffer many years and die,
methinks, is merely propagating death,
and multiplying murder. -- Lord Byron

Once a man has realized that death is the end of everything, there is nothing worse than life, either. Leo Tolstoy

21. If there is no way that we can avoid death, is life just a prelude to death?
22. **Read Ecclesiastes 9:5-10 in several different versions. What point was Solomon trying to make? Was he making a theological statement about the nature of man or just a fatalistic statement about the nature of life?**
23. Have you tried to use those verses to convince a non-Christian about the nature of man? What about dealing with those who believe in the immortality of the soul? How would you answer the person who says that those are just the outrageous words of a tired and depressed old king? Solomon said other things which are not strictly true. How do we know these words are true? **Are you planning to take Solomon's advice and grab all the gusto in life that you can because, after all, if Jesus does not come back, you will just die with everyone else?**
24. I once saw a birthday card that said, "The mortality rate is the same as it has always been... one per person!"
25. Does it seem to you that the people in the world are trying to grab all the gusto they can get all the time? Is that what Las Vegas and Hollywood are all about?
26. **On occasion, Christians have debated a serious question: If you suddenly discovered unequivocally that there was nothing beyond this life, how would it affect your present way of life? Would you continue to live as you are living now? Would you move to Las Vegas? Are you restrained from doing evil in your life because you believe that everyone will have to give an account of himself to God? (Romans 14:12)**
27. **Are the rewards of living a righteous life only going to be experienced in the future life?**
28. Is it obvious to your friends that Christ is the most important factor in your life? Is it obvious to you?
29. Remembering the words of Ecclesiastes 9:5,6, is it really true that:
- The dead know nothing and get nothing. They're a minus that no one remembers. Their lives, their hates, yes, even their dreams, are long gone. There's not a trace of them left in the affairs of this earth. (*The Message*).
- Don't we believe that God will bring the new Jerusalem back to this earth where we will have a home for eternity? Was Solomon completely ignorant of this idea? Where do we get this idea? Is it presented anywhere in the Bible before Revelation 21?

30. **What do you say to your Christian friends when they mention the belief that some departed relative is in heaven, looking down on us? What is the most Christ-like way to present the truth as you know it?**
31. Solomon concluded this chapter by suggesting that wisdom is better than might or strength. Even military might. But he believes, unfortunately, that without money, even if you are wise, you will soon be forgotten. (Ecclesiastes 9:14,15; compare 10:19)
32. Does God forget? Will our records be preserved for all eternity?
33. If you had a choice, would you prefer to have your departed relatives in heaven, enjoying the bliss there and looking down on you, or are you more comfortable with them being in the grave, sleeping, awaiting the second coming? Why? Solomon bemoans disasters and bad luck that happen even to righteous people. Is God in any way responsible for that?
34. Without an understanding of the great controversy and the battle between Satan and Christ over the character and government of God, it is sometimes even very difficult to make sense of passages of Scripture. Does your understanding of the great controversy make it easier for you to understand the book of Ecclesiastes? In what way?
35. Sometimes we suggest that we have not been able to accomplish certain goals because we have not been given the right “gifts” or abilities. Have you ever felt that if you had been made wiser or smarter you could serve God better? Did the universe learn something about human wisdom from the life of Solomon? Have we learned something?

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Last modified: January 17, 2007

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