

Ecclesiastes
The Way of the Wind

Lesson #12 for March 24, 2007

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 11.

1. There is much variation in the translations of this chapter. Consider this brief summary derived from several translations:
 - a. Life is full of risks.
 - b. Invest wisely—diversify your risks.
 - c. If you wait until conditions are perfect, you will never do anything!
 - d. You can't know everything—work hard and you will receive a good harvest.
 - e. Enjoy your life and your work while it lasts, because everyone dies and nothing happens in the grave.
 - f. Enjoy life while you are young, but remember you will live with the consequences of your actions.
2. Could you summarize what we have learned from the book of Ecclesiastes so far? Is this book just to remind us that even discouraged and depressed people are God's children too?
3. Many groups down through history have believed in some sort of fate. Fate implies that history is predetermined by some sovereign force. Fate implies that if we are going to die today, there is nothing we can do to change that. That idea has been prevalent since the days of Homer, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.
4. Christians believe in a certain kind of fate as well: we have all been predestined to be saved! (Ephesians 1:1-11)
5. So how many real choices do we have in life? How many of our day-to-day decisions are predetermined by forces that we do not even recognize or by our habit patterns? How many truly-free choices do we have in a lifetime?
6. Read Ecclesiastes 11:1. What does it mean to, "Cast your bread upon the waters"? Should this passage be treated as an apocalyptic expression where waters represent peoples? Look at some of the interesting variations in the rendering of this verse. Should this verse be considered parallel to Proverbs 22:9 or Isaiah 58:7?
7. As we know, the Jews and the children of Israel before them had a very interesting way of trying to maintain a balance between creditors and debtors. Every seven years the land would return to its original family owner (at jubilee). One was not allowed to sell a family plot on a permanent basis. How would such a plan work today? Would that be what long-term leasing is today?
8. Read Deuteronomy 15:7-11. Remembering how the system of debt cancellation worked, how do you interpret these verses? Since we do not have such a system in place in our day, do these verses have no application to us? What do these verses imply about charity? Read again Matthew 25:31-46. Do we consider these issues when we are thinking of helping our brothers and sisters in the Church and in the world?
9. Is it God's intention that we balance our risks in this life by being generous to the poor and needy so that he will reward us when the time comes? Does 2 Corinthians 9:6 teach us

anything about charity? Is anything in Ecclesiastes 11 really about charity?

10. Read Ecclesiastes 11:3,4. Is the point of these verses that we should just accept our fate?
11. How should we relate to things in this life which we cannot control or even things which we do not have any choice about?
12. When severe weather, earthquakes, war, hurricanes, typhoons, or twisters hit, should we automatically assume that they are sent by God?
13. Does Ecclesiastes 11 tell us anything about the uselessness of worrying? If we have sufficient trust in God, can we stop worrying? Are you willing to place your life in God's hands? If you knew for sure that it was God's plan for you to die now, arise at the second coming, and then go to heaven, how would you feel? Would you feel a certain amount of rebellion? Resignation? Relief?
14. Consider what you know about evolution. Is evolution a completely chaotic, chance system? Is there any fate involved in that system? Do you feel better knowing that a sovereign, majestic, omniscient God made everything? Does it bother you, as it seemed to bother Solomon, that you cannot understand every aspect of everything?
15. What do you think God was implying when he said, "My ways are not your ways"? (Isaiah 55:7,8) Read Ecclesiastes 11: 6-8. What is God trying to teach us through contrasting light and darkness? Light is a very commonly-used symbol in scripture. (Isaiah 5:20; Luke 11:34; Acts 26:18; Romans 13:12; Ephesians 5:8; 1 Thessalonians 5:5; 1 Peter 2:9; 1 John 1:5) Was Solomon trying to tell us that there is nothing at all to look forward to? Or was he trying to tell us to enjoy our lives here and now because we do not know what is coming?
16. God's blessings today are certainly no guarantee for tomorrow. We live in a time when God seems to be withdrawing his spirit from this earth. What does that imply about the future of our country, our world, the world's economics, our retirement plans, our homes, our safety, our money, even our lives?
17. How should we react when we find ourselves either blessed or cursed by circumstances which seem to be beyond our control?
18. How close do you think the operations of heaven are to us in our lives here and now? Have you ever believed that you had just experienced the direct intervention of one of God's angel-messengers in your life?
19. To what forces do we look to try to help us decide whether it is a good time or not a good time to do something?
20. Have you ever tried to discuss "the afterlife" with an evolutionist, an atheist, or an agnostic?
21. Read Ecclesiastes 11:6. Was Solomon saying, "Don't be lazy. Get up and do what needs to be done today"? (*Adult Sabbath School Teachers Guide*, page 145) Because we do not know exactly what is going to happen next, is that a reasonable excuse for not doing our best now? Success does not come by accident. Great progress is made in this world and toward the goals for the world to come by applying oneself diligently.
22. Troubles may arise. Accidents may occur. But we cannot let that prevent us from doing our best. Do we ever allow the situation to prevent us from moving forward? If we are prevented from moving forward in the relative peace and calm in which we live today, what will happen when times get much worse?
23. Read Ecclesiastes 11:9,10. Does God intend for us to be happy even here and now?

Should that be especially true of young people who have health, vigor, and their lives set out in front of them? Was Solomon trying to remove the joy and happiness of youth by warning about God's judgment? Or was he suggesting that if we do everything to the glory of God, we will be happiest? God is not placing a damper on our happiness!

24. Does God's forgiveness, his great grace, and the plan of salvation prevent us from suffering the consequences of our youthful indiscretions? Not at all! We live in a universe that is orderly. Without orderliness it would not be possible to have love. Some young people would like to be able to sow their wild oats and reap a harvest of delicious whole-grain wheat! But that is inconsistent with the orderly universe in which we live: a universe in which consequences follow actions.
25. So how do you decide each day what you are going to do? Is your friendship with God such that it hurts you to do anything that would hurt him? Do you look forward to the time that you are able to spend with him in personal relationship and devotion?
26. Are you caring for your body in a way that God knows is best and as he advises you? Do you get adequate exercise? Is your diet not only appetizing but healthy? Do you take time for those you love? Do you represent God to them? Do you find time to support the church and its activities and programs? Remember that you **are** the church. Or does your work completely consume your time and energy?
27. Could you set down in a few words what your most important goals in life are? Read the following words from Ellen White in *Christ's Object Lessons* pages 331,332:

Remember that you will never reach a higher standard than you yourself set. Then set your mark high, and step by step, even though it be by painful effort, by self-denial and sacrifice, ascend the whole length of the ladder [332] of progress. Let nothing hinder you. Fate has not woven its meshes about any human being so firmly that he need remain helpless and in uncertainty. Opposing circumstances should create a firm determination to overcome them. The breaking down of one barrier will give greater ability and courage to go forward. Press with determination in the right direction, and circumstances will be your helpers, not your hindrances. {COL 331.4}

28. *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5 p. 297:

The more we learn in reference to the early days of the Christian church, and see with what subtlety Satan worked to weaken and destroy, the better we shall be prepared to resist his devices and meet coming perils. We are in the time when tribulations such as the world has never yet seen will prevail...But God has set bounds that Satan cannot pass. Our most holy faith is this barrier; and if we build ourselves up in the faith, we shall be safe in the keeping of the Mighty One. {5T 297.3}

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