

Ecclesiastes
The Conclusion of the Matter

Lesson #13 for March 31, 2007

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 12.

1. We have noted through the entire book of Ecclesiastes that one of the Solomon's major concerns was that he had no way of knowing what would happen after he died. How much difference does it make in your life to have some idea about what God will do after you die? Think of the mental condition of the disciples just before crucifixion weekend. Then consider what experiences they went through while Christ was in the grave. Then review their experiences after the resurrection. What had changed? Was the big change that they then were certain about the afterlife? Was it because they knew the person who was in charge of eternity?
2. What difference would it make in your life if you were not certain about the existence of God? If someone asked you to make a list of the reasons why you are happy that you are alive, what would be the top three or four?
3. Review Ecclesiastes 11:9-12:1. What is implied about youth versus old age? Are old-age days and years truly evil? What is evil about them? Is it easier or more difficult to be a faithful Christian when you are young or when you are old?
4. What difference does it make to remember, during our youthful years, the one who created us? Why is knowing that God is the one who created all things important to us? (Isaiah 40-55)
5. An evangelist was once reported to have come home after a series of meetings and told his wife that on that particular day he had baptized 3 ½ people. When his wife queried him as to what he meant, he said, "I baptized three children and one adult." The adult only had half a life left! Is that how God feels about our lives when we are old?
6. What are the advantages of growing up as a Seventh-day Adventist Christian?
7. If you choose not to grow up as a Christian, there is always the possibility that you could die or be killed prematurely, and thus, end your life without becoming a Christian. The Bible seems to suggest that the best reason for obeying God's laws is that they are **the right thing to do!**
8. **So why do we rebel and sin? What forces, what motives, what evil contrivances lead us to do what is wrong instead of doing what we know is right?** Can we answer that question honestly?
9. Do you know anyone who honestly regrets having lived a Christian life? Why?
10. **How many of us actually need additional information in order to do what is right? How many of us already know what we should do, but don't actually do it?**
11. If we press on and seek to do our very best to obey God and keep his commandments, will God reveal to us the right course to take?
12. Why do we have such a hard time learning from the mistakes of others?
13. Thinking back over the experiences of Solomon and the writings in the book of Ecclesiastes, can we learn any good lessons from bad examples?
14. Seen on a bumper recently: "Retirement is great but getting old is for the birds!"
15. Read Ecclesiastes 12:2-7. This seems to be a poetic and quite interesting description of what often happens when we get old. Do you think you can correctly identify each symbol as recorded in Ecclesiastes 12:2-6, (KJV):
 - a. the sun, or the light, or the moon, or the stars, be not darkened - fading eyesight
 - b. the keepers of the house shall tremble - gradual loss of strength
 - c. the strong men shall bow themselves - weakening legs

- d. the grinders cease because they are few - losing teeth
- e. those that look out of the windows be darkened - early cataracts?
- f. the doors shall be shut in the streets - unable to hear what is going on
- g. the sound of the grinding is low - fading hearing
- h. he shall rise up at the voice of the bird - shallower sleep? earlier rising
- i. all the daughters of musick shall be brought low - deteriorating vocal cords
- j. they shall be afraid of *that which is* high - the elderly are more cautious
- k. the almond tree shall flourish - white hair
- l. the grasshopper shall be a burden - even small things are sometimes difficult
- m. desire shall fail - nothing seems as attractive as it once did
- n. man goeth to his long home - the grave?
- o. the silver cord be loosed - the hold on life may be slipping
- p. the golden bowl be broken - life ends
- q. the pitcher be broken at the fountain - death comes
- r. the wheel broken at the cistern - no longer able to do things

16. Is Ecclesiastes written primarily for the elderly?
17. Seen on a T-shirt recently: "It's not that life is so short, but that death is so long! John 3:16." (*Adult Sabbath School Teacher's Study Guide* p. 157) Does it really worry you that you might be dead for many years before Jesus comes back again?
18. How seriously do you take the biblical descriptions of heaven? Are you excited about going there? In your thinking, what is the most anticipated thing about going to heaven? What are you looking forward to the most? Is there anything about heaven that scares you? Why?
19. Think of the changes that take place over the decades of human life. Which changes are most important? Physical? Mental? Spiritual? Social? In what ways have you changed over the last decade?
20. How much is the aging process affected by diet and exercise? The main contrast that Solomon seemed to be emphasizing between youth and old age was that of the physical capacities. Would you say that the physical changes are the greatest?
21. Read Ecclesiastes 12:7. Is there any question in your mind about what this means? Read Genesis 2:7. Are these two verses contrasting?
22. What is a man's spirit? Read Genesis 2:7; Ecclesiastes 12:7; John 11:11-13; 1 Thessalonians 4:13-17.
23. Read Ecclesiastes 12:8. "In Hebrew, the word *hebel* can be translated to mean 'breath' or 'vapor.' It also can mean vanity. 'Vanity of vanities' in Hebrew is *hebel habalim*." (*Ibid* 157)
24. So now that we have read the words of Solomon in Ecclesiastes, how would you describe vanity? "Excess pride in one's appearance or accomplishments; conceit. Another definition: a lack of usefulness, words, or effect; worthlessness." Do these definitions help you to understand something about the book of Ecclesiastes?
25. What things in your life today are vanity? Useless? Nothing but smoke?
26. Read Ecclesiastes 12:9-12. Is it actually possible to teach other people wisdom? How would you do that? What is wisdom? After having spent 13 weeks studying this subject, do you think you could give a clear definition?
27. What are the pleasing words that Solomon talks about in Ecclesiastes 12:10? Are those words that please the audience? Are those carefully-chosen, very wise words? Are they "just the right words"? How does that relate to the New Testament verse on itching ears? (2 Timothy 4:3)

28. Read Ecclesiastes 12:12. Solomon seemed to be warning about something. What do you think he was warning about? Is there a kind of knowledge or “wisdom” which leads one eventually to rebellion or even rejection of God? What about the mass of material in science today? Would a study of the broad field of science in our day lead to wisdom?
29. How much is included in “the whole duty of man”? (Ecclesiastes 12:13,14)
30. Read Ecclesiastes 12:13,14. There is an interesting parallel in these verses to the three angels’ messages. (Revelation 14:6-12)
 - a. Revelation 14:7: “fear God.”
 - b. Revelation 14:12: “keep the commandments of God.”
 - c. Revelation 14:7: “judgment is coming.”
31. We as Seventh-day Adventists have claimed that the three angels’ messages are our final message to the world. Does it mean that these verses in Ecclesiastes should also be part of our message?
32. What does it really mean to “fear God”? Why do some translations have “respect” or “honor” instead of “fear”?
33. Read Ecclesiastes 12:13 in several different translations. Do you agree with Solomon that fearing God and keeping his commandments is the whole duty of man? What about faith, love, and the other Christian virtues?
34. We know from studies of moral development in children that there are at least three levels: 1) Pre-conventional—fear of punishment or hope of reward, (This is a “me first” mentality); 2) Conventional—desire to be accepted; peer pressure, (This is an “us first” mentality); 3) Post-conventional—doing what is right because it is right. (This is an “others first,” principled mentality which considers others before oneself!) At which level of moral development do you think Solomon was functioning when he gave us that conclusion? Did Solomon speak those words because that was the level at which he was functioning or because he thought that was the level of his audience?
35. Job lived hundreds of years before Solomon. When he had been through his “experiment,” God’s commendation was: “He [Job] has said of me what is right!” (Job 42:7,8) Do you think God could have spoken the same words about Solomon?
36. In scriptures we find even the “greats of faith” expressing their relationship to God anywhere from being God’s servant or his child to being his friend. Jesus himself seems to encourage friendship. (John 15:15) Do you believe that the book of Ecclesiastes would promote a servant-like relationship, a childlike relationship, or an “as-a-friend” relationship with God?
37. Look at the prayers offered by Moses (Exodus 33:7-14), Job (Job 13:15), Daniel (Daniel 9:16-19), and Ezekiel (Ezekiel 36:16-38). Do they seem to be on a more mature level of moral development than these words from Solomon?
38. Could you summarize what you have learned from the book of Ecclesiastes? Was Solomon trying to say that without God, nothing really matters? Could Ecclesiastes be summarized by the words of Jesus in Matthew 16:26 (*KJV*): “For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”
39. How does God feel about your salvation? Is there really, “More joy in heaven over one sinner who repents than over ninety-nine respectable people who do not need to repent”? (Luke 15:7,10, *GNB*) Consider the following words from Ellen White:

In the book of God’s remembrance every deed of righteousness is immortalized. There every temptation resisted, every evil overcome, every word of tender pity expressed, is faithfully chronicled. And every act of sacrifice, every suffering and sorrow endured for Christ’s sake, is recorded. Says the psalmist: “Thou tellest

my wanderings: put Thou my tears into Thy bottle: are they not in Thy book?" Psalm 56:8. {GC 481.1}

There is a record also of the sins of men. "For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil." "Every idle word that men shall speak, they shall give account thereof in the day of judgment." Says the Saviour: "By thy words thou shalt be justified, and by thy words thou shalt be condemned." Ecclesiastes 12:14; Matthew 12:36, 37. The secret purposes and motives appear in the unerring register; for God "will bring to light the hidden things of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts." I Corinthians 4:5. "Behold, it is written before Me, . . . your iniquities, and the iniquities of your fathers together, saith the Lord." Isaiah 65:6,7. {GC 481.2}

40. Consider the stages that we go through in our lives:

1. Childhood, a time to share unconditional love.
2. Youth, a time of energy, courage, and willingness to try new activities.
3. Young adults have the time, energy, and fresh ideas to enrich the church's current programs.
4. The prime of life includes more money than time. Now members may have the means to support the church's financial needs and provide encouragement and emotional support for other members.
5. The mature member may now have time and money available to support the church, but less energy to be engaged in spring cleanups or remodeling projects.
6. Retirement years should be full of words of wisdom. The voice of experience helps guide and lead the decisions of the church family. *Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide* page 159

Is it easier to be a Christian in some stages of life than in others? Why?

41. Ellen G. White, *Christ's Object Lessons* p. 146:

You need not go to the ends of the earth for wisdom, for God is near. It is not the capabilities you now possess or ever will have that will give you success. It is that which the Lord can do for you. We need to have far less confidence in what man can do and far more confidence in what God can do for every believing soul. He longs to have you reach after Him by faith. He longs to have you expect great things from Him. He longs to give you understanding in temporal as well as in spiritual matters. He can sharpen the intellect. He can give tact and skill. Put your talents into the work, ask God for wisdom, and it will be given you.

42. Do you and your fellow church members in your local congregation clearly distinguish between what is of eternal value and what is nothing but smoke? How many things are promoted even in your church that have no eternal consequences?
43. How much time during the week do you spend actually doing things that you think are really important for eternity? How much time do you spend during the week just earning money and doing the tasks that are necessary to maintain your daily existence? What percentage of time do you think God would like to see for each of those major areas of life?

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