

Ecclesiastes

Nothing New Under the Sun

Lesson #2 for January 13, 2007

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 1.

1. Read Ecclesiastes 1. How do you feel after listening to Solomon's attempt to summarize his life? How would you have responded to Solomon if you had been there? Is your world depressing? Are people around you cynical? Do you see in nature an endless repetition with no meaningful progress in any direction? Do you find it to be true that the more you know, the more depressed you become? Is life really meaningless?
2. Our lesson study guide suggests that life lived without God is indeed meaningless! Why is that? What difference does the addition of a belief in God make?
3. If we have an understanding of God, do we look at the same raw data and come to different conclusions? Or does including God in our picture, change the picture?
4. What is it that gives real meaning to your life? Is the possibility of living life eternally with God, the only meaningful thing we can look forward to in life? Even if you accept and believe in God, are there many meaningless aspects to your life?
5. In the original Hebrew language, this book was called *Kohélet* (or *Qoheleth*). It means someone who gathers or assembles something (or with the definite article, the process itself). Was Solomon attempting to assemble people to listen to his musings? Or is this title speaking primarily about his attempts at gathering wisdom?
6. How would you summarize Ecclesiastes 1? Is life circular or linear? If you look at the generations of human history, the water cycle, the winds blowing from different directions, and the endless cycles in nature, does it seem like we are never going to get anywhere but rather like we just keep on repeating the same old things?
7. **Solomon seemed to be desperately and continuously hunting for something new! What is the attraction of something new? Does that imply that there is something wrong with the old? What makes new things exciting?**
8. Considering our current world, do you find the history of hurricanes, tsunamis and earthquakes depressing? Does it seem like nature is "going crazy"? What simple pleasures give meaning to your life? Do any of the following give you pleasure or give meaning to your life? Seeing or having a new baby; visiting a new place; experiencing a child's love; eating a good meal; giving or getting a hug; seeing a beautiful flower, bird, fish or even a mountain; making a new friend; seeing a beautiful waterfall, fresh fallen snow or a beautiful coral reef. What would you include in the list of "your favorite things"?
9. Solomon seemed to be depressed by the idea that he might not leave a huge impact on his world. Do you worry about that a lot? What kind of legacy do you hope to leave behind?
10. In modern neurochemistry, neuropharmacology and psychiatry, the idea is becoming prominent that depression is primarily caused by a chemical imbalance in the brain. Was that Solomon's problem? Did Solomon just need an antidepressant?
11. Contrast the life of a child with the words from Solomon in Ecclesiastes 1. Why do children seem to have so much energy? Why do they get so excited about surprises? Why do they find simple pleasure in some of the simplest things?
12. Solomon seems to believe that our lives are simply "puffs of wind." Do you feel that way?

13. At the end of every day, do you feel like you have accomplished something of importance? Is sleeping the best part of your day?
14. Read Matthew 6:19,20 and Mark 8:36. What do these famous texts tell us about how life should be lived?
15. What is the most important thing in your life? For what do you live? Is it your job, your family, pleasure, sex, money or a good retirement? What are the great motivators in our world? What motivators are good for Christians?
16. Why is all the depressing language of Ecclesiastes recorded? Is it for our benefit?
17. What do you think Solomon implied by the use of the very common expression “under the sun”?
18. Again read Ecclesiastes 1: 4-11. How many of these statements are even true? Could something that is not true be inspired? Would these statements qualify as “natural theology”? In what legitimate ways does nature speak to us about God?
19. To what do evolutionists and atheists have to look forward? Do we learn the following lessons from nature? Might makes right. The end justifies the means. Survival of the fittest.
20. What do you think Solomon had in mind when he said there is “nothing new under the sun”? Are there ever two sunrises or two sunsets that are exactly the same? Theoretically, if there were two sunsets that looked exactly the same—but were still beautiful—would it be a waste of time to look at both of them? What about the beauties in nature such as birds, fish, animals, even children? Are there any two that are exactly the same?
21. With all these beautiful things to look at in the world around us, could it be true that “God has laid a miserable fate on us”? (Ecclesiastes 1:13b, *GNB*)
22. If the crooked can never be made straight, are we wasting our time in trying to practice orthodontics and orthopedics? (Eccl. 1:15)
23. What do you think Solomon means in Ecclesiastes 1:18, suggesting that wisdom and knowledge lead to worries and hurt?
24. **Had Solomon been defeated in trying to answer the great existential questions? Where did we come from? Why are we here? Where do we go after we die? What is the purpose of life?**
25. In contrast to the general tone of Ecclesiastes, read 1 Corinthians 15:26, 51-55; Hebrews 2:14; Revelation 21:4. These verses suggest that eventually death will be destroyed, that the righteous will be resurrected and that the devil will be thrown into the lake of fire. There will be no more aging or death. Doesn't that sound like a change for the better?
26. One of the greatest challenges to human minds has always been the question of death. What happens after we die? Where can we go to try to get answers to these questions? Is Jesus the only one who has been able to break into human history and give us any reliable answers?
27. Does the process of justification and forgiveness ever seem endlessly repetitious to you? If we are supposed to forgive 490 times (“seventy times seven”), would that become boring? Does that suggest that ultimately, humans are incapable of overcoming their sins? Even with God's help?
28. Is it possible to make real changes in our lives and real progress?

29. To look at our world, you might conclude that money is a great motivator! Is a life spent in amassing wealth, a goal to be pursued? “Not for the wages we receive [in God’s work] are we to labor. The motive that prompts us to work for God should have in it nothing akin to self-serving.” Ellen G. White, *Prophets and Kings*, p. 65.
30. Do you feel that you are not being paid adequately? Do you believe that you are in the position in which God wants you to be? Do you truly trust God to take care of you? Do your answers to these questions affect how you feel about life?
31. Would your life be more meaningful if you felt you were being directed, day-by-day, by God’s hand?

As Christ lived the law in humanity, so we may do if we will take hold of the Strong for strength. But we are not to place the responsibility of our duty upon others, and wait for them to tell us what to do. We cannot depend for counsel upon humanity. The Lord will teach us our duty just as willingly as He will teach somebody else. If we come to Him in faith, He will speak His mysteries to us personally. Our hearts will often burn within us as One draws nigh to commune with us as He did with Enoch. Those who decide to do nothing in any line that will displease God, will know, after presenting their case before Him, just what course to pursue. And they will receive not only wisdom, but strength. Power for obedience, for service, will be imparted to them, as Christ has promised. Whatever was given to Christ—the “all things” to supply the need of fallen men—was given to Him as the head and representative of humanity. And “whatsoever we ask, we receive of Him, because we keep His commandments, and do those things that are pleasing in His sight.” 1 John 3:22. {DA 668.4}

32. As we look at the book of Ecclesiastes, why do you think the tone is so different from that of Proverbs?
33. Ellen G. White wrote:

Had the Sabbath been universally kept, man's thoughts and affections would have been led to the Creator as the object of reverence and worship, and there would never have been an idolater, an atheist, or an infidel. The keeping of the Sabbath is a sign of loyalty to the true God, “him that made heaven and earth, and the sea, and the fountains of waters.” It follows that the message which commands men to worship God and keep his commandments, will especially call upon them to keep the fourth commandment. {GC88 437.2; LHU 52; 4SP 281.1; SR 382.2; cf. ST, November 1, 1899 par. 10}

Would that also suggest that there would be no one with a meaningless life?

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