

Ecclesiastes
“All That My Eyes Desired”

Lesson #3 for January 20, 2007

Scripture: Proverbs 3:13-28; Ecclesiastes 2.

1. Ecclesiastes 2 is not uplifting or encouraging reading! What was Solomon’s problem?
2. If we choose any goal, no matter how good it may seem to us, but leave God out of the pursuit, will the result always be useless, meaningless, nothing but smoke?
3. Don’t we live in a world where the scientific community and the news media are determined to leave God out of everything? If God is intentionally left out, will the conclusion always be unreliable?
4. If the world’s wisest man made all those mistakes in his own personal life, what are the chances that we will learn anything from his mistakes? Why is it so difficult for human beings to learn from the mistakes of others? Ecclesiastes 1 seems to end with Solomon discouraged about the fact that all his wisdom will perish with him! Why does it seem like Solomon discovered this point so late in life?
5. Read Proverbs 3:13-26. Does it seem like sound, practical theology? After having written these words—and perhaps even living by them for a number of years—what happened in Solomon’s life?
6. Solomon, in Ecclesiastes 2, seemed to have been on the relentless pursuit of happiness and pleasure. Do we imply from this that he was not happy in his earlier years when he was serving God, building the temple, etc.?
7. Why does the pursuit of happiness never seem to result in long-term satisfaction? Why do those who pursue pleasure always seem to want more?
8. Take a look at the amusement parks and the entertainment so popular in our world. There seems to be a relentless pursuit of more exciting, newer, more dangerous things to do! What does this teach us about human nature?
9. Solomon seems to talk about working hard all his life. What would you understand that work to be?
10. One of the things that Solomon seemed to pursue was a lasting legacy. How do you feel about the legacy that he left? Would you feel that he left an adequate legacy, having written 3000 or more proverbs and more than 1000 songs and having been inspired to write three books in the Bible? Did the evils of the rest of Solomon’s life negate those positive factors?
11. In several places Solomon compared himself to others. Is that a valid way to evaluate his life? Is that a valid way to evaluate our lives? Does God grade “on the curve”?
12. If you had the opportunity to travel back in time and observe the life of Solomon, would you think that it was a full life? In John 10:10, Jesus promises his followers a life “to the full.” How would you compare that kind of life with Solomon’s?
13. What is God’s plan for Christians? Is it simply that we desire less and, therefore, we are more easily satisfied? Is there any role for pleasure in the life of a Christian?
14. Is the pursuit of pleasure always a “no-no” for the Christian?
15. In ancient Greek Platonic thinking—which was widely accepted in the days of Jesus—it was believed that anything that was pleasant and pleasurable, and thus of benefit to the body,

was automatically dangerous or detrimental to the soul. Thus, if you wanted to benefit your soul, you must persecute, torment, or at least deny the body. Is there any truth in that idea?

16. Think of all the friends that you have had during your life. Among them, there must have been some who were selfish pleasure-seekers. Undoubtedly, there were also some who denied self for the purpose of loving and serving others. Which of those two individuals and/or groups were happier?
17. Read Ecclesiastes 2:1-3. Does that sound like a great life? Wouldn't the world consider that to be almost ideal? Earlier in his life, in Proverbs (6:23-29, 7:6-27, 20:1, and 23:1-6), Solomon decries the "pleasures" of adultery, of adulterous women, of wine and even of excessive eating of food. What percentage of the advertisements on television glorify one or more of those "pleasures"?
18. Addiction has become a major study in the field of health. One of the characteristics of addictions is that, whatever they consist of, the present amount is never satisfying. People who are addicted always want more! Is it possible to be addicted to pleasure? Was Solomon addicted to pleasure?
19. If we are wise enough to learn something from Solomon's mistakes, are we wiser than he was?
20. Dr. Richard Nies attended the UCLA School of Psychology. He got degrees in Clinical and Experimental Psychology. Starting at the time he entered the program, he realized that, sooner or later, someone was going to challenge him about his Christian beliefs. When one of his classmates discovered that he was a Christian, that classmate began to harass him about his "foolish" ideas. On one occasion the classmate directly confronted him and challenged him with his "foolish pie-in-the-sky" ideas. So Dr. Nies responded with this challenge: Let us suppose that there is a 50% chance that you are right, that there is nothing at all beyond this life. And let us also suppose that there is a 50% chance that I am right and that there is an eternity in heaven. Sooner or later we will both die. If I am right and I have lived a life according to God's plan, I will experience an eternity of bliss and you will receive nothing. If you are right, we will both die and be dead a long time. Immediately, his classmate responded, but what about all the pleasures in this world right now that you are missing? Dr. Nies's response was, I am very happy with my life as it is and I would not change the way I live even if there were no "pie-in-the-sky." The amazed classmate had nothing more to say! Could you confidently make the same claim as Dr. Nies did?
21. Probably the two most important and most expensive pursuits in the life of Solomon were the building of the temple in Jerusalem and the building of his own palace. These two structures cost millions of dollars and took many years to complete. They were both completed when he was relatively young and apparently in harmony with God's will for his life. Instead of using all that time and money for the building of these two structures, how might things have turned out differently if he had dedicated the time and money to establishing schools and synagogues to instruct the people how to improve their way of life and to help them live healthier lives, physically, mentally and spiritually?
22. How did Solomon amass all that wealth? Was it God's plan for one person to enjoy all of that luxury at the expense of so many others? Ellen G. White states specifically that his lavish palace was built and supported by an extreme form of taxation. (*Prophets and Kings* p. 56) Thousands and thousands of non-Hebrew slaves and many Hebrews working at less than fair wages were required to meet Solomon's demands.

23. Jesus tells us that the poor will always be with us. (Matthew 26:11) That implies that there will be others who are better off, even rich. Does that mean that there is no way to solve the class struggle between rich and poor? Should we stop even trying? Do Seventh-day Adventists—as a church or as individuals—have any responsibility for trying to correct the abuses in our society, especially between rich and poor?
24. Considering all the pursuits of almost anything that is normally thought to bring happiness that Solomon carried out, why wasn't he happy? What was missing in his life? If it was God that was missing in his later life, did he experience God to the full extent in his early life? Did he ever recognize the difference in his early life compared to his later life and realize why things had changed?
25. Some have suggested that there is a “God-shaped hole” in our hearts. They imply that it is impossible for our lives to be complete without the presence of God. Do you agree with this? Why, or why not?
26. Look at our world. Many of us live in developed nations, with all sorts of luxuries at our beck and call. Others live a subsistence life, struggling even to find enough food and shelter. Shouldn't those who are in the wealthy nations be happier than those in the poor nations? Is that the case? Why are there so many more suicides in wealthy nations?
27. Jesus added that we should put God's kingdom first (Matthew 6:33) and whatever else we need will be given to us. How is that supposed to work out in real life? Have you experienced that?
28. Solomon spent a lot of time in both Proverbs and Ecclesiastes discussing fools! Look at some of the things he says about fools in Ecclesiastes:
- 2:14: Fools walk in blind darkness.
- 2:19: Fools are probably poor rulers.
- 4:5: Fools are lazy.
- 5:1: Fools don't know right from wrong.
- 5:3: Fools talk too much.
- 5:4: Fools don't keep their promises.
- 7:4-6: Fools always think about happiness!
- 7:9: Fools harbor grudges and lose their tempers.
- 10:2: Fools naturally do the wrong thing.
- 10:3: Fools let everyone else know that they are fools!
- 10:12: Fools are destroyed by their own words. (They say hurtful things.)
- 10:14: Fools simply talk on and on.
29. One definition of folly is, “Trying to live as close to sin as possible without actually getting into it!”—so-called “living on the edge!”
30. There is a story of an ancient king who lived on a high, steep mountain. One time he was looking for a driver for his carriage. Three applicants were interviewed and each was asked only one question. They were taken to a very narrow part of the road where there was a long drop-off. The king asked each of them, “How close can you drive to the edge and still be safe?” The first driver looked carefully at the situation and said, “I can drive within one foot!” He turned to the second driver who said he could drive within 6 inches! He then

turned to the third driver and asked the same question. The third driver after carefully looking things over said, "The only safe place on that road is as far from the edge as possible." Who do you think got the job?

31. In this portion of Ecclesiastes, Solomon seemed to be very concerned about what is going to happen after his death. Why is there no mention of heaven or the afterlife? Did he know anything about the resurrection? Do you spend a lot of time worrying about what's going to happen after you die? Why was Solomon so concerned about that? Does it stress you to realize that we all die the same death? Do you consider that a disaster? What's wrong with that? Should we expect God to somehow make the death of Christians different from the death of worldlings? Should God prevent bad things from happening to good people?
32. We know from history that after Solomon's death, the kingdom was divided and the larger portion was given to Jeroboam, his rival, and only a smaller portion was given to Rehoboam, his son. Solomon seemed to be very distraught by the fact that he would have almost no influence over what was going to happen after he died. Do you worry about that?
33. Read Ecclesiastes 2:17-26. Do you feel that it is totally unfair that one of your descendants might inherit what you have worked so hard to produce, even if he/she doesn't deserve it!?
34. If we follow God's plan for our lives and he blesses us, do we deserve any of the gifts he gives us?
35. Do you think David was comfortable in handing over his kingdom to Solomon? Did he have any doubts about the direction that this young king would pursue? What will David have to say to Solomon in the "kingdom to come"?
36. Read Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 in several different versions. Is Solomon telling us that the best thing to do in life is to eat, drink and be merry?
37. Are we making legitimate and useful progress with the blessings and gifts that God has given us? What will be our legacy? Read Amos 8:11,12; and 2 Timothy 3:5,7. What do you think Solomon would have had to say about those statements from later biblical writers?
38. So far in the book of Ecclesiastes, what have you learned from Solomon? Have you benefitted from all his "wisdom"?
39. Eugene Peterson in his paraphrase of the Bible ("The Message") suggests that the book of Ecclesiastes is like a bath! It is an in-the-face exposé on the uselessness of most of the things that humans find attractive in this life! Is that a sufficient reason to put such a book in the Bible? Do we need to be warned?

© 2006 Kenneth Hart M. D. ***Permission is hereby granted for any noncommercial use of these materials. Free distribution is encouraged. It is our goal to see them spread as widely and freely as possible. If you would like to use them for your class or even make copies of portions of them, feel free to do so. We always enjoy hearing about how you might be using the materials and we might even want to share good ideas with others, so let us know.***

Info@theox.org

Last modified: November 30, 2006

C:\My Documents\WP\SSSTG-Hart\Ecclesiastes\SS-Eccl-3-2007-01-20.wpd