

Ecclesiastes

God Made Man Upright? What Happened?

Lesson #8 for February 24, 2007

Scripture: Ecclesiastes 7.

1. This lesson focuses on the purpose or meaning in life. Why is it that we look for meaning in life? What different things did Solomon do to look for meaning? Research? Amass money? Exercise power? Marry more wives?
2. What things give real meaning to your life? Religion? Family? Fellowship? Faith? A relationship with God? Read Ecclesiastes 7:1. The first half of the verse seems to make some intuitive sense. But what led Solomon to write what he did in the second half? Why is it that in this chapter, Solomon seems to favor mourning, sorrow, death, reprimands? What is to be learned from these? Why did Solomon write, "A wise person thinks about death"? (Ecclesiastes 7:4, *GNB*)
3. How do you get a good reputation? Is it something that we need to work for? Can a good reputation be destroyed?
4. Do our lives have any eternal impact? What impact does your life have?
5. Do you spend your time and effort on what really matters? Or is your life dominated by the "tyranny of the urgent"? How often do you get to sit back and take a few minutes to evaluate whether you are doing what you really want to do in life?
6. Why are so many people in our day rejecting God, religion, and Christianity for things of this world? The Bible says repeatedly that we cannot serve both God and the world. (Matthew 6:24; Luke 16:13) Is it easy to tell when someone is living for the world? Can we be sure which side we are on?
7. What is the relationship between Ecclesiastes 7:2 and 9:5?
8. Read Ecclesiastes 7:3. "Sorrow is better than laughter; it may sadden your face, but it sharpens your understanding." (*GNB*) How does this fit with Solomon's earlier statement in Proverbs 15:13, "When people are happy, they smile, but when they are sad, they look depressed"? Or Proverbs 17:22, "Being cheerful keeps you healthy. It is slow death to be gloomy all the time"? (*GNB*)
9. Read Ecclesiastes 7:4. Why would it be smarter to think about death than about happiness? Notice that Solomon described fools as people who are "always thinking about happiness," "singing the praises of other people," "laughing," or "cheating others."
10. Read Ecclesiastes 7:8. What was Solomon saying in this verse? "The end of something is better than its beginning."
11. Read Ecclesiastes 7:10. "Never ask, 'Oh, why were things so much better in the old days?' It's not an intelligent question." (*GNB*) What is wrong with this question?
12. What do you get out of your religion? What do you get out of your membership in the Seventh-day Adventist church? Might you be like the Baptists who say, "He has just enough religion to make himself miserable." Should the true Christian be happy all the time? Or should he be very serious and sad as seems to be suggested by Ecclesiastes 7?
13. Read Leviticus 23:40; Psalms 5:11; 149:2; Philippians 4:4; 1 Thessalonians 5:16. These verses seem to suggest that we should celebrate when we receive God's blessing. In fact, we should rejoice always! Did Paul contradict Solomon? Or was Solomon right in

Ecclesiastes 3:4 when he said, “He sets the time for sorrow and the time for joy, the time for mourning and the time for dancing”?

14. As you think about your place in the Seventh-day Adventist church and the possible time of trouble, even the second coming of Jesus Christ—potentially in the near future—are you serious or joyful?
15. One of the themes of Ecclesiastes 7 seems to be that people need to live a righteous, godly life, despite ups and downs.
16. How would you outline the book of Ecclesiastes? Some have suggested that Ecclesiastes 1:1-11 is the prologue in which the writer spells out his major thoughts. Then, in Ecclesiastes 1:12 through 6:12, he attempts to prove his theme. Beginning with Ecclesiastes 7, he draws conclusions based on his previous observations. This continues through Ecclesiastes 12:8. Ecclesiastes 12:9-14 is Solomon’s conclusion or epilogue.
17. Could you summarize Ecclesiastes 7 in a few words? What are Solomon’s early conclusions to his research?

Ecclesiastes 7:1-12: Life is all meaningless, but some experiences may be better for us than others. Sorrow is better than laughter because it is more realistic and will lead to less disappointment.

Ecclesiastes 7:13,14: We do not have control over our future, so we should accept good and bad as they come, enjoying the good.

Ecclesiastes 7:15-22: Since there is no righteous person, it is best to avoid extremes. Trying to be too good in our own effort leads to guilt. Trying to be too wicked will certainly lead to death or destruction.

Ecclesiastes 7:23-29: Even though Solomon’s wisdom was not able to figure everything out, it was obvious that the moral insight of wisdom was preferable to the moral perversion of folly. (*Adult Teachers Sabbath School Bible Study Guide-Ecclesiastes*-pps. 93 and 95)

18. Read Ecclesiastes 7:8. “The end of something is better than its beginning. Patience is better than pride.” Why do you think Solomon is comparing patience and pride? Read Ecclesiastes 7:7-14. These are short Proverbs-like verses with a lot of wisdom. Why would Solomon say that it is foolish to harbor a grudge? Should this verse be considered along with Romans 12:19-21 and Deuteronomy 32:35? Could God admit to heaven people who are still angry at their brothers and sisters? Would God admit or should God admit to heaven people who are still angry at their brothers and sisters? Does God expect us to overcome such bad habits before he takes us there?
19. Read Ecclesiastes 7:12. In what way is wisdom or knowledge a protection? How does that match Proverbs 1:7; 9:10; Colossians 1:28; James 3:13-18? Did Paul agree with Solomon in Ecclesiastes 7:14 that God sends the good and the bad? Is that why he said that whatever his lot may be, he would be content? (Philippians 4:11-13.)
20. Read Ecclesiastes 7:14. “When things are going well for you, be glad, and when trouble comes, just remember: God sends both happiness and trouble; you never know what is going to happen next.” That final phrase could be translated, “You cannot find fault with him.” Is this just a reflection of the monotheistic thinking of the Jewish people? Is this because they assumed that God was responsible for everything? Come good or bad, he must be responsible. Is that your understanding? Is that what God wants us to think? Have

you had significant troubles in your life that you are sure were sent by God? Why?

21. Read Ecclesiastes 7:15. "My life has been useless, but in it I have seen everything." Is Solomon trying to tell us that nothing in this life could ever have any significant meaning? Does it destroy your confidence in God to know, "Some good people may die while others live on, even though they are evil"? (*GNB*)
22. Read Ecclesiastes 7:16-18. "So don't be too good or too wise—why kill yourself? But don't be too wicked or too foolish, either—why die before you have to? Avoid both extremes. If you have reverence for God, you will be successful anyway."
23. Is there really any danger of being too wise or too good? Or is it just too much work? Is Solomon suggesting that temptations are too hard to resist?
24. Read Ecclesiastes 7:20. "There is no one on earth who does what is right all the time and never makes a mistake." Compare 1 Kings 8:46; 2 Chronicles 6:36; Romans 3:23 and 1 John 1:8-10. What do these verses about sin say to us?
25. One of the clearest chapters regarding the great controversy to be found in the entire Bible is Romans 3. Why does Paul take such a large part of that chapter to focus on the sinfulness of man as quoted from the Old Testament? Is it hard for us as human beings to admit our sinfulness? With all our scientific accomplishments and conquests over disease, poverty, and ignorance, is it hard for us to admit that we are sinners? In the 17th through the 20th centuries, human beings felt an ever increasing pride over their accomplishments. We have reached the place where we believe that given enough money and enough time, we can accomplish almost anything! Is our world really getting better and better? Where are we headed? Given enough time, would the world become a perfect place?
26. Read Matthew 24; Mark 13; Luke 21. Compare Revelation 16. These portrayals of the end times certainly do not suggest that things are getting better or that they will always be easy!
27. What kind of people do we need to be to stand through those final trials? Do we need to be people of godly character? How do we accomplish that?
28. Read Ecclesiastes 7:23-29. Solomon came to some rather startling conclusions! "I used my wisdom to test all this. I was determined to be wise, but it was beyond me. How can anyone discover what life means? It is too deep for us, too hard to understand. But I devoted myself to knowledge and study; I was determined to find wisdom and the answers to my questions, and to learn how wicked and foolish stupidity is. . . . Yes, said the Philosopher, I found this out little by little while I was looking for answers. I have looked for other answers but have found none. I found one man in a thousand that I could respect, but not one woman. This is all that I have learned: God made us plain and simple, but we have made ourselves very complicated." (Ecclesiastes 7:23-29, *GNB*) So what do we conclude from this lesson?
29. Ellen White comments:

True education does not ignore the value of scientific knowledge or literary acquirements; but above information it values power; above power, goodness; above intellectual acquirements, character. The world does not so much need men of great intellect as of noble character. It needs men in whom ability is controlled by steadfast principle.

"Wisdom is the principal thing; therefore get wisdom." "The tongue of the

wise use of knowledge is right." Proverbs 4:7; 15:2. True education imparts this wisdom. It teaches the best use not only of one but of all our powers and acquisitions. Thus it covers the whole circle of obligation--to ourselves, to the world, and to God.

Character building is the most important work ever entrusted to human beings; and never before was its diligent study so important as now. Never was any previous generation called to meet issues so momentous; never before were young men and young women confronted by perils so great as confront them today. (Education 225.1-3)

30. How do you understand Ecclesiastes 7:29? See what different translators have done:

See, this alone I have found, that God made man upright, and they—they have sought out many devices. *YLT*

But, see, this I did find: God made men plain, but they have engaged in too much reasoning. *Tanakh*

But I did find this: God created people to be virtuous, but they have each turned to follow their own downward path. *NLT*

This alone is my conclusion: God has created man straightforward, and human artifices are human inventions. *NJB*

One thing I have learned: God made people good, but they have found all kinds of ways to be bad. *NCV*

This is all that I have learnt: God made us plain and simple, but we have made ourselves very complicated. *GNB*

I have found only this: God made people decent, but they looked for many ways [to avoid being decent.] *God's Word*

I did learn one thing: We were completely honest when God created us, but now we have twisted minds. *CEV*

Behold, this is the only [reason for it that] I have found: God made man upright, but they [men and women] have sought out many devices [for evil]. *AMP*

The one thing that I have learned is that God made man to walk upright and to live a simple, honest life. But man has made life so complex that in the process he has lost his simplicity and uprightness. *Clear Word*

© 2007 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: January 5, 2007

C:\My Documents\WP\SS\TG-Hart\Ecclesiastes\SS-Eccl-8a-2007-02-24.wpd