

Study of Ecclesiastes: Chapter 1
Questions for Discussion

1. As we have previously discussed, verse 2 contains the “thesis statement” of Ecclesiastes:

Ecclesiastes 1:2 (ESV) - Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.

a. In what context is this statement true? Explain the phrase “under the sun.”
(vv. 2-3, Matt 16:26, Rom 8:20)

b. At what point in the human existence did this become true?
(vv. Gen 2:16-17; 3:1-24, Rom 5:12-21)

c. How do we avoid a meaningless life? (vv. Matt 6:19-21)

2. What is the Koheleth’s overall point in verses 3-11?

a. Does man have any impact on the workings of the earth? What is the nature of things on the earth?

b. Can man be satisfied with the things the earth has to offer “under the sun?” What is man’s view of these earthly activities “under the sun?”

c. How does our view of these earthly workings change when we are not limited to the perspective from “under the sun?” (v. Rom 1:20)

3. Was the Koheleth unaware that the earth would be destroyed? Why did he say that the earth would last forever? What was his point? (vv. 4, Exodus 21:1-6, II Peter 3:8-13)

4. What is the outcome of the search for earthly wisdom? (vv. 13-18)

5. Is the Koheleth suggesting that we should strive for ignorance? Why or why not?

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Notes & Answers

1. As we have previously discussed, verse 2 contains the “thesis statement” of Ecclesiastes:

Ecclesiastes 1:2-3 (ESV)

²Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity. ³What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?

1a. In what context is this statement true? Explain the phrase “under the sun.”

Under the Sun – Life lived unto itself without regard for a creator. Living with faith in self or this life.

Matthew 16:26 (ESV)

²⁶For what will it profit a man if he gains the whole world and forfeits his soul? Or what shall a man give in return for his soul?

Romans 8:20-25 (ESV)

²⁰For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²²For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³And not only the creation, but we ourselves, who have the firstfruits of the Spirit, groan inwardly as we wait eagerly for adoption as sons, the redemption of our bodies. ²⁴For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

1b. At what point in the human existence did this become true?

Genesis 2:15-17 (ESV)

¹⁵The Lord God took the man and put him in the garden of Eden to work it and keep it. ¹⁶And the Lord God commanded the man, saying, “You may surely eat of every tree of the garden, ¹⁷but of the tree of the knowledge of good and evil you shall not eat, for in the day that you eat of it you shall surely die.”

Genesis 3:1-24 (ESV)

¹Now the serpent was more crafty than any other beast of the field that the Lord God had made. He said to the woman, “Did God actually say, ‘You shall not eat of any tree in the garden?’” ²And the woman said to the serpent, “We may eat of the fruit of the trees in the garden, ³but God said, ‘You shall not eat of the fruit of the tree that is in the midst of the garden, neither shall you touch it, lest you die.’” ⁴But the serpent said to the woman, “You will not surely die. ⁵For God knows that when you eat of it your eyes will be opened, and you will be like God, knowing good and evil.” ⁶So when the woman saw that the tree was good for food, and that it was a delight to the eyes, and that the tree was to be desired to make one wise, she took of its fruit and ate, and she also gave some to her husband who was with her, and he ate. ⁷Then the eyes of both were opened, and they knew that they were naked. And they sewed fig leaves together and made themselves loincloths. ⁸And they heard the sound of the Lord God walking in the garden in the cool of the day, and the man and his wife hid themselves from the presence of the Lord God among the trees of the garden. ⁹But the Lord God called to the man and said to him, “Where are you?” ¹⁰And he said, “I heard the sound of you in the garden, and I was afraid, because I was naked, and I hid myself.” ¹¹He said, “Who told you that you were naked? Have you eaten of the tree

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of which I commanded you not to eat?" ¹² The man said, "The woman whom you gave to be with me, she gave me fruit of the tree, and I ate." ¹³ Then the Lord God said to the woman, "What is this that you have done?" The woman said, "The serpent deceived me, and I ate." ¹⁴ The Lord God said to the serpent, "Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life. ¹⁵ I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and her offspring; he shall bruise your head, and you shall bruise his heel." ¹⁶ To the woman he said, "I will surely multiply your pain in childbearing; in pain you shall bring forth children. Your desire shall be for your husband, and he shall rule over you." ¹⁷ And to Adam he said, "Because you have listened to the voice of your wife and have eaten of the tree of which I commanded you, 'You shall not eat of it,' cursed is the ground because of you; in pain you shall eat of it all the days of your life; ¹⁸ thorns and thistles it shall bring forth for you; and you shall eat the plants of the field. ¹⁹ By the sweat of your face you shall eat bread, till you return to the ground, for out of it you were taken; for you are dust, and to dust you shall return." ²⁰ The man called his wife's name Eve, because she was the mother of all living. ²¹ And the Lord God made for Adam and for his wife garments of skins and clothed them. ²² Then the Lord God said, "Behold, the man has become like one of us in knowing good and evil. Now, lest he reach out his hand and take also of the tree of life and eat, and live forever—" ²³ therefore the Lord God sent him out from the garden of Eden to work the ground from which he was taken. ²⁴ He drove out the man, and at the east of the garden of Eden he placed the cherubim and a flaming sword that turned every way to guard the way to the tree of life.

Romans 5:12-21 (ESV)

¹² Therefore, just as sin came into the world through one man, and death through sin, and so death spread to all men because all sinned— ¹³ for sin indeed was in the world before the law was given, but sin is not counted where there is no law. ¹⁴ Yet death reigned from Adam to Moses, even over those whose sinning was not like the transgression of Adam, who was a type of the one who was to come. ¹⁵ But the free gift is not like the trespass. For if many died through one man's trespass, much more have the grace of God and the free gift by the grace of that one man Jesus Christ abounded for many. ¹⁶ And the free gift is not like the result of that one man's sin. For the judgment following one trespass brought condemnation, but the free gift following many trespasses brought justification. ¹⁷ For if, because of one man's trespass, death reigned through that one man, much more will those who receive the abundance of grace and the free gift of righteousness reign in life through the one man Jesus Christ. ¹⁸ Therefore, as one trespass led to condemnation for all men, so one act of righteousness leads to justification and life for all men. ¹⁹ For as by the one man's disobedience the many were made sinners, so by the one man's obedience the many will be made righteous. ²⁰ Now the law came in to increase the trespass, but where sin increased, grace abounded all the more, ²¹ so that, as sin reigned in death, grace also might reign through righteousness leading to eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord.

1c. How do we avoid a meaningless life?

By placing our faith in God rather than in the things of this life.

Matthew 6:19-21 (ESV)

¹⁹ "Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal, ²⁰ but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹ For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

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2. What is the Koheleth's overall point in verses 3-11?

Ecclesiastes 1:3-11 (ESV)

³What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun? ⁴A generation goes, and a generation comes, but the earth remains forever. ⁵The sun rises, and the sun goes down, and hastens to the place where it rises. ⁶The wind blows to the south and goes around to the north; around and around goes the wind, and on its circuits the wind returns. ⁷All streams run to the sea, but the sea is not full; to the place where the streams flow, there they flow again. ⁸All things are full of weariness; a man cannot utter it; the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing. ⁹What has been is what will be, and what has been done is what will be done, and there is nothing new under the sun. ¹⁰Is there a thing of which it is said, "See, this is new"? It has been already in the ages before us. ¹¹There is no remembrance of former things, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after.

2a. Does man have any impact on the workings of the earth? What is the nature of things on the earth?

The things of earth continue on an endless cycle regardless of the activities of man.

2b. Can man be satisfied with the things the earth has to offer "under the sun?" What is man's view of these earthly activities "under the sun?"

Everything repeats itself and nothing will be remembered.

2c. How does our view of these earthly workings change when we are not limited to the perspective from "under the sun?"

Romans 1:20 (ESV)

²⁰For his invisible attributes, namely, his eternal power and divine nature, have been clearly perceived, ever since the creation of the world, in the things that have been made. So they are without excuse.

We see a creator / designer behind the working of the earth

3. Was the Koheleth unaware that the earth would be destroyed? Why did he say that the earth would last forever? What was his point?

Exodus 21:1-6 (ESV)

¹"Now these are the rules that you shall set before them. ²When you buy a Hebrew slave, he shall serve six years, and in the seventh he shall go out free, for nothing. ³If he comes in single, he shall go out single; if he comes in married, then his wife shall go out with him. ⁴If his master gives him a wife and she bears him sons or daughters, the wife and her children shall be her master's, and he shall go out alone. ⁵But if the slave plainly says, 'I love my master, my wife, and my children; I will not go out free,' ⁶then his master shall bring him to God, and he shall bring him to the door or the doorpost. And his master shall bore his ear through with an awl, and he shall be his slave forever.

Forever – figure of speech (his lifetime)

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2 Peter 3:8-13 (ESV)

⁸ But do not overlook this one fact, beloved, that with the Lord one day is as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. ⁹ The Lord is not slow to fulfill his promise as some count slowness, but is patient toward you, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should reach repentance. ¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come like a thief, and then the heavens will pass away with a roar, and the heavenly bodies will be burned up and dissolved, and the earth and the works that are done on it will be exposed. ¹¹ Since all these things are thus to be dissolved, what sort of people ought you to be in lives of holiness and godliness, ¹² waiting for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be set on fire and dissolved, and the heavenly bodies will melt as they burn! ¹³ But according to his promise we are waiting for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

4. What is the outcome of the search for earthly wisdom? (vv. 13-18)

Ecclesiastes 1:13-18 (ESV)

¹³ And I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven. It is an unhappy business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. ¹⁴ I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind. ¹⁵ What is crooked cannot be made straight, and what is lacking cannot be counted. ¹⁶ I said in my heart, "I have acquired great wisdom, surpassing all who were over Jerusalem before me, and my heart has had great experience of wisdom and knowledge." ¹⁷ And I applied my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is but a striving after wind. ¹⁸ For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.

Earthly Wisdom:

- All is vanity / Striving after wind
- Cannot make the crooked straight
- What is lacking cannot be counted
- Much vexation
- Increases sorrow