

(T) Welcome to **Discipleship training On The Air**. In this teaching series, you will have an opportunity to learn to know the Bible. Today we introduce the book of ECCLESIASTES - PART 2. We will continue to give the division and a short summary of the whole book of Ecclesiastes.

**Continuation of POINT 3. THE DIVISION AND A SHORT SUMMARY OF ECCLESIASTES**

Chapter 4:7-12. The toiling of the single person proves that finding the lasting significance of all man's toil is futility. The Teacher observed that all the toil of a *single person* is a miserable business and meaningless, because he has no one to inherit what he works for (7-8). That is why there is relatively speaking much greater advantage in doing things together with another person (9-12).

Chapter 4:13-16. The instability (fickleness) of popularity proves that finding the lasting significance of all man's toil is futility. It is better to be a poor youth who is wise, than an old king who is foolish and who does not want to accept warning and counsel anymore. "All who lived and walked under the sun" is an exaggerated expression for *the crowds*. The crowds followed this wise youth and cheered him enthusiastically and endlessly (13-16a). But later, these same crowds were no longer pleased with him. Thus, the fickleness of popularity with the crowds proves that all human toil is meaningless.

Chapter 5:1-7. Using God to advance one's own plans will bring God's wrath over one's work. Listening to God's Word is better than bringing sacrifices without understanding. Not making a vow is better than making a vow, but not fulfilling it. Making vows was bad, because it was purely selfish. Man endeavoured to use God in order to accomplish his own plans. Not fulfilling vows was even worse. God is in heaven and man is on earth. Therefore let man not play with God, but rather stand in awe of God.

Chapter 5:8-6:12. The gathering of wealth proves that finding the lasting significance of all man's toil is futility. The following 8 reasons prove the futility of wealth:

One. Corruption never stops: Wealth is very often acquired by applying unjust means, like extortion and corruption of justice (5:7-9).

Two. The thirst for money cannot be satisfied: Whoever loves money never has money enough; whoever loves wealth is never satisfied with his income" (10).

Three. Personal enjoyment is always limited: As wealth increases, so do other people who consume it, like employees, family, friends, institutions and parasites (11).

Four: Wealth causes sleeplessness: Wealth often robs a person from the opportunity to work hard and sleep well at night (12).

Five. Wealth is unstable: Due to unforeseen circumstances or misfortune, wealth can be quickly lost, so that a man leaves this world as naked as he came into it. All his hard work gained nothing except frustration and the angry quarrelling of those who were also depending on that wealth (13-17).

Six. Temporary enjoyment of wealth is only by grace: Enjoyment of the fruit of wealth is only possible as a gift from God. The few people on earth who enjoy this privilege do not reflect on the question about the significance of all human toil (20).

Seven. Wealth is passed on to others: God may give one person wealth, possessions and honour. God may also pass it on to another person before the first person could enjoy it himself (6:1-2).

Eight. It is sometimes impossible to enjoy wealth: A person may have many children and live a very long life. But if for any particular reason he fails to enjoy his wealth, he is worse off than a stillborn child. If his roving appetite for wealth is never satisfied so that he cannot even enjoy a little of it, then his great wealth is meaningless. If a person during his long and fruitful life has not been able to discover the enduring value of all his toil, then the only conclusion is that such a value does not exist (3-9). No man can contend with the one who is stronger than he. Man is absolutely small and insignificant before the almighty sovereignty of God, who determines his life on earth. Man is warned not to criticise God's sovereignty. Man hardly knows what is good for him during his few days on earth and he certainly knows nothing of what will happen in the future (10-12).

Chapter 7:1-14. The wrong appreciation of things proves that finding the lasting significance of all man's toil is futility. Man's wrong appreciation of things leads to his inability to determine the real value of things. In trying to determine the enduring value of things, man makes wrong judgements. He judges as valuable those things that feel good and create joy. But actually, things that do not feel so good and create pain often strengthen man and enrich him spiritually. Because man toils for things that do not have enduring value, like pleasure and laughter, he is unable to determine the essential or enduring value of things (1-6). Likewise, the too high appreciation of material goods leads to man's inability to determine the enduring value of things (7). Man's inability to see the end of a matter makes him impatient, and causes him to complain against God or angrily question God's sovereign rule (8-10). Wisdom, which seeks the

right relationship with God, has greater advantage than material possessions, because it gives its possessor life (11-12). But because God's rule is unfathomable, man's judgement and appreciation of things is absolutely limited (13-14).

Chapter 7:15-22. The absence of judgement of injustice in this world proves that finding the lasting significance of all man's toil is futility. Ecclesiastes 3:16-4:6 already taught that injustice on earth proves that seeking the lasting significance of all man's toil is meaningless. Here the emphasis is on the fact that this injustice does not receive retribution on earth. A person, who is excessively righteous by maintaining (arguing) that strict retribution of injustice is already taking place on this earth, or who pretends to be overly wise by determining how justice ought to be executed on earth, will become bewildered by the opposite facts of life (15-16). A person, who behaves in excessive wickedness, because he believes that the wicked will live long, could die before he expects it (17). Therefore, man must grasp both these warnings. The man who fears God will avoid both these extremes (18). *The theme of Ecclesiastes may be that there is no enduring value in all man's toil "under the sun", that is, on this present earth, but the wise know that there is more than just this earth!* The wise fear God and are more powerful than the rulers of this earth (19).

Chapter 7:23-8:1. While attempts to discover the answer to his question failed, the Teacher discovered the wickedness of man instead. The teacher investigated wisdom and searched out the scheme of things, but he discovered that wisdom was most profound and beyond the discovery of man. He could not discover the lasting significance of all man's toil on earth. The problem cannot be solved (23-25). However, what he did discover was the wickedness of man, especially demonstrated in the seductive tricks of the immoral woman (26). Nevertheless, God created man right (29), and true wisdom, which consists in the fear of the Lord (Prov 9:10) changes the appearance of man's face and makes it radiant (8:1).

Chapter 8:2-8. Submission to the king and certainty of judgement. The relationship of this paragraph with the theme of the book is not clear. It is possible that Israel was living under foreign domination at that time. Foreign domination proves that finding the lasting significance of all man's toil on earth is futility. The nation of Israel had sworn an oath that they would remain faithful to that foreign king. By obeying the king, no one needed to be anxious. But standing in the neighbourhood of a riot, could cause one to be accused of complicity (2-4).

The wise, that is, those who fear God, not only obey the king out of self-preservation, but also in the knowledge of the coming judgement. They know that there will be "a time and a judgement". That is, they know that there will come a time of God's judgement, in which everyone will have to give account of all his deeds, including his wrong attitude towards the king who had been appointed over him. There is certainly going to be a time of judgement for every matter, because the wickedness of man on earth has very much prevailed over him (5-6)! But the wise do not know the time when this judgement will come (7). Whoever does wickedness will certainly not escape this judgement. It will be impossible to escape the Judgement Day, just as it is impossible to stop the wind, and just as it is impossible to escape death or get discharged in the middle of a battle (8).

Chapter 8:9-17. The disproportion in the fate of the wicked and the righteous on earth proves that finding the lasting significance of all man's toil is futility. Several unjust relationships between people are described: There are those who lord it over others and cause them harm (9). The wicked receive honourable funerals, while the righteous are driven from Jerusalem to be forgotten (10). The sentences for crimes are not quickly carried out, with the consequence that people become more arrogant in committing crimes (11). Thus wicked people commit hundred crimes and still live a long life. Nevertheless, it will go better with those who fear God, even if it cannot be seen on this present earth (12). And it will not go well with the wicked. They will not escape God's righteous judgement and many of them will live short lives on earth (13). The fact that the righteous get what the wicked deserve and vice versa, proves that finding the lasting significance of all man's toil on earth is futility (14). It is commendable to enjoy life, when joy accompanies his work during the days God gives him to live on earth (15). However, to discover "wisdom", that is, to comprehend the lasting significance of all man's toil on earth, is impossible. It is futility. It is only idle pretence when a man claims that he can comprehend God's inscrutable (impenetrable) rule of people and events on earth, and especially that he understands why the wicked prosper, while the righteous suffer (16-17).

Chapter 9:1-10. Inescapable death proves that finding the lasting significance of all man's toil is futility. All people and the things they do are dependent on God's sovereign will and control. No one can comprehend that (1). The futility of everything that happens under the sun is proven by the fact that all people share the same destiny. Death overtakes them all and no one can escape that lot (2-4). Therefore, when God favours a man and has determined this to be his lot on earth, let him enjoy life on earth. Let him do whatever his hand finds to do with all his might (7-10). Because when he dies, he will have no more part in what happens under the sun on earth. In the grave, where everyone is going, that is, where everyone's body is buried, there is no more working, nor planning, nor knowledge, nor wisdom (10).

Chapter 9:11-12. The inability of personal capacities to influence time and chance proves that finding the lasting significance of all man's toil is futility. Man's swiftness, strength, wisdom, brilliance and learning do not determine a man's fate in this life. Time and chance happen to all people and unexpected misfortune (evil times) can end all expectations.

Chapter 9:13-10:3. Folly that destroys the influence of wisdom proves that finding the lasting significance of all man's toil on earth is futility. Wisdom has great advantage, as the Teacher teaches in several places in this book (Eccl 2:13-14; 4:13; 7:11-12,19; 8:1), but the advantage wisdom could have had, is nullified when it is not given a chance to show what it could do (14-16). Wisdom has a greater effect than strength, but it is spoiled by foolishness that causes decay and a bad smell (9:17-10:1). The deliberate way of the wise leads to virtue, but the unthinking way of the fool leads to damage (2). Even in the most ordinary and simple things, a fool cannot act properly (3).

Chapter 10:4-20. The power that folly exercises in this world proves that finding the lasting significance of all man's toil on earth is futility. Because there is so much folly, no lasting significance can be given to all man's toil. Folly is to walk away when a ruler (leader) reacts in anger (4). Folly is to place fools in high positions (5-7). Folly is to neglect consultation with others involved in the same undertaking (8-9). Folly is to use unsuitable instruments and needlessly tire oneself. Success can only be gained by acting with wisdom (10). Folly is to wait taking the proper measures until it is too late to do anything about it (11). Folly is to be blunt, to multiply words and to speculate about the future (12-14). Folly is to wear oneself out by work without gaining any result (15). Folly is when people in high positions live a luxurious life and feast at the wrong times (16-17). Folly is to be lazy or idle around and allow conditions to deteriorate (18). Folly is to live a frivolous and carefree life, to eat, drink and make fun, while money takes care of whatever they wish (19). Folly is to speak evil of any ruler (20).

### **Third. The practical conclusions.**

Chapter 11:1-6. The first practical conclusion. Man is called to energetic and persistent work in this life. In spite of the conclusion of the investigation, that the lasting significance of all man's toil on earth cannot be discovered, man is nevertheless called to be industrious. The fact that he cannot penetrate the mysteries of God's sovereign rule over people and events on earth, should not lead man to be slack or spineless. On the contrary, man is called to exert himself and work with perseverance (6). Man should employ his energy and possessions as royally as possible, even when he cannot see which results it may bring (1). However, his courage to invest must not lead to recklessness. He should invest economically, because he does not know what disaster might strike (2). Evil will happen as certainly as rain falls from a cloud. And an evil situation cannot be changed, as certainly as the direction in which a felled tree lies cannot be changed (3). Man should not be overly scrupulous and wait for the most ideal conditions, lest he misses his chance. He must tackle the venture (4), because he cannot know the mystery of God's sovereign rule. Therefore, exaggerated scrupulousness, in which man wants to know the most suitable time to act, is foolish, because God has hidden his plan of sovereign rule from mankind (5). Precisely because the outcome is uncertain, man should do whatever he can (6).

Chapter 11:7-12:7. The second practical conclusion. Man is called to prepare for the life to come. However wonderful it may be to live on this earth, man must remember that the time spent in death will be longer than the time spent in life. The sentence, "Everything that has come is meaningless" refers to everything that man has acquired and achieved during his toil under the sun on this present earth. Nothing of these things has any advantage, essential or enduring value, or lasting significance (meaning)! Man must remember that when he dies, he will not take anything he has acquired or achieved with him across the grave (7-8).

The young people may enjoy their youth and may follow their ideals to a certain extent. But they must remember that they will have to give an account of everything they have done on earth in the Final Judgement (9). They may freely try to banish anxiety out of their heart and avoid all kind of physical problems. But they must realise that youth and vigour are meaningless, that is, their youthful years pass by very quickly, just like a gust of wind (10). The young people must remember their Creator in the days of their youth. They must seek God, think of him, acknowledge him, honour him, love and serve him, because the day when age overtakes them is coming very quickly.

Old age are days of trouble, because many problems arise (1). Old age is described in terms of an allegory: Old age is like the darkness of the Palestinian winter, when dark rain clouds blot out the sun, moon and stars (2). "The keepers of the house" stand for *the hands*, which begin to tremble in old age. "The strong men" stand for *the bones* in the body, which begin to bend over. "The grinders" stand for *the teeth*, which begin to be few. "The windows" stand for *the eyes*, which grow dim (3). "The closed doors", which cause the sound of grinding to fade, stand for the mumbling of *the lips of a mouth*, which has fallen in. Then the allegory is dropped and old age is described as a time when people find it hard to sleep and are awakened by the early birds. Old age is a time of becoming hard of hearing (4), a time of being afraid of heights and of the dangers on the streets, because old people cannot move fast anymore. Then the allegory is taken up again. "The almond tree" stands for the grey hair. "The grasshopper dragging himself along" stands for the great difficulty with which he walks. "The caper herb that is useless" stands for the diminishing appetite. Finally, old age ends in certain death (5). The allegory is dropped and figurative language is used to further describe death. The golden lamp hanging on a silver cord is a symbol of the lamp of life. The lamp is shattered, the oil flows away, and the lamp of life is extinguished. The broken waterwheel at the well and the shattered pitcher symbolise that the supply-line of life has been cut (6). Then plain language is used to describe what happens at death: The body or physical part of man returns to the dust from which it came, and the soul or spiritual part of man returns to God who gave it to man at his creation (7).

#### **Fourth. The conclusion of the book.**

The Teacher repeats the theme of his book, "Everything is meaningless."

He does not conclude that whatever man does is meaningless. He concludes *that finding the lasting significance of all man's toils on earth is futility*. The real significance of life cannot be found in mere human activities. It lies beyond the discovery of man and must be revealed by God to man (8). The Teacher had thoroughly meditated on this question and had searched it out. Much wisdom has been produced in the world. No matter how many proverbs or books there are in the world, they are wearisome to write and to read (9-12). Real wisdom and the whole duty of man are to fear God, to keep his commandments and to remember that God will bring man's whole life into judgement.

This is the peak of the Teacher's teaching: The fact that no lasting significance can be found in all man's toiling here on earth is designed to cause man to look up to God in heaven and to expect everything from him! The Teacher calls people, not to try and discover meaning in the things or activities on earth in themselves, because they are all temporary. *But to open man's eyes to see that he is on his way to an eternal destination and that man is above all else called to direct his spirit to God and the eternal things!*

#### **ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK**

First. During the next week, read Isaiah 1-39. Next week we will introduce the book of Isaiah - part 1.

Second. See the workbooks "Go and preach God's Kingdom" and Internet on [www.dota.net](http://www.dota.net)

Third. Listen every SATURDAY to WEDNESDAY on the radio to "Discipleship training on the air".