

Ecclesiastes Bible Study Week 2

This week, let's start with a reading of Ecclesiastes Chapter 3, verses 1-8, but keep in mind the concept of merism while we read:

- Merism: A poetic device whereby extremes are used to describe not only the extremes but everything in between (e.g. birth and death referring to the whole of one's life)." -Enns, 52
- Using Merism, what are the topics Qohelet is covering in these verses?
- Is Qohelet talking about everything having its rightful place, or is he just describing the natural order of the universe?
- Do you find this passage comforting or troubling?

Next, let's look at Ecclesiastes 3:9-15

- How does your translation render verse 11? Does it use the word "eternity"?
- *Olam* – refers to the expanse of time itself, both backward and forward. It does not necessarily refer to the concept of eternity. The term could also be rendered as "darkness." Used here, it is a... "concept that refers to the great expanse of human existence, and it is this very awareness, that time goes on and on, both into the past and future, that God has placed in our hearts." -Enns, 55
- What is the gift God gives humanity in this passage? Is this gift always good?

Next, let's read 3:16-4:3

- How does justice work out in this passage?
- Are human beings any better than animals?
- Consider this quote from Peter Enns:
The word picture Qohelet is painting here is clear, if also out of accord with the overall biblical witness. Still, Qohelet leaves us no safety net here, no escape into the mainstream of orthodoxy. He is almost taunting his readers: "I dare you, make a case for how we differ from animals in terms of our ultimate end! Any case you make, I can thwart with simple observation: we do not know – period. What we do know is that we will all die, and it is this ever-present threat that renders any activity, and labor in which we engage, wholly pointless, without profit."
- According to Qohelet, who is more fortunate than the living?

Next, let's read 4:4-16

- What does Qohelet think motivates all work?
- Does work produce any lasting gain for people who do it?
- What does Qohelet have to say about moderation in verse 6?
- Look at verse 12: Where do you often see this quoted? What do you think this passage is actually about?

Next, let's look at Chapter 5:1-7

- Why does Qohelet warn the reader to guard their steps when you draw near to the house of God?
- What does this say about Qohelet's view of God? Is it a positive view or negative view?

Finally, let's end with a quick look at 5:8-20

- What does Qohelet have to say about wealth and corruption in these verses?
- Does it benefit anyone to amass massive quantities of wealth? Why or why not?
- What is the gift of God in verse 19?

Think about these things:

- What are the major themes we have seen in these three chapters?
- Is Qohelet happy with God? Why or why not?
- Does Qohelet's theology line up with the rest of the bible? Why or why not?
- Is God good? Why do we believe this as Christians? How would you provide a counterpoint to Qohelet's view of God?
- Do you think that Qohelet's view of God has some validity to it? What do you agree with him on?
- Do you think Qohelet is an atheist or an agnostic? Or, is Qohelet a believer who is struggling?

Do you need a palate cleanser after reading these heavy passages, but you need it to have some weight to help you process Qohelet's anger with God? Might I recommend reading Psalm 23?