

LIFE UNDER THE SUN



STUDIES IN ECCLESIASTES

26 August 2018

הַבֵּל

*“He who was living is now dead
We who were living are now dying
With a little patience*

— T.S. Elliot, “The Wasteland”

Ecclesiastes Part 3 - “*The Frustrations of Life in a Fallen World*”

Introduction: The Experiences of Life

“The problem is experience; specifically, *a concept of experience* that gives us the feeling we are really living, but makes us unsatisfied with whatever life we obtain.”
—Mark Greif, *Against Everything*

The Theme of the Book

These verses state Qohelet’s overall assessment of life and explain the question that he sought to answer through the various experiences which he will consider throughout the work.

Ecc. 1:2—“*Vanity of vanities,*” says the Preacher, “*Vanity of vanities! All is vanity.*”

“*vanity*”—הַבֵּל (*hebel*) — This term is sometimes translated ‘meaningless,’ ‘futile,’ or ‘vanity.’ Literally it means ‘breath’ or ‘wind.’

The term conveys the nature of life:

The term conveys the effect of this on the human psyche:

- Significance of this term is shown in that it is found in both 1:2 and 12:8, forming a thematic inclusio for Qohelet’s assessment of the experience of life.

Key Point: The experience of life will include a great deal of _____.

The Question Posed by Life

Ecc. 1:3—*What does man gain by all the toil at which he toils under the sun?*

“*gain*”—יִתְרוֹן (*yithrown*) — Used 9 times in the book but nowhere else in Scripture. It can be translated as ‘profit’ or ‘advantage.’

The term refers to that which is lasting and there is an implied answer to the question:

Key Point: The search for meaning and significance through the things of this life will end in _____.

- It is the haunting reality of death which brings life to a sudden end that leads Qohelet to such a negative assessment. As the book continues, however, we come to see that he does see profit both in wisdom (2:13; 10:10) and in worship (5:1; 12:13).

“So although this key phrase at first appears to communicate only negative thoughts in the mind of Qohelet, the end of the matter is quite different. Yes, it is true that there is “no profit” in the sense that things accomplished “under the sun” cannot be carried out of this world by the dead. But profit will come both in this life and in the life to come through God’s gift of wisdom.” — O. Palmer Robertson, *The Christ of Wisdom*

Qohelet’s Poem (1:4-11)

The poem serves as an artistic explanation of the two key interpretive verses that have preceded it.

⁴ *A generation goes, and a generation comes,
but the earth remains forever.*

⁵ *The sun rises, and the sun goes down,
and hastens to the place where it rises.*

⁶ *The wind blows to the south
and goes around to the north;
around and around goes the wind,
and on its circuits the wind returns.*

⁷ *All streams run to the sea,
but the sea is not full;
to the place where the streams flow,
there they flow again.*

Key Point: The _____ of the natural world never seem to come to a state of _____.

⁸ *All things are full of weariness;
a man cannot utter it;
the eye is not satisfied with seeing,
nor the ear filled with hearing.*

⁹ *What has been is what will be,
and what has been done is what will be done,
and there is nothing new under the sun.*

¹⁰ *Is there a thing of which it is said,
“See, this is new”?
It has been already
in the ages before us.*

¹¹ *There is no remembrance of former things,
nor will there be any remembrance
of later things yet to be
among those who come after.*

Key Point: The experiences of our lives never truly _____ us and end the end we _____ and are forgotten.

The Consequences of the Fall of Man

Genesis 1:26-28

⇒ Mankind was made by God to know and enjoy Him in the world that He created and to exercise rule over it.

Genesis 3:16-19

⇒ One consequence of the Fall of man was that the creation itself was cursed by God in order that mankind could no longer find the same type of lasting satisfaction that God had intended for Him in the beginning.

Key Point: The reality of this fits well with Qohelet's _____ concerning nature and human experience.

A Glimpse of the Consummation of All Things — Romans 8:18-30

1. The Apostle Paul _____ the words of Qohelet.

Rom. 8:18-25—¹⁸ For I consider that the sufferings of this present time are not worth comparing with the glory that is to be revealed to us. ¹⁹ For the creation waits with eager longing for the revealing of the sons of God. ²⁰ For the creation was subjected to futility, not willingly, but because of him who subjected it, in hope ²¹ that the creation itself will be set free from its bondage to corruption and obtain the freedom of the glory of the children of God. ²² For we know that the whole creation has been groaning together in the pains of childbirth until now. ²³ And 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. ²⁴ For in this hope we were saved. Now hope that is seen is not hope. For who hopes for what he sees? ²⁵ But if we hope for what we do not see, we wait for it with patience.

2. For believers, the Spirit of God has made us a _____ in Christ and is working to conform us to His image throughout the course of our lives lived in a fallen world.

Rom. 8:26-30—²⁶ Likewise the Spirit helps us in our weakness. For we do not know what to pray for as we ought, but the Spirit himself intercedes for us with groanings too deep for words. ²⁷ And he who searches hearts knows what is the mind of the Spirit, because the Spirit intercedes for the saints according to the will of God. ²⁸ And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified.