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The Chapters of Ecclesiastes

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Ecclesiastes

SECTION OUTLINE ONE (ECCLESIASTES 1)

The Teacher declares that everything is meaningless. He begins reviewing his search for meaning, and his first conclusion is that wisdom is futile.

- I. THE MAN (1:1, 12): The author introduces himself as King David's son-presumably Solomon-and notes that he once ruled over Israel.
- II. THE MISSION (1:13, 16)
 - A. His quest (1:13): Solomon devotes himself to searching out the purpose of life.
 - B. His qualifications (1:16): Because of his great wisdom and power, Solomon feels he possesses the necessary credentials to conduct this search.
- III. THE MADNESS (1:2-11, 14-15, 17-18): A preliminary investigation quickly reveals some bitter truths about life.
 - A. No real purpose (1:2-7, 14, 17): Life is futile and meaningless.
 - B. No new thing (1:9-10): History merely repeats itself.
 - C. No cure (1:15): What is wrong cannot be righted.
 - D. No lasting honor (1:11): The dead are quickly forgotten.

SECTION OUTLINE TWO (ECCLESIASTES 2)

Solomon tries to find meaning through various things.

- I. THE KING'S DELUSIONS (2:1-10): Solomon travels down many roads in his search for peace and purpose. This includes:
 - A. Pleasure (2:1-2)
 - B. Alcohol (2:3)
 - C. Great building projects (2:4a)
 - D. The planting of vineyards (2:4b)
 - E. The creation of beautiful parks with exotic trees (2:5-6)
 - F. The accumulation of possessions, including:
 - 1. Human slaves (2:7a)
 - 2. Herds and flocks (2:7b)
 - 3. Silver and gold (2:8a)
 - 4. Gifted musicians (2:8b)
 - 5. Beautiful concubines (2:8c)
 - G. A universal reputation (2:9)
 - H. Total indulgence (2:10)
- II. THE KING'S CONCLUSIONS (2:11-26)
 - A. The bitter truth (2:11-23)
 - 1. What Solomon finds (2:11-16)
 - a. Everything is useless and empty (2:11).
 - b. Everyone must eventually die (2:12-16).
 - 2. What Solomon fears (2:17-23): He realizes that in most instances the achievements of good men are left to fools.
 - B. The better truth (2:24-26): Be content with what you have, and enjoy your work!

SECTION OUTLINE THREE (ECCLESIASTES 3)

Solomon views life from a human perspective and from God's perspective.

I. EARTHLY EVENTS FROM A HUMAN PERSPECTIVE (3:1-14, 22)

- A. The categories (3:1-8): There is a proper time for all events.
 - 1. To be born and to die (3:2a)
 - 2. To plant and to harvest (3:2b)
 - 3. To kill and to heal (3:3a)
 - 4. To tear down and to rebuild (3:3b)
 - 5. To cry and to laugh (3:4a)
 - 6. To grieve and to dance (3:4b)
 - 7. To scatter and to gather (3:5a)
 - 8. To embrace and to turn away (3:5b)
 - 9. To search and to lose (3:6a)
 - 10. To keep and to throw away (3:6b)
 - 11. To tear and to mend (3:7a)
 - 12. To be quiet and to speak (3:7b)
 - 13. To love and to hate (3:8a)
 - 14. To wage war and to pursue peace (3:8b)
- B. The conclusions (3:9-14, 22)
 - 1. The ultimate truth (3:9-11, 14): God-and God alone-can separate time from eternity.
 - 2. The "until-then" truth (3:12-13, 22): Enjoy both your work and the fruits proceeding from it.

II. EARTHLY EVENTS FROM GOD'S PERSPECTIVE (3:15-21)

- A. What God has done (3:15): He has supervised all past actions.
- B. What God now does (3:18-21): He tests people so that they can see they are no better than animals.
- C. What God will do (3:16-17): He will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked.

SECTION OUTLINE FOUR (ECCLESIASTES 4)

Solomon continues his observations about life.

I. THE WRETCHED THINGS IN THIS LIFE (4:1-8, 13-16)

- A. The people Solomon finds (4:1, 4-8)
 - 1. The oppressed poor (4:1)
 - 2. The selfish rich (4:4, 7-8)
 - 3. The lazy fool (4:5-6)
- B. The pessimism Solomon feels (4:2-3, 13-16)
 - 1. Concerning life and death (4:2-3)
 - a. It is better to be dead than living (4:2)!
 - b. It is best never to have been born (4:3)!
 - 2. Concerning prisoners and potentates (4:13-16)
 - a. It is better to be a poor but wise youth with a prison record than to be a rich but foolish king (4:13-16a)!
 - b. However, in the final analysis, it matters little who and what one is (4:16b).

II. THE WORKABLE THINGS IN THIS LIFE (4:9-12)

- A. Two are better than one (4:9-12a).
 - 1. If one falls, the other can help (4:10).
 - 2. If one is cold, the other can provide warmth (4:11).
 - 3. If one is attacked, the other can defend (4:12a).
- B. Three are better than two (4:12b): A triple-braided cord is not easily broken.

SECTION OUTLINE FIVE (ECCLESIASTES 5)

Solomon observes humanity.

I. HUMAN WORDS (5:1-7)

- A. Be cautious in making a vow (5:1-3).
- B. Be committed in keeping a vow (5:4-7).

II. HUMAN WICKEDNESS (5:8-12)

- A. Our injustice (5:8-9): This can be seen from the poor person to the king on the throne.
- B. Our greed (5:10-12): The more people receive, the more they desire.

III. HUMAN WRETCHEDNESS (5:13-17)

- A. Our birth (5:15): We enter this world with nothing.
- B. Our life (5:13-14): We may be financially reduced to nothing in this life.
- C. Our death (5:16): We leave the world with nothing.

IV. HUMAN WISDOM (5:18-20): Once again Solomon advises us to enjoy our work and to be content with our life.

SECTION OUTLINE SIX (ECCLESIASTES 6)

Solomon considers the source of joy.

I. FORTUNE DOES NOT BRING JOY (6:1-2).

- A. Most wealthy people are unhappy with their possessions in life (6:2a).
- B. All wealthy people leave their possessions to others in death (6:2b).

II. FAMILY DOES NOT BRING JOY (6:3-5): A stillborn child is better off than the unhappy father of 100 children.

III. FULLNESS OF YEARS DOES NOT BRING JOY (6:6-12): This is true even if a person could live to observe his or her 2000th birthday!

SECTION OUTLINE SEVEN (ECCLESIASTES 7)

Solomon considers the better things in life.

I. THE "BETTERS" (7:1-12, 19)

- A. A good reputation is better than fine perfume (7:1a).
- B. The day of death is better than the day of birth (7:1b).
- C. Funerals are better than festivals (7:2).
- D. Sorrow is better than laughter (7:3-4).
- E. Criticism from a wise man is better than praise from a fool (7:5-6).
- F. Finishing is better than starting (7:8a).
- G. Patience is better than pride (7:8b).
- H. Wisdom is better than wealth (7:11-12).
- I. Wisdom is better than power (7:19).

II. THE BITTER (7:26): The snares of a prostitute are more bitter than death!

III. THE BOTTOM LINE (7:13-18, 20-25, 27-29): Solomon concludes the following:

- A. What is crooked cannot be made straight (7:13).
- B. Enjoy today, for tomorrow is uncertain (7:14).
- C. Don't be too good or too wise (7:15-18).
- D. There is no one who has not sinned (7:20).
- E. Don't eavesdrop (7:21-22).
- F. Wisdom without God is impossible (7:23-25, 27-29).

SECTION OUTLINE EIGHT (ECCLESIASTES 8)

Solomon makes further observations about life.

I. CONCERNING UNDERSTANDING (8:1, 16-17)

- A. Wisdom brightens a person's appearance (8:1).
- B. Wisdom comes only from God (8:16-17).

II. CONCERNING UNQUESTIONED OBEDIENCE (8:2-5): Obey the king, for his word is supreme.

III. CONCERNING UNCERTAINTY (8:6-8): No one can escape death.

IV. CONCERNING UNFAIRNESS (8:9-14)

- A. Solomon's frustration (8:9-11, 14)
 1. Why do the wicked often receive that which the righteous deserve (8:9-11)?
 2. Why do the righteous often receive that which the wicked deserve (8:14)?
- B. Solomon's realization (8:12-13): God will eventually punish the wicked!

V. CONCERNING THE ULTIMATE (8:15): Be content, and enjoy life!

SECTION OUTLINE NINE (ECCLESIASTES 9)

Solomon reflects on the things that control human destiny.

I. THE INFINITE ONE (9:1): The affairs of all people are in the hands of God.

II. THE INSANITY (9:2-6, 11-12)

- A. Death ends every person's life (9:2-6).
 1. The living know they will die (9:5a).
 2. The dead know nothing at all (9:5b).
- B. Chance controls every person's life (9:11).
 1. The swift do not always win the race (9:11a).
 2. The strong do not always win the battle (9:11b).
 3. The smart do not always acquire the wealth (9:11c).
- C. Calamity stalks every person's path (9:12).

III. THE INSTRUCTIONS (9:7-10)

- A. Enjoy life with your wife (9:9).
- B. Whatever you do, do well (9:10).

IV. THE ILLUSTRATION (9:13-18)

- A. The contents (9:13-15)
 1. The saving (9:13-15a): By his wisdom a poor but wise man once saved his town from a powerful king whose armies had surrounded it.
 2. The sorrow (9:15b): His noble achievements were soon forgotten because he was poor.
- B. The conclusion (9:16-18): Wisdom is still better than strength!

SECTION OUTLINE TEN (ECCLESIASTES 10)

Solomon reflects on different kinds of people.

I. THE INDIVIDUALS DESCRIBED BY SOLOMON (10:1-7, 12-18, 20)

- A. The wise (10:2a, 12a)
 1. Their hearts direct them to do right (10:2a).
 2. Their mouths give forth gracious words (10:12a).
- B. The foolish (10:2b-3, 6-7, 12b-15)
 1. Their hearts direct them to do evil (10:2b).
 2. The way they walk betrays them as fools (10:3).
 3. They are often (tragically) given great authority (10:6-7).
 4. They are consumed by their own words (10:12b-14).
 5. They are exhausted by even the simplest tasks (10:15).
- C. Those in authority (10:4-5, 16-17, 20)

1. Stay calm, and don't quit if your boss is angry with you (10:4).
 2. Woe to the land whose king is a child (10:16).
 3. Happy is the land whose king is a nobleman (10:17).
 4. Don't make light of a king, even in your thoughts (10:20).
- D. The lazy man (10:18): He lets the roof leak and the rafters rot.

II. THE INJURIES WARNED ABOUT BY SOLOMON (10:8-11): He cautions concerning:

- A. Digging a well, lest you fall into it (10:8a)
- B. Demolishing an old wall, lest a snake bite you (10:8b)
- C. Working a quarry, lest the stones crush you (10:9a)
- D. Chopping wood, lest the axe strike you (10:9b-10)

III. THE INSIGHTS OBSERVED BY SOLOMON (10:19)

- A. A party gives laughter (10:19a).
- B. Wine gives happiness (10:19b).
- C. Money gives everything (10:19c).

SECTION OUTLINE ELEVEN (ECCLESIASTES 11)

Solomon considers various rules for life.

I. GENERAL RULES FOR ALL PEOPLE (11:1-6)

- A. Be generous (11:1-2).
- B. Don't delay in matters of sowing and reaping (11:3-4).
- C. Don't try to understand the work of God (11:5).
- D. Keep on sowing your seed (11:6).

II. SPECIAL RULES FOR YOUNG PEOPLE (11:7-10)

- A. Rejoice (11:7-9a): Enjoy your youth. Live life to the hilt.
- B. Remember (11:9b-10): Keep in mind that someday you must account to God for everything you do.

SECTION OUTLINE TWELVE (ECCLESIASTES 12)

Solomon gives some concluding thoughts.

I. THE COMMAND (12:1-8)

- A. What his readers are to do (12:1-2): They are to honor their Creator early in life.
- B. Why they are to do it (12:3-8): God desires the strength of his people when they are young, before old age reduces the body to a pitiful shell of its former days.

II. THE COLLECTION (12:9-12)

- A. The information (12:9): The Teacher collected and classified many proverbs.
- B. The instruction (12:10): The gifted Teacher then taught the proverbs to his people.

III. THE CONCLUSION (12:13-14)

- A. What his readers are to do (12:13): "Fear God and obey his commandments."
- B. Why his readers are to do it (12:14): "God will judge us for everything we do."