



What's New?

Existentialism & Ecclesiastes

The Greatest Existential Work



- “The late great theologian, Dr. Francis Schaeffer and his wife, Edith, stayed in our home for a week in the Fall of 1982. One morning around the breakfast table I took the opportunity to ask Dr. Schaeffer to explain the book of Ecclesiastes. What I remember most about what he said is that Ecclesiastes is the greatest existential book ever written.” Anne Murchison *Eternity Now*

What is *Existentialism*?



- Twentieth-century French Existentialism requires an authentic acceptance of total meaninglessness, especially in the face of our own mortality. But then it offers the creation of our own meaning by the free act of deciding. Its creed is "By choosing this totally meaningless and irrational act and direction for my life, I become the creator of my own meaning."

Precepts of Existentialism



- First, there is the basic existentialist standpoint, that existence precedes essence, has primacy over essence.
- Man is a conscious subject, rather than a thing to be predicted or manipulated; he exists as a conscious being, and not in accordance with any definition, essence, generalization, or system.
- Existentialism says I am nothing else but my own conscious existence. (Lavine)

Precepts of Existentialism



- A second theme is that of anxiety – angst.
- A generalized discomfort that is the universal condition of human existence.
- Rejection of
 - Happiness
 - Optimism
 - Serenity
- Only the Naïve and Foolish deny the despair and tragedy of human existence

Precepts of Existentialism



- When I consider the short duration of my life, swallowed up in the eternity before and after, and the little space I fill, and even can see, engulfed in the infinite immensity of space of which I am ignorant, and which knows me not, I am frightened, and am astonished at being here rather than there, why now rather than then." --by T.Z. Lavine
 - T.Z. Lavine, Elton Professor of Philosophy at George Washington University

Theism, Dostoyevski, Sartre



- Dostoyevski and Ivan K.,
 - "If God didn't exist, everything would be permissible".
- John Paul Sartre responded to Dostoyevski's statement in *Existentialism and Humanism*,
 - "That is the very starting point of existentialism . . . and as a result man is forlorn, because neither within him nor without does he find anything to cling to . . . if God does not exist, we find no values or commands to turn to which legitimize our conduct."

INTRODUCTION TO ECCLESIASTES



- A. Title: Qohelet (The Speaker [in an Assembly])
 - In Hebrew the book is titled "Qohelet"
 - This has been understood to be a proper name, and thus not translated but transliterated
 - This is probably a title rather than a proper name due to the definite article which is used with the term in 12:8, "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher
 - In the LXX titled "Ecclesiastes"
 - This describes "one who calls an assembly"
 - Therefore, many English versions interpret "Qohelet" in terms of the role that he played within the assembly:
 - "The Teacher" (NIV)
 - "The Preacher" (KJV/NASV)
 - "The Leader of the Assembly" (NIV marg)

Authorship:



- Self-identification,
 - the son of David
 - King in Jerusalem
 - points to Solomon but not explicit
- External Evidence:
 - Although many critical scholars argue for a late date of Ecclesiastes, their evidence is not conclusive and an earlier Solomonic date is supportable in line with the general opinion before the seventeenth century
 - Until the rise of literary and historical criticism during the Enlightenment (17th century) Solomonic authorship of Ecclesiastes was generally accepted

Church & Synagogue



- The Jews considered Ecclesiastes to be inspired:
 - It was included in the Mishnah and the Talmud
 - It was included in the LXX
 - It was not doubted by Josephus
 - Other Greek translations
 - It was not doubted by the translation of Aquila
 - It was not doubted by the translation of Symmachus
 - t was not doubted by the translation of Theodotion
- It was approved in the early Christian era:
 - It was included in the catalog of Melito, bishop of Sardis (c. AD 170)

Authorship Questioned



- Questions of authorship arising due to linguistic discussions:
 - Hebrew Style: Some believed that the Hebrew of Ecclesiastes was closer in style to that of the Mishnah (AD 200) than Solomon's age (BC 951-921)
 - Loan Words: Aramaic and Persian words led scholars to date the work after Solomon, but some recent studies show that some of these features exist in Canaanite-Phoenician literature of the pre-Solomonic era

Autobiographical References:



- Autobiographical references are considered to be literary devices to validate the author's arguments as in the case of the pseudepigraphical *Wisdom of Solomon* (ca. 150-50 BC),
 - but this is not a necessary conclusion for the following reasons:
 - Although some argue that the verb "was" *hayah* means "I ... Was [and am no longer] king."
 - However, the verb could be translated as follows:
 - "I ... have been [and still am] king." See the NASB
 - The reference to "all who were over Jerusalem before me" may not only refer to Israelite rulers (e.g., David only), but to the non-Israelite rulers before David

The Older Wise Guys



- In 1 Kings 4:29-34 we read: 29 And God gave Solomon wisdom and exceedingly great understanding, and largeness of heart like the sand on the seashore. 30 Thus Solomon's wisdom excelled the wisdom of all the men of the East and all the wisdom of Egypt. 31 For he was wiser than all men -- than Ethan the Ezrahite, and Heman, Chalcol, and Darda, the sons of Mahol; and his fame was in all the surrounding nations. 32 He spoke three thousand proverbs, and his songs were one thousand and five. 33 Also he spoke of trees, from the cedar tree of Lebanon even to the hyssop that springs out of the wall; he spoke also of animals, of birds, of creeping things, and of fish. 34 And men of all nations, from all the kings of the earth who had heard of his wisdom, came to hear the wisdom of Solomon.

Socio-Political Conditions



- Although some argue that the social and political conditions of Ecclesiastes are descriptive of the later time periods when the Jews were under Persian or Greek rule, they could also be descriptive of the end of Solomon's rule when he was so harsh
 - **1 Kings 12:9-11** "What advice do you give? How should we answer this people who have spoken to me, saying, 'Lighten the yoke which your father put on us'?" 10 Then the young men who had grown up with him spoke to him, saying, "Thus you should speak to this people who have spoken to you, saying, 'Your father made our yoke heavy, but you make *it* lighter on us' -- thus you shall say to them: 'My little *finger* shall be thicker than my father's waist! 11 'And now, whereas my father put a heavy yoke on you, I will add to your yoke; my father chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scourges!'

Internal Evidence



- Although not conclusive, the internal evidence leans in the direction of Solomon:
 - The author identifies himself as:
 - "Son of David" (1:1)
 - a "King in Jerusalem" (1:1)
 - a "king over Israel in Jerusalem" (1:12)
- The author identifies himself with qualities which would have been true of David's son, Solomon:
 - He has "magnified and increased wisdom more than all who were over Jerusalem before" him 1:16
 - He describes himself as a builder of great projects 2:4-6
 - He describes himself as possessing
 - many slaves (2:7),
 - herds of sheep and cattle (2:7),
 - and great wealth (2:8)
- He claimed to be greater than all who lived in Jerusalem before him 2:9

Date



- Probably around 935 BC
 - If one holds to Solomonic authorship, than the date is between 970-931 BC

Vanity of vanities



- The book of Ecclesiastes begins:
 - Ecclesiastes 1:1-3 The words of the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem. 2 "Vanity of vanities," says the Preacher; "Vanity of vanities, all *is* vanity." 3 What profit has a man from all his labor In which he toils under the sun?
- It is easy to see in these three verses the connection between Ecclesiastes and Existentialism

The Improbable Existentialist



- While the book of Ecclesiastes adopts an existentialist point of view, it will not be existentialist in its conclusions.
 - This is because Qohelet is too wise to be an atheist.
 - He is writing from a profoundly human point of view but he cannot deny his own experience of God's immanence:
 - 1 Kings 3:1-15
 - What happens though to Solomon is actually a common consequence of disobedience. First was Solomon disobedient?

Solomon's Disobedience



- 1 Kings 11:1-13
- Isaiah 59:1-2
- Jeremiah 5:24-25
 - A basic consequence of disobedience is a sense of estrangement, an isolation and alienation from fellowship. This alienation is often perceived as *angst* a generalized anxiety that colors everything we do. We are going to see this very clearly in Qohelet, we will be able to trace its effects, but the profound experience of the two theophanic experiences one of blessing and the other of reproof preclude Solomon from ever descending into the error of atheism but they intensify the confusion of his emotions, and actually help us see some very profound insights into the real nature of the fallen world we live in.

The *Vain* (הֶבֶל) World



הֶבֶל הֶבְלִים אָמַר קֹהֵלֶת הֶבֶל הֶבְלִים הַכֹּל הֶבֶל

“vanity of vanities says Qohelet, vanity of vanities,
everything is vanity”

- “. . . Qoheleth deliberately chose a word with a calculated ambiguity; he skillfully employed it in a variety of contexts so that several associated meanings could be communicated without the use of synonyms. . . It must be emphasized that Qoheleth nowhere uses hebel pejoratively or with morally negative connotations. For Qoheleth hebel is a neutral term expressing brilliantly in its figurative nuances, the limitations of human activity and human wisdom”

(R. Cover, “Hebel in Ecclesiastes,” Th.M thesis, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1978, p.76.)

Transitory



- 3:19 For what happens to the sons of men also happens to animals; one thing befalls them: as one dies, so dies the other. Surely, they all have one breath; man has no advantage over animals, for all *is* vanity.
- 6:12 For who knows what *is* good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?
- 9:9 Live joyfully with the wife whom you love all the days of your vain life which He has given you under the sun, all your days of vanity; for that *is* your portion in life, and in the labor which you perform under the sun.
- 11:10 Therefore remove sorrow from your heart, And put away evil from your flesh, For childhood and youth *are* vanity.

Perplexing



- 6:2 A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor, so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires; yet God does not give him power to eat of it, but a foreigner consumes it. This *is* vanity, and it *is* an evil affliction.
- 8:10 And again, I have observed the wicked carried to their graves, and people leaving the holy place and, once out in the city, forgetting how the wicked used to behave; this is vanity too!
- 8:14 There is a vanity which occurs on earth, that there are just *men* to whom it happens according to the work of the wicked; again, there are wicked *men* to whom it happens according to the work of the righteous. I said that this also *is* vanity.

Fruitless, or Unbeneficial



- 2:19 And who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will rule over all my labor in which I toiled and in which I have shown myself wise under the sun. This also *is* vanity.
- 2:21 For there is a man whose labor *is* with wisdom, knowledge, and skill; yet he must leave his heritage to a man who has not labored for it. This also *is* vanity and a great evil.
- 2:1 I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure"; but surely, this also *was* vanity.
- 2:15 So I said in my heart, "As it happens to the fool, It also happens to me, And why was I then more wise?" Then I said in my heart, "This also *is* vanity."
- 7:6 For like the crackling of thorns under a pot, So *is* the laughter of the fool. This also *is* vanity.

Chasing the Wind?



- Play on words. Gasping for breath? Chasing the wind?
 - 4:4 I have also noted that all labor and skillful enterprise come from men's envy of each other -- another futility and pursuit of wind!
 - 2:11 Then I looked on all the works that my hands had done And on the labor in which I had toiled; And indeed all *was* vanity and grasping for the wind. *There was* no profit under the sun.
 - 6:7-9 7 All the labor of man *is* for his mouth, And yet the soul is not satisfied. 8 For what more has the wise *man* than the fool? What does the poor man have, Who knows *how* to walk before the living? 9 Better *is* the sight of the eyes than the wandering of desire. This also *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

The Relationship of the Transient and the Permanent



- 3 What profit has a man from all his labor In which he toils under the sun? 4 *One* generation passes away, and *another* generation comes; But the earth abides forever. 5 The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, And hastens to the place where it arose. 6 The wind goes toward the south, And turns around to the north; The wind whirls about continually, And comes again on its circuit. 7 All the rivers run into the sea, Yet the sea *is* not full; To the place from which the rivers come, There they return again.

Profit and Toil



מֵה־יִתְרוֹן לְאָדָם בְּכָל־עֲמָלוֹ שִׁיעֲמַל תַּחַת הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

– What *profit* is there for a man in all his *toil* in which he *toils* under the sun?

- Yithron is the idea of *results*. It can be a positive result, which is often expressed by *profit* or by *advantage*. It can simply mean, *the outcome*, in a more neutral sense.
- This first section begins by asking what is the outcome of all of man's labor.
- `Amal *toil*, has the sense of anxiety, care, and burden. I think this is directly behind Jesus teaching in Matthew 6:24-34.

Profit and Toil



- **Ecclesiastes 1:4-8** *One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever. 5 The sun also rises, and the sun goes down, And hastens to the place where it arose. 6 The wind goes toward the south, And turns around to the north; The wind whirls about continually, And comes again on its circuit. 7 All the rivers run into the sea, Yet the sea is not full; To the place from which the rivers come, There they return again. 8 All things are full of labor; Man cannot express it. The eye is not satisfied with*
 - This expresses the activity of creation which is never finished. Men come and go, the earth is always here. The sun comes and goes, but it does it every day. Rivers are always flowing, but nothing changes. There is activity, but everything remains seemingly the same.
 - In an age when we have started to make an impact on creation. (Negatively mostly) What does this say to us about the futility of all our efforts?

The Enduring Monotony of Hardship



- 8 All things *are* full of labor; Man cannot express *it*. The eye is not satisfied with seeing, Nor the ear filled with hearing. 9 That which has been *is* what will be, That which *is* done is what will be done, And *there is* nothing new under the sun. 10 Is there anything of which it may be said, "See, this *is* new"? It has already been in ancient times before us. 11 *There is* no remembrance of former *things*, Nor will there be any remembrance of *things* that are to come By *those* who will come after.
 - Does this sound as true today as it did in Solomon's time? We read in Daniel 12:4 "But you, Daniel, shut up the words, and seal the book until the time of the end; many shall run to and fro, and knowledge shall increase."
 - In what ways are Solomon's observations still very valid? For those things that are genuinely new, how much have *eternal profitability* or are even currently *advantageous*?

The Anxiety of Entropy



- 12 I, the Preacher, was king over Israel in Jerusalem. 13 And I set my heart to seek and search out by wisdom concerning all that is done under heaven; this burdensome task God has given to the sons of man, by which they may be exercised. 14 I have seen all the works that are done under the sun; and indeed, all *is* vanity and grasping for the wind. 15 *What is* crooked cannot be made straight, And what is lacking cannot be numbered.
 - This is an intriguing point. Solomon is examining all human labor. He is very much aware that the frustration of labor is burdensome and *divine*. Cf. Gen. 3:17-19.
 - He concludes with a very *ironic* formula. You can't straighten what is crooked. *There is something fundamentally wrong* with the world, we can't undo it. And you can't count what is missing. There is a nearly insatiable appetite for annihilation in the universe. Scientists call this entropy. Cf. Proverbs 30:15-16.

The Anxiety of Psychology



- 16 I communed with my heart, saying, "Look, I have attained greatness, and have gained more wisdom than all who were before me in Jerusalem. My heart has understood great wisdom and knowledge." 17 And I set my heart to know wisdom and to know madness and folly. I perceived that this also is grasping for the wind. 18 For in much wisdom *is* much grief, And he who increases knowledge increases sorrow.
 - Solomon acknowledges the ultimate futility of wisdom. It does not make one more content. It tends to make one more discontent. The world is essentially disturbing. Understanding the human psyche, is also disturbing. The more we understand human behavior, the more frustrating humanity becomes to us. This too is something that left Solomon with an anxiety attack

Feelin' Good was good enough for me....



- (Janis Joplin's cover of K. Kristofferson's *Me and Bobby McGee*)
- I said in my heart, "Come now, I will test you with mirth; therefore enjoy pleasure"; but surely, this also *was* vanity. I said of laughter -- "Madness!"; and of mirth, "What does it accomplish?"
I searched in my heart *how* to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what *was* good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives. Ecclesiastes 2:1-3
 - Solomon's Experiment
 - The purpose was to test/prove/examine his own inner life.

Mirth & Laughter



- Mirth is used by the translator because it is evidently found wanting.
 - The word is Simchah which is joy gladness mirth or gaiety.
 - Many versions translate this here as simply pleasure
- The next phrase is *See good! And this also was fleeting and insubstantial.*
 - Solomon set his sights on anything that produced the sensation of “fun,” Tov – “the modern summum bonum”

The Experiment



- I said of laughter -- "Madness!"; and of mirth, "What does it accomplish?"
 - Then he shifts to specific ways that we define or attempt to create *good* times.
 - Laughter is devoid of reason, it is inherently foolish, it is often illogical.
 - It is an emotional release that is transitory and dangerous to replicate.
 - But for Qohelet, its greatest indictment is that it is unproductive, *What does it do?*

Wine



- I explored my inner self, refreshing my sensual man with wine while steering my inner life with good judgment, to get a hold of frivolity, until I could really understand what is best for the children of Adam to do in the short time they are allotted in this world.
 - I am convinced that everything that follows this verse until we get to verses 9, 10 and 11 is the substance of his exploration.
 - **Ecclesiastes 2:4-8** I made my works great, I built myself houses, and planted myself vineyards. 5 I made myself gardens and orchards, and I planted all *kinds* of fruit trees in them. 6 I made myself water pools from which to water the growing trees of the grove. 7 I acquired male and female servants, and had servants born in my house. Yes, I had greater possessions of herds and flocks than all who were in Jerusalem before me. 8 I also gathered for myself silver and gold and the special treasures of kings and of the provinces. I acquired male and female singers, the delights of the sons of men, *and* musical instruments of all kinds.

The Results Are In



- Vss 9,10 and 11 are his assessment of a lifetime of research.
 - **Ecclesiastes 2:9-11** So I grew great, greater than anyone in Jerusalem before me; nor did my wisdom leave me. 10 I denied my eyes nothing that they desired, refused my heart no pleasure, for I found all my hard work a pleasure, such was the return for all my efforts. 11 I then reflected on all that my hands had achieved and all the effort I had put into its achieving. What **futility** it all was, what **chasing after the wind!** There is **nothing to be gained** under the sun.

We Cannot Control the Future



- **Ecclesiastes 2:12-19** My reflections then turned to wisdom, stupidity and folly. For instance, what can the successor of a king do? What has been done already. 13 More is to be gained from wisdom than from folly, just as one gains more from light than from darkness; this, of course, I see: 14 The wise have their eyes open, the fool walks in the dark. No doubt! But I know, too, that one fate awaits them both. 15 'Since the fool's fate', I thought to myself, 'will be my fate too, what is the point of my having been wise?' I realised that this too is futile. 16 For there is no lasting memory for the wise or the fool, and in the days to come both will be forgotten; the wise, no less than the fool, must die. 17 Life I have come to hate, for what is done under the sun disgusts me, since all is futility and chasing after the wind. 18 All I have toiled for under the sun and now bequeath to my successor I have come to hate; 19 who knows whether he will be wise or a fool? Yet he will be master of all the work into which I have put my efforts and wisdom under the sun. That is futile too.

The End



- **Ecclesiastes 2:20-23** I have come to despair of all the efforts I have expended under the sun. 21 For here is one who has laboured wisely, skilfully and successfully and must leave what is his own to someone who has not toiled for it at all. This is futile too, and grossly unjust; 22 for what does he gain for all the toil and strain that he has undergone under the sun- 23 since his days are full of sorrow, his work is full of stress and even at night he has no peace of mind? This is futile too.
 - Vss 20 & 21 are the conclusion to the ironic observation about a squandered legacy.
 - Vss 22 & 23 are the summary of both sections considered together.
 - The only *good* that Qohelet found was the reward that is intrinsic in the doing. He enjoyed the work while he was working, but the results were transitory, and exhausting.

Is Nothing Good?



- The only positive conclusion that Qohelet draws from his research is this:
 - Ecclesiastes 2:24 24 Nothing *is* better for a man *than* that he should eat and drink, and *that* his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God.
 - I think we could say it a little more emphatically, more like Qohelet said it if we say: “nothing is better for a man than to eat, drink, and to make himself recognize what is good about his toil, even this, I myself learned, even this came from the hand of God.”
 - So for Qohelet, this was the greatest pleasure, the satisfaction that arose from the doing of the stuff we are caught up with.

That's In The Bible?



• *To Everything Turn, Turn, Turn
There is a Season Turn, Turn, Turn
And a Time for Every Purpose Under Heaven*
(Pete Seeger, arr. Jim McGuire)

- This brings us to Chapter 3 of Qohelet's exploration of the world of phenomena. His observation of the nature of everyday life. This section is so vividly human that the Byrds borrowed it for a song:
 - Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 is a repetitive and evocative poem that embraces all of human existence.
 - The statements are so simple as to be tautological.
 - There is no revelation contained in the statement "there is a time to die."
 - Since there is nothing profound in each of the sayings, we must look to the combination of sayings.
 - The structure is essential to the meaning of the poem. So we must take into account the choices made in stitching it together.

The Struture



- Comprised of 15 couplets, all but the first couplet are antithetical. But that does not tell the whole story. The couplets are woven together in a varying structure of positive and negative elements with the ideas playing against each other to express the complexity of life.



- To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to be born, And a time to die;
A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted;

A time to kill, And a time to heal;

A time to break down, And a time to build up;
A time to weep, And a time to laugh;
A time to mourn, And a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones;

A time to embrace, And a time to be far from an embrace;

A time to find/seek, And a time to lose;
A time to keep, And a time to throw away;
A time to tear, And a time to sew;

A time to keep silence, And a time to speak;

A time to love, And a time to hate;
A time of war, And a time of peace.
- Notice the interplay
 - between being and doing
 - Positive and negative

The Relationships



- In the first stanza there are two couplets. The first is the summary of the human condition represented by the extreme ends of all life.
- Then the summary of all endeavor symbolized by the agrarian image of planting and harvesting.
- The most natural pattern of cause and effect for individual profit.



- To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to be born, And a time to die;
A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted;

A time to kill, And a time to heal;

A time to break down, And a time to build up;
A time to weep, And a time to laugh;
A time to mourn, And a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones;

A time to embrace, And a time to be far from an embrace;

A time to find/seek, And a time to lose;
A time to keep, And a time to throw away;
A time to tear, And a time to sew;

A time to keep silence, And a time to speak;

A time to love, And a time to hate;
A time of war, And a time of peace.
- Notice the interplay
 - between being and doing
 - Positive and negative

Punctuation



- The next couplet is suggested by the agrarian image, a time to slaughter, but it is ambiguous because its coordinate term is heal.
 - I believe it refers to the care of animals
- This moves it into a realm of harm and help.
 - It is not just the seasonal activity of the farmer now.
 - Standing awkwardly after the introduction. it becomes the first of 3 couplets that punctuate the poem.
 - The other 2 are; embracing and silence, but more on these later.

Next Quatrain



- The next section is a balanced quatrain of couplets that are all antithetical, are all posited in a negative followed by positive order.
 - There is a structure to the quatrain, the outer couplets are activities, labors. The first is the sequence of maintenance. First you demolish the old and then you build the new.
 - The closing is drawn from field work. First you throw the stones out, as in clearing a field. Then you gather them together, to make a building or fence.
 - Both images are of the cyclic nature of labor. The old soldier's dilemma of dig a whole here. Then move it there, dig a whole there to put the dirt from the first hole in, and then use that dirt to fill the first hole up. It seems that work is never over, we are either tearing something down or building something up.
- The interior couplets are successive statements of emotion, how the negative feelings are always eased by time,
 - there is an intensification as we move from one couplet to another.
 - A movement from being to doing as well.
- This emphatically emphasizes that even the worst sorrow in life is transitory. It could have been said the other way around but this argues against a blind pessimism.



- To everything there is a season,
A time for every purpose under heaven:
A time to be born, And a time to die;
A time to plant, And a time to pluck what is planted;

A time to kill, And a time to heal;

A time to break down, And a time to build up;
A time to weep, And a time to laugh;
A time to mourn, And a time to dance;
A time to cast away stones, And a time to gather stones;

A time to embrace, And a time to be far from an embrace;

A time to find/seek, And a time to lose;
A time to keep, And a time to throw away;
A time to tear, And a time to sew;

A time to keep silence, And a time to speak;

A time to love, And a time to hate;
A time of war, And a time of peace.
- Notice the interplay
 - between being and doing
 - Positive and negative

Decisions of Life



- The next stanza (skipping over the single couplet of embracing) is slightly more complex.
 - It is composed of 3 couplets.
 - While the couplets are each an antithetical pair, there are more intricate relationships that are thematically suggested.
- The first 2 couplets move from Positive to negative.
 - Unlike the couplets in the last stanza.
 - The final couplet moves from negative to positive.
 - The first 2 couplets combine the idea of losing and keeping forming a sharp antithesis that seems to pull the couplets together.
 - There is also antithesis between seek/find and discarding. So there are multiple levels of antithesis.
- The second couplet when compared with the third also is interesting.
 - The second is positive to negative and the third is negative to positive
 - there is a contrast between the movements, and there is also a relationship that spans the two couplets.
 - The idea of keeping something and mending it is a strong preservative image.
 - The 1st and last cola are synonymous.
 - The second and third are throwing away and tearing up.
 - These are both negatives so they are roughly synonymous.
 - It is significant I think that the positive embraces the negative.
 - That the final decision is to preserve and repair, a thoroughly human and healthy note.

More Punctuation



- The 3 individual bicola are very intriguing.
 - They stand in the middle of all this with almost an ethereal quality.
 - Slaughter and heal
 - to embrace and to be far away from the one you want to embrace
 - to speak and to be silent.
- They are in a different category than the others and I think they tend to reflect the inner life more than the activities of man.
 - We are called on at times to hurt to help
 - we have relationships we are alone
 - we have a lot to say or nothing.
 - These move through the rest of our experiences in a detached way sometimes.
- The complexity of this poem reflects the complexity of our human existence.
 - Our seasons are not predictable except in the fact that they will change, they will get better and they will get worse.

So What?



- So what are we to do?
- Well the poet adds his commentary:
 - Ecclesiastes 3:9-13 What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? 10 I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. 11 He has made everything [אֶת־הַכֹּל עָשָׂה יָפֵה] beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end. 12 I know that nothing *is* better for them than to rejoice (לְשִׂמְחָה), and to do good in [or with] their lives, 13 and also that every man should eat and drink and enjoy the good of all his labor -- it *is* the gift of God.

Transition



- Ecclesiastes 3:14-15
 - This is one of the transitional passages. It stands as the conclusion to what has gone before.
 - The personal anguish that comes from the transience and ineffectual legacy of all personal endeavors.
 - What we do, is far from permanent.
 - What we leave behind us is always beyond our control.
 - The momentary pleasure that we take in the doing of our stuff is a fleeting relief, from the oppressive burden of eternity.
 - In all this, we need to have the right perspective.
 - What we are experiencing is not new, and unique to ourselves.
 - Nor will our plans be truly innovative.
 - All that we do springs from a common complex of motivations.
 - What we need to remember is that our thoughts and plans make the transition to fact, act, and history, we are accountable for what we do.

Injustice



- This brings us to another one of the great calamities of human experience, one of the most inexplicable conditions of humanity.
 - Ecclesiastes 3:16 - 17
 - If we are indeed accountable, why does God allow injustice?
- Notice how the language of the opening poem of this chapter is picked up in these verses to structurally maintain the continuity with the previous section.
 - And the faith of Qohelet peeks through with his conviction that God who is behind providence will hold everyone accountable.
 - This is the only safeguard against the travesty that he is now turning his attention towards.

Under the Sun



- Notice how he describes his existentialist observation. / *looked even farther under the sun . . .*
 - under the sun is his way of describing the observable phenomena of life, the raw data. What one can see, uninterpreted by faith.
- He uses a synonymous pair of words to sum up the depravity of society. He uses *judgement* (הַמִּשְׁפָּט) and *righteousness* (הַצְדִּיק) to describe the social order.
 - These words are not describing personal ethical behavior. They refer to institutional injustice.
 - They describe the aspect of society that should be administering justice.
 - Instead he finds there (הַרְשָׁע) this is the kind of behavior which is wrong, immoral, unjust and impious.
 - It is a behavior which acts defiantly in disregard for divine justice.
- This is the ultimate expression of atheism, immorality.

Qohelet Succumbs



- The preacher persists in his “scientific” quest to believe only what he can confirm, and is swallowed up in pessimism.
 - My translation:
 - I decided regarding society to consider them apart from God. [or to consider the powerful by themselves] To look at them as they treat each other, as animals.
 - From this perspective, they all have the same fate. Man has no advantage.
 - They both die, who can say what happens afterwards.
 - From an existential viewpoint, there is nothing better than to enjoy his work.
 - For you can't make most people think about what they can't see

Oppression



- Chapter 4 begins with a lament about oppression
 - This is one of the great tragedies of a fallen world.
 - That injustice and inequity are the ultimate reality of this sin wracked world is one of the bitterest consequences of this world that we live in .
 - Remember the existentialist view point states that existence and not essence is the ground of understanding. Therefore the existentialist looks at humanities' inhumanity to man and accepts it as part and parcel of the human condition.
 - It does not ask why man is the way he is.
 - The notion of fallenness is not important.
 - What the believer understands as a decline from original righteousness, the existentialist accepts as a fact of existence.
 - The existentialist despairs of reform or transformation.
 - He accepts the condition as he finds it

Qohelet's Pessimism Deepens



- Ecclesiastes 4:2-3
 - This is perhaps the height of existential pessimism.
 - Life stinks,
I would be better off dead.
But it would be even better not to be born.
 - The reasoning of the existentialist is *humans are inhuman to humans*.
 - This is ironic.
 - To be human is to be inhuman.
 - Yet from where do we get our notion that man is inhuman, if what he is is what he is, then he is being humane.
 - That is the existential reality because like Qohelet that is what we observe.

Why was I born?



- The existentialist wishes he had never been born, had never been exposed to this sad world.
- We cannot blame them for this discouraging state because they are only considering the world from a purely human perspective.
 - “Humanity is inhumane to man.
There is no hope because man’s essence is not the issue, man’s existence is inhumane, not inhumane because he is fallen.
- It is actually the Gospel which accepts the judgment of the Scriptures that because man’s nature is fallen he is redeemable.
 - If man’s nature can be changed than what is, is not what needs to be.
 - This is why the social gospel failed.
 - Man can not by himself improve man’s condition by treating the symptoms.
 - The great futility of evangelicalism is the exclusive emphasis on the individuality of the gospel.
 - We are not saved merely to be prepared for heaven.
 - We are saved to save the world by changing humanity from the inside out.

What do we do?



- We cannot live by ourselves.
 - We cannot enjoy our salvation and ignore the plight of the human condition.
- Ecc 4:4-6
 - Everything good we do will provoke more envy than admiration.
- The next verse seems to be something akin to Epicurus in its philosophy.
 - That a life of modest accomplishment is better than what amounts to just a little more with its attendant futility and anxiety.

Ecclesiastes 4:7-12



- This section continues to explore the meaningless despair of loneliness.
 - Ecc. 4:7 Qohelet says he re-thought the issue of הַבֵּל and one of the primary sources of futility was loneliness.
 - Vs. 8, a person who is alone, without family, all he has is his work. The products of his labor hold no meaning for him. Wealth is meaningless because he is alone, This is הַבֵּל, and big time bad news.
 - Than the pragmatic answer to this is “Two are better than one.” This answer is explored in 4 areas
 - productivity – *profit*
 - mutual assistance – *recovery*
 - welfare – *warmth*
 - security – *defense*

Ecclesiastes 4:13-16



- The next section of Ecclesiastes is one of the most intriguing, to me. It seems to be both
 - autobiographical
 - Prophetic
- 1Ki 11:26-40
 - Jeroboam
 - He has to flee from Solomon to Egypt
 - His dynasty is short lived

Hindsight



- I am suggesting that Qohelet is written very near the end of Solomon's reign. He has some notion of what is going to happen after him, through the direct message from God, and it is conceivable that he must have heard of the prophecy made of Jeroboam. Why else would he have tried to kill him? And so I believe that he is lamenting his ineffectualness as he assesses his life from near its end.

Living in God's Material World



- Ecclesiastes 5:1-7
 - Dreams vs Words
 - Votive offerings
 - Vanity vs the Fear of God
- Vs 1 Warns about going to worship in the wrong spirit. There are those who go to listen to God, and those who offer the sacrifice of the insolent. I think that we should compare this to;
 - James 4:13-17

The Sacrifice of Fools



- The sacrifice of the insolent fool I believe is the promising God service, or tithe or worship, in exchange for His blessing.
 - Psalm 50:9-17
 - There seems to be a consistent theme here in Qohelet and James, and the Psalms. This fits in with the nature of faith versus magic. We do not seek to manipulate God, that is the stuff of fertility cults and mystical religions. We only want to walk in faith and rely on him. But when we boast of what we shall do for God, we become fools and our arrogance intrudes in our speech. Notice the use of dreams to intensify the nuance of vanity. Man only imagines what he can give to God for . . .

1 Corinthians 4:6-8



- Now these things, brethren, I have figuratively transferred to myself and Apollos for your sakes, that you may learn in us not to think beyond what is written, that none of you may be puffed up on behalf of one against the other. 7 For who makes you differ *from another*? And what do you have that you did not receive? Now if you did indeed receive *it*, why do you boast as if you had not received *it*? 8 You are already full! You are already rich! You have reigned as kings without us -- and indeed I could wish you did reign, that we also might reign with you!

Solomon's Decline



- I think that here Solomon's perspective is driven by his great fall. He had offered at the beginning of his reign great sacrifices.
 - 1 Kings 3:4 Now the king went to Gibeon to sacrifice there, for that was the great high place: Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar.
- Yet, he had lost sight of the fact that it must be God who builds the house.
 - His privilege to build the house of God led him to think it was possible to do something for God.
- His conclusion is that this is very pure arrogance.
 - And it leads to illusions that are just vanity, and go beyond futility to culpability.

"Why Are People So Mean?"



8 If you see the oppression of the poor,
and the violent perversion of justice and righteousness in a province,
do not marvel at the matter;

for high official water

and higher o

Moreover the profit of

even the king is se

וַיִּתְרוֹן אֶרֶץ בְּכָל (הִיא) [הוּא]
מֶלֶךְ לְשָׂדֵה נֹעֲבָד

- Ecclesiastes 5:8 & 9
- This, like the story of the tower of Babel, is one more demonstration that God uses the competitive and selfish nature of man, to restrain man's wickedness.
- Vs 9 is very difficult to translate.
- *The land generally profits,
the king is committed to the cultivated field.*

The Insatiability of Man



- Ecclesiastes 5:10-11
 - He who loves silver will not be satisfied with silver;
Nor he who loves abundance, with increase.
This also *is* vanity.
When goods increase,
They increase who eat them;
So what profit have the owners
Except to see *them* with their eyes?

What is really satisfying?



- Ecclesiastes 5:12 The sleep of a laboring man *is* sweet, Whether he eats little or much; But the abundance of the rich will not permit him to sleep.

The Transient Futility of Wealth



- Qohelet returns to the transiency of wealth.
 - It is finite.
 - Even the most powerful and successful at *acquisition*, has not found a way to take his *stuff* into the next word.
 - Ecclesiastes 5:13-16
 - There is a severe evil
which I have seen under the sun:
Riches kept for their owner to his hurt.
But those riches perish through misfortune;
When he begets a son,
there is nothing in his hand.
As he came from his mother's womb,
naked shall he return,
To go as he came;
And he shall take nothing from his labor
Which he may carry away in his hand.
And this also *is* a severe evil
Just exactly as he came,
so shall he go.
And what profit has he who has labored for the wind?

Not Only Can't You Take It With You...



Here is what I have seen:

- *It is good and fitting for one to eat and drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labor in which he toils under the sun all the days of his life which God gives him; for it is his heritage.*
As for every man to whom God has given riches and wealth, and given him power to eat of it,
- to receive his heritage and rejoice in his labor -- this *is* the gift of God.
For he will not dwell unduly on the days of his life, because God keeps *him* busy with the joy of his heart.

More of Wealth's Frustration



- Eccl 6 introduces one of Qohelets great regrets

To see someone who has been outwardly or

Ecc. 6:1-2

There is an evil which I have seen under the sun,
and it *is* common among men:

A man to whom God has given riches and wealth and honor,
so that he lacks nothing for himself of all he desires;
yet God does not give him power to eat of it,
but a foreigner consumes it.

This *is* vanity, and it *is* an evil affliction.

live long enough to enjoy the fruit of his labors.

Still More Vanity



- 6:3-6

- If a man begets a hundred *children*
and lives many years,
so that the days of his years are many,
but his soul is not satisfied with goodness,
or indeed he has no burial,
I say *that* a stillborn child *is* better than he

For in vanity it comes
and in darkness departs,
and in darkness its name is covered

Though it has not seen the sun or known *anything*,
this has more rest than that man,
even if he lives a thousand years twice --
but has not seen goodness.

Do not all go to one place?

The Best & The Worst



All the labor of man *is* for his mouth,
And yet the soul is not satisfied.
For what more has the wise *man* than the fool?
What does the poor man have,
Who knows *how* to walk before the living?
Better *is* the sight of the eyes
than the wandering of desire.
This also *is* vanity and grasping for the wind.

- but it seems so pointless.
- We should conduct ourselves wisely,
- but there is no advantage to being wise
- except it is good, for now.

No Escape



- 6:10-12
 - Whatever one is, he has been named already, For it is known that he *is* man; And he cannot contend with Him who is mightier than he. 11 Since there are many things that increase vanity, How *is* man the better? 12 For who knows what *is* good for man in life, all the days of his vain life which he passes like a shadow? Who can tell a man what will happen after him under the sun?
- No one can escape their own humanity.
 - No matter what one tries to achieve,
 - he cannot climb higher than his fallenness.
- We cannot win a lawsuit with God to overcome the finiteness of the curse!
 - The world we live in is filled with confusing and seemingly unfair circumstances.
 - We pass through it in a brief transitory and insubstantial moment.
- Why put off our satisfaction in what is available to us
 - We will not see the legacy we leave.

Chapter 7



- Chapter 7 becomes very proverbial in style
 - A good name *is* better than precious ointment, And the day of death than the day of one's birth;
 - Better to go to the house of mourning
Than to go to the house of feasting,
For that *is* the end of all men;
And the living will take *it* to heart.
 - Sorrow *is* better than laughter,
For by a sad countenance the heart is made better.
 - The heart of the wise *is* in the house of mourning,
But the heart of fools *is* in the house of mirth.
 - *It is* better to hear the rebuke of the wise
Than for a man to hear the song of fools.
For like the crackling of thorns under a pot,
So *is* the laughter of the fool.
This also is vanity.

Ecclesiastes & Relativism



- Solomon was too wise to believe that there was no objective good or evil.
 - **Ecclesiastes 8:10-13**
 - Then I saw the wicked buried.
 - They used to go in and out of the holy place and were praised in the city where they had done such things.
 - This also is vanity.
 - Because the sentence against an evil deed is not executed speedily, the heart of the children of man is fully set to do evil.
 - Though a sinner does evil a hundred times and prolongs his life, yet I know that it will be well with those who fear God, because they fear before him.
 - But it will not be well with the wicked, neither will he prolong his days like a shadow, because he does not fear before God.



- Ecc 9:1-12 Take Life as It Comes
 - But he who is joined with all the living has hope, for a living dog is better than a dead lion. 5 For the living know that they will die, but the dead know nothing, and they have no more reward, for the memory of them is forgotten
- Ecc 9:13 Wisdom Superior to Folly
 - **13-16** I have also seen this example of wisdom under the sun, and it seemed great to me. 14 There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siegeworks against it. 15 But there was found in it a poor, wise man, and he by his wisdom delivered the city. Yet no one remembered that poor man. 16 But I say that wisdom is better than might, though the poor man's wisdom is despised and his words are not heard.

Chapters 10 & 11



- Ecc 10 Miscellaneous Observations
 - Dead flies make the perfumer's ointment give off a stench;
so a little folly outweighs wisdom and honor.
A wise man's heart inclines him to the right,
but a fool's heart to the left.
Even when the fool walks on the road,
he lacks sense,
and he says to everyone that he is a fool.
- Ecc 11 Enigmatic Sayings
 - Cast your bread upon the waters,
for you will find it after many days.
Give a portion to seven, or even to eight,
for you know not what disaster may happen on earth.
 - If the clouds are full of rain,
they empty themselves on the earth,
and if a tree falls to the south or to the north,
in the place where the tree falls, there it will lie.
 - He who observes the wind will not sow,
and he who regards the clouds will not reap.
 - As you do not know the way the spirit comes
to the bones in the womb of a woman with child,
so you do not know the work of God who makes everything.

The Extended Metaphor



- **Ecclesiastes 12:1-7**

- Remember also your Creator in the days of your youth,
before the evil days come
and the years draw near of which you will say,
"I have no pleasure in them";
- before the sun and the light
and the moon and the stars are darkened
and the clouds return after the rain,
- in the day when the keepers of the house tremble,
and the strong men are bent,
and the grinders cease because they are few,
and those who look through the windows are dimmed,
- and the doors on the street are shut--
when the sound of the grinding is low,
and one rises up at the sound of a bird,
and all the daughters of song are brought low--

The Extended Metaphor



- they are afraid also of what is high,
and terrors are in the way;
the almond tree blossoms,
the grasshopper drags itself along,
and desire fails,
because man is going to his eternal home,
and the mourners go about the streets--
- before the silver cord is snapped,
or the golden bowl is broken,
or the pitcher is shattered at the fountain,
or the wheel broken at the cistern,
and the dust returns to the earth as it was,
and the spirit returns to God who gave it

Concluding Thoughts



- **Ecclesiastes 12:9-10**

- Besides being wise, the Preacher also taught the people knowledge, weighing and studying and arranging many proverbs with great care. The Preacher sought to find words of delight, and uprightly he wrote words of truth.

- **Ecclesiastes 12:11-12**

- The words of the wise are like goads,
and like nails firmly fixed are the collected sayings;
they are given by one Shepherd.

My son, beware of anything beyond these.

Of making many books there is no end,
and much study is a weariness of the flesh.

- **Ecclesiastes 12:13-14**

- The end of the matter;
all has been heard.

Fear God and keep his commandments,
for this is the whole duty of man.

For God will bring every deed into judgment,
with every secret thing,
whether good or evil.