Ecclesiastes Week 2: A believer's journey with The Preacher

1. **A brief background review of Ecclesiastes (why was Week 1 important?)**
    - Written for the disillusioned Jew returned from exile who thinks that God forgot about His people[1]
        i. A "snap back to reality" given the ideas of multi-cultural Babylon
    - Therefore, the main section is supposed to clash with the rest of Biblical revelation—it reminds us of our temptation to think the world is vanity based on circumstances.
    - Therefore, we should read Ecclesiastes like Job rather than like Proverbs[2]
        i. This determines what overall message we take from the text—a reminder that God is sovereign and in control even though the world may seem chaotic
        ii. This also helps us to understand and approach our culture lost in the world of "vanity."

2. **What The Preacher (Qohelet) says resonates with us as believers**
    - First, what does he mean by "vanity?"
        i. Hebrew word "hebel"
        ii. Literal meaning breath or wind[3] and is used 38 times[4] in the text
        iii. Range of meanings in context: enigmatic[5], or meaningless[6]
        iv. Enigma of enigmas: There may be a meaning to things, but we don't know it or cannot know it
        v. Utterly meaningless: We try to find meaning, but we will always fail
    - **Consider Ch 2:18-24**: Is there any meaning in our work/labor/toil?
        i. Work is a vexation (v23) because we don't know if the fruit will endure. We may have to hand it off to a fool. Believers see this all the time and it resonates with us[7].
        ii. Even so, we obsess over it and lose sleep (v23)
        iii. Work should be enjoyable because God gave it to us, but we don't always see it that way (v24-25).
    - **Consider Ch 7:1-23**
        i. 7:1-13—Value in a good name, value in sober-mindedness, value in wisdom
            - What is The Preacher doing here? Likely, he is musing on what he sees in life rather than teaching a principle[8]
        ii. 7:14—There are, in fact, good and bad times
        iii. 7:15-18—Good things happen to bad people and bad things happen to good people. This is frustrating
        iv. Do we see this happening in our world? How do we react and how do we feel about it?
3. **What is The Preacher's real attitude and viewpoint?**
    - How does The Preacher view the progression of history?

i. 2:18-24 and 7:1-23 indicate a "vicious cycle" that apparently cannot be broken. Therefore it indicates a circular view of history[9]

ii. The narrator warned us of this in 1:2-11; "What has been is what will be (1:9)"

- Does The Preacher have a hopeful attitude toward life and God?
  - **i.** View of history as a cycle that cannot be escaped indicates a hopeless attitude
  - **ii.** Most ideas and concepts in Ecclesiastes are in the context of death as the end of our experience
    - Death directly referenced in 2:12-13; 3:16-22; 4:1-3; 5:13-17; 7:1-4; 7:17; 9:1-12; 12:1-7.
    - Ends in 12:1-7 with: we experience youth, we languish when we get old, we come to a painful end, we return to dust, and it is all vanity! It is either meaningless or utterly enigmatic!
    - If death is not directly referenced, it is alluded to indirectly: 2:18-23; 3:9-13; 5:18-20; 6:1-6; 6:10-12 (we have only a few days in this vain life).
  - **iii.** How does he view God?
    - He knows God is there since he attributes agency to Him (7:13-14)
    - He struggles with God's goodness and wonders if He "made the world crooked" (7:13) and why He allows the wicked to prosper (7:15)
- Therefore, The Preacher struggles to understand why the world is the way it is and appears to have no lasting hope

4. **Contrasting The Preacher with the Old Testament**
   - Consider Psalm 37
     - **i.** Yes, the wicked appear to prosper
     - **ii.** Yes, the righteous suffer
     - **iii.** The righteous can still do good because the LORD will save him
     - **iv.** Acknowledges The Preacher's struggle, but does so in an attitude of hope
5. **Contrasting The Preacher with the New Testament**
   - Consider 1 Corinthians 15: Implications of the Gospel
     - **i.** Can we really know that God acts in this world?
       - 1 Corinthians 15:1-11—Christ came, died, and resurrected!
     - **ii.** Does our work matter?
       - 1 Corinthians 15:10-11—Paul worked through God's grace and people believed in Christ as a result
     - **iii.** Is Death the end?
       - 1 Corinthians 15:12-28—Christ was raised, therefore we will be raised as well and Death will die.
       - 1 Corinthians 15:50-56—We will be made imperishable through the work of Christ and death will have no power.
6. **What is the right conclusion for the believer?**

- Consider 1 Corinthians 15:58
    - **i.** A real answer to The Preacher: Life, work, and trial are not in vain, nor meaningless, nor enigmatic—we have victory in Jesus Christ who gives ultimate meaning rather than ending in vanity.
- Consider 1 Peter 1:3-9
    - **i.** Trials are real and we will be tested
    - **ii.** We have a living hope in the midst of trial
    - **iii.** We know this because God gave this living hope to us through the resurrection of Christ and keeps it in heaven for us
    - **iv.** We can have joy now because we will be saved
- Therefore: Ecclesiastes 12:13-14 takes us out of The Preacher's struggle to remind us that God provides meaning and purpose.
- Therefore: Though the world looks meaningless and enigmatic, we have a living hope in Jesus and we need a constant reminder of it.
- Therefore, this book is in the Bible to remind us of our temptation to think in despair like The Preacher and to point us to the truth of a sovereign God

---

[1] *Ecclesiastes*, Craig G. Bartholomew; Baker Academic; Grand Rapids, MI; 2009: p 94.
[2] *The book of Ecclesiastes*. Tremper Longman III; Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing; Grand Rapids, MI; p 38.
[3] Ibid., p 61
[4] Bartholomew, p 105.
[5] Ibid., p126-127.
[6] Longman, p 61.
[7] Bartholomew, p 148.
[8] Ibid. p 246-252
[9] Ibid.