

WALMSLEY BIBLE STUDY – ECCLESIASTES SESSION 1

1. PESSIMISM; Problems & Remedy: Chs 1 to 3 cf: Ps 8; Ps 19; Ps 39; Mat 23; Mat 6 19-34; Ro 8 22-27; 2 Cor 3 10

Chapter 1 vs 1 – 11 'Vanity, Vanity, all is Vanity', saith the Preacher (Heb Qoheleth; Gk Ekklesiastes – both related to the meaning of 'gathering': Lat Ecclesium = meeting place, 'Church', place where people hear a preacher)

Q 1: The book seems to open with a cry of rebuke, despair, and warning. What are the main themes of this passage, and what 'voices' and attitudes do you hear and see today that would invoke such rebuke?

Chapter 1 vs 12-18 Wisdom is meaningless.

Q 2: What do you think the Preacher is trying to say in his conclusions after studying wisdom all his life? Do you agree with the statements he is making? In what context and with what perspective do you think he is speaking?

What 'Wisdom' today do you consider to be folly?

Chapter 2 vs 1-11 Pleasures are meaningless

Q 3: Why do you think that the desire of pleasures is unquenchable? What parallels in history and today do you see in the world and in your own hearts and lives? Do you agree with the Preacher, and what examples can you recall from history and now of other people who came to the same conclusion, and what did they do about it?

Chapter 2 vs 12-16 Wisdom and Folly are meaningless.

Q 4: the comparisons between Wisdom and Folly lead the Preacher to conclude that both Wisdom and Folly have the same outcomes for the individual. In what context do you think he is saying this? What parallels today are there?

Chapter 2 vs 17-26 Toil is meaningless.

Q 5: The Preacher engages with the issue of building an empire which others must then succeed to when the builder is dead and gone. The Preacher sees only folly in this. What examples are there in history that describe the Preacher's musings? What parallels are there today? What should our attitude be to labour and toil in the same contexts? What is our hope for the future in the work of our lives? Do you think it is pointless?

Chapter 3 vs 1-22 'A Time for Everything under Heaven'.

This chapter opens with a very well-known text, famously made into song by Bob Dylan.

Q 6: Vs 1-8: Look at each line and discuss how you may think that the comparisons between building and pulling-down fit in to an ethical and godly way of life. Do you think they do? Does it really matter anyway?

Q 7: Vs 9-15 *Be content in toil, and rest*. What do you make of this passage concerning Work and Labouring? What are the real benefits to all of this?

Q 8: Vs 16-22 *Our fate is just like the Animals*. What message is being propounded here? What should our attitude be towards life on Earth, and what aims should we have, individually, collectively and as created beings? What comforts should we derive from this outpouring of seeming pessimism?