

# "Five Takeaways from a Vain Book"

## "What I Learned from Meditating on the Book of Ecclesiastes"

Ecclesiastes

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### Introduction

1. Ecclesiastes is one of the wisdom books of the OT, like Proverbs, Job and Song of Solomon. The writer calls himself "*the Preacher, the son of David, king in Jerusalem*"
2. The book begins: "*Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.*"
  - Hebrew = *hebel* = *vanity* or *vain* = concretely, "mist," "vapor," or "mere breath," fleeting or elusive (with different nuances depending on the context)
3. Ecclesiastes: OT reminder of "*without hope and without God in the world.*" Ephesians 2:12.
4. Here are 5 takeaways from meditating on this book.

### 1<sup>st</sup> Takeaway. When I'm "*without hope and without God in the world*", life and living has no purpose or meaning beyond death.

Ecclesiastes 1:2. "*Vanity of vanities, says the Preacher, vanity of vanities! All is vanity.*"

- a. Neil Degrasse Tyson, astrophysicist: "*we are atomically connected to all atoms in the universe. We are not figuratively, but literally stardust.*"
- b. Carl Sagan: "*Look again at that dot. That's here. That's home. That's us ... a mote of dust suspended in a sunbeam.*"

### 2<sup>nd</sup> Takeaway. When I'm "*without hope and without God in the world*", I am – in fact – forgotten ... a nobody ... as if I'd never existed.

- a. "*There is no remembrance of former people, nor will there be any remembrance of later things yet to be among those who come after.*" Ecclesiastes 1:11
- b. "*There was a little city with few men in it, and a great king came against it and besieged it, building great siege-works against it. 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.*" Ecclesiastes 9:14-16

### 3<sup>rd</sup> Takeaway. When I'm "*without hope and without God in the world*", this life's pursuits and pleasures – even though God-given -- are as a speck of nothing

- a. **Work is God given** ... "*I have seen the business that God has given to the children of man to be busy with. ... I perceived that there is nothing better for them than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; <sup>13</sup> also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man*" Ecclesiastes 3: 10-13; 2:10  
... **but ... the gift ends up having no substance or meaning.** "*Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.*" Ecclesiastes 2:11
- b. **Wealth & possessions are God given:** "*Everyone... to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God.*" Ecclesiastes 5:19-20  
... **but what is the outcome of enjoying wealth, possessions and toil?** "*I made great works. ... I had also great possessions... <sup>8</sup> I also gathered ... silver and gold ... So I became great and surpassed all who were before me ... <sup>10</sup> And whatever my eyes desired I did not keep from them. I kept my heart from no pleasure, for my heart found pleasure in all my toil ... <sup>11</sup> Then I considered all that my hands had done and the toil I had expended in doing it, and behold, all was vanity and a striving after wind, and there was nothing to be gained under the sun.*" Ecclesiastes 2:1-11

## "Five Takeaways from a Vain Book"

**4<sup>th</sup> Takeaway.** When I am *"without hope and without God in the world"*, more Wisdom and Knowledge add nothing to my eternal life: *"I applied my heart to seek and to search out by wisdom all that is done under heaven ... I have seen everything that is done under the sun, and behold, all is vanity and a striving after wind ... For in much wisdom is much vexation, and he who increases knowledge increases sorrow."* Ecclesiastes 1:13-15.

- a. *"I saw that there is more gain in wisdom than in folly, as there is more gain in light than in darkness ... Then I said in my heart, 'What happens to the fool will happen to me also. Why then have I been so very wise?' And I said in my heart that this also is vanity."* Ecclesiastes 2:13-15

**5<sup>th</sup> Takeaway.** When I am *"without hope and without God in the world"*, I get no satisfaction.

- a. **Desires:** *"... the eye is not satisfied with seeing, nor the ear filled with hearing."* Ecclesiastes 1:8
- b. **Justice:** *"... the righteous get what the wicked deserve, and the wicked get what the righteous deserve. This too, I say, is meaningless."* Ecclesiastes 8:14

**What is the Preacher's advice in a life of vanity, vapor and mist?**

1. **God has the final say, no matter what man does.** *"I perceived that whatever God does endures forever; nothing can be added to it, nor anything taken from it. God has done it, so that people fear before him"* Ecclesiastes 3:14.
2. **God will judge me for your sins.** *"God will bring every deed into judgment, with every secret thing, whether good or evil."* Ecclesiastes 12:14.
3. **Do the best you can with what you've got, in the time you've got.**  
*"I perceived that there is nothing better for (men) than to be joyful and to do good as long as they live; also that everyone should eat and drink and take pleasure in all his toil—this is God's gift to man."* Ecclesiastes 3:12-13.  
*"Everyone also to whom God has given wealth and possessions and power to enjoy them, and to accept his lot and rejoice in his toil—this is the gift of God.<sup>20</sup> For he will not much remember the days of his life because God keeps him occupied with joy in his heart."* Ecclesiastes 5:19-20
4. **"The end of the matter ... Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the whole duty of man."** Ecclesiastes 13:13.

**The Preacher's take on life, based on his best insight, wisdom and experience is this ...**

1. **The Preacher's advice is this: Take your best shot ... enjoy as much of life as you can ... be a moral, ethical person ... and fear God ... because it's a shot ride ... when the curtain comes down after the last act, the lights go out and my show is over.** *"... the race is not to the swift, nor the battle to the strong, nor bread to the wise, nor riches to the intelligent, nor favor to those with knowledge, but time and chance happen to them all. For man does not know his time ... so the children of man are snared at an evil time, when it suddenly falls upon them."* Ecclesiastes 9:11-12
2. **Based on human understanding ... no matter how wise, knowledgeable and moral ... I have no certainty where I will end up ... No eternal security.**  
*"... man may not find out anything that will be after him."* Ecclesiastes 7:14
3. **The Preacher understands the terrible predicament he is in:**
  - *"Wisdom is good with an inheritance, an advantage to those who see the sun."* Ecclesiastes 7:11
  - *"Enjoy life with the wife whom you love, all the days of your vain life that he has given you ... because that is your portion in life ... Whatever your hand finds to do, do it with your might, for there is no work or thought or knowledge or wisdom in Sheol, to which you are going."* Ecclesiastes 9:9-10
4. **The Preacher does not have the confidence that Job had:** *"I know that my Redeemer lives, and at the last he will stand upon the earth. And after my skin has been thus destroyed, yet in my flesh I shall see God, whom I shall see for myself, and my eyes shall behold, and not another."* Job 19:25-27
5. **Paul clearly identifies the Preacher's problem and, with Job, nails down God's solution:** *"If in Christ we have hope in this life only, we are of all people most to be pitied ... But in fact Christ has been raised from the dead ... <sup>22</sup>For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ shall all be made alive."* 1 Corinthians 15:19-24