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## Introduction to the Book of Ecclesiastes

### ***The Meaning of “Ecclesiastes”***

Ecclesiastes is one of the wisdom books of the Old Testament. The word Ecclesiastes comes from the Greek, *ekklao*, which means “to gather” or “to assemble”, or the word *ekklesia*, which means “a gathering” or “an assembly.”

Ecclesiastes is basically a sermon given to the Assembly, meant to encourage every wanderer to return to the assembly and holy congregation of the Lord.

### ***The Author***

The Preacher delivering this Sermon is the wise Solomon, the son of David, and the last of the kings of the united Israel. Perhaps, in his last days, he realized that God had saved him from his prodigal living, in which he sought after vanities and took to himself many wives. Realizing the vanity of this world, he wishes to exhort the flock to rise above the earthly and to attain a new, eternal, and heavenly life.

### ***How to Understand this Book***

Some people think that this book is very pessimistic and that Solomon displays a very desperate attitude, because it concentrates on the vanity of this life and human wisdom, while confirming the fact of death several times.

However, Solomon only speaks in these terms in order to raise us to a more heavenly view. For instance, the use of the word “Vanity” thirty seven times in this book reminds us that the world without its Creator is vain. “Under the sun” is repeated seven times to raise us from the heat of the day (temptations) to the Sun of Righteousness (Malachi 4:2), where there is eternity and freedom for the glorified children of God. “Under heaven” is repeated three times so that we may rise to heaven. “Upon the earth” is repeated seven times to remind the faithful to dwell above the earth and not under it, that is, to not submit to carnal desires of the earthly body but to rise toward holiness. Lastly, at the end of this book, we see Solomon’s conclusion to “fear God and keep His commandments.”

There are five parts to the Book of Ecclesiastes: 1) The introduction and the illustration of vanity (1:1-11), 2) the proof that “all is vanity” based on experience (1:12-2:26), 3) the proof that “all is vanity” based on observation (3:1-6:12), 4) counsel and advice for living with vanity (7:1-12:8), and 5) the conclusion to “fear God and keep His commandments” (12:9-14).

### ***The Relationship of this Book to the Other Wisdom Books of Solomon***

Solomon wrote the Song of Songs, Proverbs, and Ecclesiastes. In the Song of Songs, we see Solomon at the peak of experiencing divine love. In the book of Proverbs, we see Solomon in the glory of God’s wisdom. Now, in the book of Ecclesiastes, we see him in the depth of repentance.

### ***A Season for Everything***

Let us take one of the more well-known sections of Ecclesiastes and contemplate on it.

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 refrain from embracing; a time to gain, 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 to war, and a time of peace (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8).

Let us examine each of these in turn in order to see how this relates to our spiritual life:

1. **To everything there is a season.** This reminds us that everything has its own time and that time comes to an end.
2. **A time to be born and a time to die.** God has fixed both the times of our birth and departure, but we are also reminded that He calls us to the spiritual birth of baptism and the death of the old man.
3. **A time to plant and a time to pluck up what is planted.** Spiritually, there is a time to plant and work on our virtues, and a time to pull up the roots of unsuitable thoughts.
4. **A time to kill and a time to heal.** Sometimes we need severe judgment and chastisement in order to produce the healing of ourselves and the community around us.
5. **A time to break down and a time to build up.** It is not enough to break down, that is to cast out sin and all things that are negative, but we also need to take positive action and to build up virtues. For instance, it is not enough to cast out hatred, but we also have to build up love.
6. **A time to weep and a time to laugh; a time to mourn, and a time to dance.** When we weep over our sins, then we can experience the joy of repentance.
7. **A time to cast away stones and a time to gather stones together.** This may refer to the nations of idolatry who accepted the faith and became children of Abraham. It can also refer to the destruction of an old building and the construction of a new one.
8. **A time to embrace and a time to refrain from embracing.** In the Old Testament, we see many who were urged to holy marriage, but now, in the age of the New Testament, the age of grace in which Paradise has been reopened, many are called to the state of virginity, and to devote their power to worshipping the Lord.

9. **A time to seek and a time to lose.** This reminds us to bless and thank God when He gives and even when He takes away.
10. **A time to keep and a time to cast away.** This reminds us of the vanity of possessions, for we often keep some material possession, but when they get old they are thrown away. However, let us remember, that when we find the pearl of great price, then we will discard all in order to gain Christ.
11. **A time to tear and a time to sew.** People often tore their clothes when they experienced great grief. Sewing may refer to the return of peace. We can also remember that sin tears us away from God and repentance reconnects us to Him.
12. **A time to keep silent and a time to speak.** There is a time for us to undergo self-examination, to meditate, and contemplate on the divine. Then there is another time to preach edifying words to others.
13. **A time to love and a time to hate.** There is a time to love all, but sometimes we have to hate sin for the sake of our salvation and the salvation of others. For instance, Saint Demiana used to obey and love her father, Mark, the governor. But when he denied the faith, she was firm and hated this action, and told him that unless he returned to the faith, she would denounce him as her father.
14. **A time for war and a time for peace.** Sometimes there is a need to get rid of evil, but it needs to be followed by peace. For instance, even when the church punishes the heretics for their deviant faith, she eagerly looks forward to their repentant return to the Truth and longs for peace with them.

Again, these verses remind us about the temporal nature of this world and how there is a season for everything. It's a reminder for us to achieve balance in our spiritual life and progress. Above all, we need a time for self-examination and to really ask ourselves, "Am I chasing after the vanities of this world or am I placing the fear of God and the obedience to His commandment above everything else?" We ask that God bless us, touch our hearts, and raise our minds above the earthly to achieve the heavenly

**Glory is due to God forever. Amen.**