

Ecclesiastes: What Is It All About? (Part 3)

John W. Ritenbaugh

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You might recall the second sermon given on the book of Ecclesiastes ended with my saying, "Solomon presents four arguments in the first two chapters and one of them had to do with death. Why does God allow us to die?" I proposed that one of the reasons is that we would waste time. If we knew when death was coming, those who are on the ball and would want to be in the Kingdom of God would know death was coming and would get prepared for it and would not waste time until the last minute and make a mad dash to the Kingdom of God. There is a bumper sticker that says, "Many who come to seek God at the eleventh hour die at 10:30." There is a lesson there.

Ecclesiastes 2:12-16 Then I turned myself to consider wisdom and [mad folly]; for what can the man do who succeeds the king? Only what he has already done. Then I saw that wisdom excels folly as light excels darkness. The wise man's eyes are in his head, but the fool walks in darkness. Yet I myself perceived that the same event happens to them all. So, I said in my heart, "As it happens to the fool, it also happens to me [he did not consider himself as the fool], and why was I then more wise?" Then I said in my heart, "This also is vanity." For there is no more remembrance of the wise than of the fool forever, since all that now is will be forgotten in the days to come. And how does a wise man die? As a fool!

Beginning here is important in understanding Solomon's thinking in this series of thoughts regarding life and death. His observations are helpful toward us being able to make proper use of time in our conversion. In verse twelve, he begins evaluating the advantages wisdom has over foolishness. There are very many and anybody is foolish who deliberately chooses to do something foolish. The illustration he uses is that wisdom is light compared to foolishness's darkness. That thought gave him encouraging hope because he was a pretty wise man; however, in verses 16 and 17, it dawns on him that despite the exceedingly huge advantage that wisdom has over foolishness, sometimes both, wise and foolish, suffer through the same calamities. Meaning, wisdom does not guarantee a life free from mishaps and misfortunes. Nobody has control over everything that might impact on one's life. Worst of all, both the wise and the foolish die and this thought through him into a depressing conviction.

Ecclesiastes 2:18-23 Then I hated all my labor in which I had toiled under the sun, because I must leave it to the man who will come after me. 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. Therefore I turned my heart and despaired of all the labor in which I had toiled under the sun. 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. For what has man for all his labor, and for the striving of his heart with which he has toiled under the sun? For all his days are sorrowful, and his work burdensome; even in the night his heart takes no rest. This also is vanity.

The verse becomes a theme in Qoheleth's lecture. In fact, he mentions "death" seven times during the course of this lecture. This is a major hint from God regarding right choices. Choosing to make the best use of our time is a major portion of wisdom. If you make the right choice at the right time that is really "wise". Most of us have the tendency to defer to something else, of pleasure or whatever, so we set the wise choice aside for a little while and "I will get back to it later. I will have better time to do it then. It will be more appropriate for me then." We will make a justification to forgive ourselves of not making the right choice at the right time. "I will get back to it!" and maybe we do and maybe we do not. Sometimes when we do not, the choice passes by us completely.

The wisdom we had when we could have made the right choice is gone and the opportunity to grow, to overcome, and to make the right sacrifice passes by and might be gone forever. How often do the Proverbs address the time wasting activities of laziness, drunkenness, or frivolity? Why do they do this? When life ends, judgment ends. There could not be favorable changes in our record. No one knows when death may come. Regardless of how wise one is in some things in life, there are things that are beyond our control.

But, this we know from God, because it is given to all men once to die: death is a certainty. It is going to come. We do not know when, but it will come and God has ordained this. Since we know this, do we make good use of the knowledge without allowing the reality of death to become morbid? God does not want us to become paranoid about it. He wants us to be aware it is coming, and that it is an absolute certainty to direct our lives to make use of the time that we do have as occasions to make choices come upon us. That happens to everybody and sometimes we do not make the right choice and let it slip by. God plans for this period of time in His purpose; we must die. Therefore, death is a loving gift from God.

There are many things we receive as gifts from God that do not give us a morbid fear at all, but death is one of the things that causes us to fear so we do it in the wrong way. Respect it, we must. If we are having a relationship with God, then we know that we are in His hands, and even our death can be a gift at the right time. This will depend on how we make use of the time while we are still able to make the choices that are going to be good.

It is the young, immature, and the children who do not often think of death. It is the major part of foolishness that is bound up in the heart of a child that they do not think of end results. They only think and do, and they do not think often of what could happen. This throws parents into a conniption; they can think of what might happen. They are more cautious than the young, the immature, and the children who take almost no thought at all. According to the book of Ecclesiastes, Solomon was concerned.

Psalm 49:1-13 Hear this, all peoples; give ear, all inhabitants of the world, both low and high, rich and poor together. My mouth shall speak wisdom, and the meditation of my heart shall give understanding. I will incline my ear to a proverb [a riddle or dark saying]; I will disclose my dark saying on the harp. Why should I

fear in the days of evil, when the iniquity at my heels surrounds me? Those who trust in their wealth and boast in the multitude of their riches, none of them can by any means redeem his brother [he could have an impact of the life of his choices, but cannot do that with a brother] nor give to God a ransom for him—for the redemption of their souls is costly, and it shall cease forever—that he should continue to live eternally, and not see the Pit. For he sees wise men die; likewise the fool and the senseless person perish, and leave their wealth to others. Their inner thought is that their houses will last forever, their dwelling places to all generations; they call their lands after their own names. Nevertheless man, though in honor, does not remain; he is the beasts that perish. This is the way of those who are foolish, and their prosperity who approve their sayings.

I once read the thoughts of a preacher who stood giving a funeral at the grave of a well-known scholar. This scholar was fluent in thirty-four languages while most of us have trouble with one. Yet, in the end it did not matter, he was just as dead as the fool who may not have gone to school and learned a thing. That is as far as death is concerned, all will die. What really discouraged the preacher was that this man had spent his life as though God and the things of God had not mattered at all.

His life was devoted to learning and becoming fluent in other languages. Death is no respecter of persons and this thought is frustrating because many have spent their lifetimes trying to deny the reality of their mortality. They build huge corporations, become wealthy, carry a great deal of power, never make any preparations at all about their own death (other than the making of the will and pass it on to those they think is worthy of it), but they did not prepare themselves of their death. All of their energies went elsewhere. This is where the central theme of Ecclesiastes is coming out, "Make good use of your time!" And do not make the same mistakes that Solomon did in his life. Time is fleeting and rushing by as it were. We only go around one time, so make the best use of it that we possibly can.

In verses 18 and 19, the reality hit Solomon like a ton of bricks. He was saying in an effect, "Why must I, as wise as I am, die just like this fool who has done nothing?" Death has the power to erase the fact that Solomon ever lived and did all of these things. It was like he was wailing internally and thoughts were rushing through his mind, and God caused them to be written down—that Solomon began to really understand that he had "blown it" in terms of most of his time.

There is a story connected between Alexander the Great and the philosopher Diogenes that has an interesting point to it. One day Alexander, looking out in the field, could see that Diogenes out there and Diogenes was doing something, and Alexander became curious and went out into the field and asked what he was doing. Diogenes replied, "I am searching for the bones of your father [King Phillip] and cannot distinguish them from the bones of the slaves. They are all in one pile."

Whether one is rich or poor, death brings the end to every advantage that anyone has in life. Every act, every achievement of that person is gone for his personal use and aggrandizement. God is judging and He is not impressed by men's lives. A few have impressed Him, but not many.

Human wisdom cannot overcome death; therefore, human wisdom cannot solve the meaning of life either. You cannot have one without the other. Death brings everything to a halt, including the dignity that one had before he had died. Solomon was stymied. Life seemed irrational and futile to him; yet, what he had was still better than death. He was caught in an inescapable dilemma from which there was no solution for him. That is why he said, "It is vanity." At this point, he said he hated labor that he had put into achieving what he had done and his great wealth that came to him as king. He realized he was going to have to give everything up without the certainty that his heirs would use them in a way that he would respect as proper. A Jewish proverb says, "There are no pockets in a shroud." We would say, "You cannot take it with you."

In Luke 12:13-21, Jesus similarly reported when the man wanted his brother to divide the inheritance equally with him. Jesus came back and said to beware of covetousness. Life does not consist of that.

I Timothy 6:6-10 Now godliness with contentment is great gain. For we brought nothing into this world, and it is certain we can carry nothing out. And having food and clothing, with these we shall be content. But those who desire to be rich fall into temptation and a snare, and into many foolish and harmful lusts which drown men in destruction and perdition. For the love of money is a root of all kinds of evil, for which some have strayed from the faith in their greediness, and pierced themselves through with many sorrows.

Solomon's conclusion, judging by his reaction to what was coming to his mind, was leading him to understand that there was sin buried in his life, and the motivation of what he had accomplished was lust. The verse in chapter two said, "I did this..." and "I did that..." It was done for himself. It was not something done to share with others. He did it for himself. The realization came to him that much of what he did in life was for himself, a fulfilling of his own desires, and not something he desired to share, but rather something that will bring him fame, power, and fortune. We can see that Solomon was far from contentment.

Some people are not striving much for riches or wealth, nor are they concerned that they get it. There is something they want so they spend energy accomplishing it; it is power or fame. Another wise man once said, "Money appears as the universal passport to everything except heaven and a provider to everything except happiness." Life is supposed to teach us that God is our owner and the provider. We are but stewards of what He provides.

This feast has seen little good, unless it produces a sincere and a driving desire to change what is lacking. Solomon's picture of himself was beginning to change here. He is coming to the realization that most of his motivation in life was wrong. The mere fact of building something was not wrong; it might have been beautiful, but his motivation for doing the things was wrong. It was aimed at pleasing himself rather than sharing it with others.

We understand we are here to share what we have in life with each other, and in the process we bring glory to God. Unless we leave this feast with a driving desire to make that a real aim in our life and begin to spend our time making choices toward that end, then the feast has not been that profitable to anybody. The feast is supposed to change people's attitudes and conduct

because of a better, higher, and greater level of understanding of what God is working out in our lives; and to give that life reason to go in this righteous direction. This is why God loads us up during the eight days in a row with compacted information and wisdom from Him through the ministry.

We have the privilege of enjoying and using what God provides for His glory. One day, we have to give account of what we have done with His generous gifts. That is what a steward does. They use what God has given them; then they are evaluated on what they did with what was given them. We see that all these things God has given us were generous gifts. It makes life more understandable and more perfect. We cannot take it with us, but what we have done with it can be sent ahead to the Kingdom of God. Even though we may not see the profit from it right away in our own life, it can be sent ahead and Jesus teaches this.

Luke 16:8-9 So the master commended the unjust steward because he had dealt shrewdly [monetary accounting situations or dealt wisely, handled things well] . For the sons of this world are more shrewd in their generation than the sons of light. And I say to you, make friends for yourselves by unrighteous mammon [filthy money], that when you fail [die], they may receive you into an everlasting home.

Jesus is conducting our present life with being in the kingdom of God, then sharing the life in the kingdom with those that we dealt wisely with while we were humans too. Our witness to these people is going to help win them over as we share life in the Kingdom of God. It may not be seen quickly, but it is there. When we do this kind of witnessing, then God is glorified, and He is going to bring those things to remembrance. Then they will have an impact on those lives.

Luke 16:10 He who is faithful in what is least is faithful also in much; and he who is unjust in what is least is unjust also in much.

In the parable, Jesus is teaching regardless of what others do, let us always be faithful because we do not know what kind of use God is going to make of it. The point is it can be sent ahead. It is going to have an impact on the Kingdom of God—what we are doing now. That is wisdom. It is faithfulness that drives it.

Luke 16:11-12 Therefore, if you have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? [If we are not faithful in what we do now, we will not be in the kingdom because we are not trustworthy. This is serious.] And if you have not been faithful in what is another man's, who will give you what is your own? [That is what you should have because you have been faithful.] No servant can serve two masters; for either he would hate one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon.

When feeding this back into what Solomon was saying in Ecclesiastes 2, we find that Solomon is saying, "I wish I had been more faithful in what had been given." He misused it and that hit him like a ton of bricks. The realization made him realize, "Hey, I am going to die just like the fool." Though he was wise, there was a lot he was not wise about. Those are things that mattered.

Was he wise about being faithful to his wife? That matters. Was he wise about being faithful to God? He was not.

We only go this way one time. God has called us and revealed Himself to us. The book of Ecclesiastes is His appeals to His children. Do not do what Solomon did. Follow the example of his thinking as he approached the end of his life, and he began to add everything up showing he had not been faithful to God in many areas because he had the wrong motivation in life. This great mind was, in a sense, wasted. These great gift; except that God was faithful in recording it, and we can benefit. It is like Solomon is saying, "Don't make your own mistakes. Look at what I did and do not do this."

Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 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. For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I? For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight [notice He does not say He will give great wealth to these people, He gives the wisdom that is doing the right thing at the right time and the right balance]; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that He may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

He who is good before God may not receive it in this life, but in the Kingdom of God, it will come in spades. With these thoughts on his mind, he concluded to this point something that is quite wise in terms of the advice to the Christian. He states the importance to us of accepting life by thanking God for what we do have. Enjoy it and use it to the glory of God.

People who seem to be greatly gifted have the opportunity; we would think of glorifying God when we do not have the opportunity. That is wrong. Anybody of any level that is a child of God can glorify God because everyone, according to the apostle Paul, has been gifted by God to do this very thing (I Corinthians 12). Nobody was standing behind the door whenever God gave the gifts. He can see right through the door. He gives everybody gifts and we are to use them to share, primarily, with His family (I Corinthians 12). We must learn that it is not enough to possess things; we must also possess the kind of character that enables us to use things wisely and to enjoy them properly. This can only be done when God is strongly present in our life before we die, and we are using our time to please Him.

In verse 26, Solomon states that it is God's purpose to build in us the proper character and use all of His good gifts. There are people who say that Solomon is describing the meaninglessness of life and that is why he uses this term about it being vain or vanity, but that is not true. They are being too narrow in their assigning of this subject. Know what Solomon is saying is, "Life without God is meaningless." There is a big difference between those two. Solomon is actually saying that kind of thought is not good at all. It is good to have what money can buy provided we do not lose the things that money cannot buy. That is a warm and wonderful relationship with God. This requires careful, honest, introspection in order to keep the balance. We can get vain about our righteousness and become self-righteous, turning good instruction from God into an uppity feeling about ourselves compared to others who might be in the same congregation.

As an overview, as we end chapter two, there is a scripture in the New Testament that gives a

title to what the main theme is here.

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you [In God's good time].

This summarizes the overall lesson in chapter two better than any other verse in the Bible. Despite the appeal of any number of alternatives, no other goal in life can substitute for walking with God. It is walking with God that gives fullness regardless of what one's social standing might be. The relationship with God along the way adds a positive dimension to life that cannot be found elsewhere. It is this that is the key to an abundant life lived in right balance. God can balance things out and He will balance things. It is the only one that actually positively prepares one for what lies ahead for the reason that everyone was ever born and it will do that.

Death may sound somewhat grim, but I hope you will believe me that as we age and death approaches we begin to evermore seriously evaluate our life, in retrospect, much in the way that Solomon did; and we wish we had done this rather than that. Everyone does that, but we can do it beginning right now, today, and right on out. This appears to be what happened to Solomon as he approached his end. That is why there are indications of repentance that took place in him. Because his evaluations are above all doubt that they are honest ones of himself. He was not lying to himself any longer.

We are going to go on to chapter 3 of Ecclesiastes. So far in my studies of Ecclesiastes, this is my favorite chapter.

The laying of the foundation by Kahaliff is over. Now he is going to expand in greater detail and come up with answers that fit more thoroughly on some of the conclusions that he reached in earlier portions of the book by simply saying, "This is vanity" kind of statement.

A commentary commonly used to research the sermons contains a picture on the cover of a man-made labyrinth (an arrangement of winding intricate passages with many dead ends designed to confuse anyone who enters and attempts to find his way through to the other end) of hedges. A labyrinth illustrates what life is like. Life is a maze of paths on which one may stumble confusedly for decades while attempting to make sense of what is going on. Is there any reason or purpose being made to struggle on while running into dead ends that have no clear cut answers?

Reiterating some of Ecclesiastes purpose from chapter two, though written in the Old Testament, was written specifically for Christians. It does not focus on God's specific purpose for each person, but rather focuses on providing overall direction for choices made within that purpose. Why? Without directly saying it, Solomon is concluding to those aware of God's purpose that time is of the essence because everything really does matter; and this thought becomes apparent in chapter three. Time must not be wasted walking unthinkingly into blind alleys of the labyrinth called life. God wants His children to have every opportunity to enjoy the good fruits of His way of life. Solomon has already walked in those blind alleys and he left a record that only one way is not vain—that is God's.

Joseph Krutch, a professor of English at Columbia University in New York City between 1937 and 1952, said, "There is no reason to suppose that a man's life has any more meaning than the life

of the humblest insect that crawls from one anthill to another." That is vastly untrue. We are not insects of any family where all act exactly the same and all behave exactly the same way. By way of contrast, each of us is a unique individual possessing his own unique personality and character. Insects have no alternatives in their life, but we must choose in order to fit into God's purpose. If we are not unique, then life has no meaning. This is why Solomon is saying, "Everything matters to people who must choose between alternatives." He is evaluating to reach conclusions as to which are better.

God is mentioned forty times in Ecclesiastes, but each time he uses the same term "Elohim." We are supposed to live by every word of God. Why did he use Elohim every time when there were alternatives that he could have used? This is the name [designation] that is predominantly used in the Old Testament for the term of God as "Creator" and is a strong inference that Solomon knew that God is creating spiritual character, and that the process is ongoing. God is mentioned actively involved in what is going on in people's personal lives. In chapter three, compared to chapters one and two, God is more specifically considered. In chapter one and two, He is mentioned four times (once in chapter one and three times in chapter two), but in chapter three God is specifically mentioned acting positively in people's lives. In other chapters, He was just a fact, a generality. He is there.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.

Though Solomon is evaluating or examining things under the sun, God is not only looked upon as involved but involved in a positive way and is the One causing events to occur in every life. Solomon is saying that God predetermines many, if not all, of life's conditions. He is saying, be aware of this fact and do not let the events of life derail you by allowing yourself to become wrongly overburdened by them, either positively or negatively. Either way, it will probably be only temporary.

In verse one is the first indication of God's direct involvement in this chapter and that first indication is the change of the words "under the sun" to "a time for every purpose under heaven." Again, that was not an accident. It was deliberately changed from "under the sun" to "under heaven." We are supposed to live by every word of God and if a change of something as significant as "under the sun" to the word "heaven," then though significant and meaningless, heaven indicates it obviously draws attention to God because that is where He is.

The elevation on Solomon's approach has gone from "under the sun" to "over the sun" where God is sovereign ruler of what is happening in His creation. In addition to the verse, it says, "A time for every purpose." What Solomon is doing is subtly suggesting that as we go through life, we had better start looking up.

Paul said that we are to pay attention to things above. John Ritenbaugh asks you, "Do you see God? Is He really involved conscientiously in our thinking as we go through life?"

Conscientiously because God wants us to take Him in serious consideration when looking for guidance regarding the attitudes that one must approach these events in; therefore, in making choices, we must understand that it is God who orders, arranges time, and times events. As one proceeds through Ecclesiastes, depending upon context, Solomon also says to look within, look

ahead, and look around for council thus taking into consideration time, eternity, death, and suffering. These directives are factors that help us keep our lives from being monotonous, meaningless, and unfocused.

Beginning with verse one, Solomon says whenever we need guidance we better look up first. We better begin thinking, "Did God do this to me? Has God caused this to happen? Does God have a solution, an aim, a goal toward which He is moving us? What is the way there?"

What we are looking at (in chapter three and the first eleven or twelve verses) may not be the most famous poem in the world, but is one of the best known biblical poems. Contrary to a negative approach Solomon had toward the end of the cycles he spoke of in chapter one, his approach in chapter three is positive regarding the orderliness of time as God ordained. Solomon is not a fatalist; he is acknowledging the sovereignty of God over His creation, over time, and events that happened within that time and events are to be accepted as part of God's purpose. In that actuality, they are challenges to be met and dealt with understanding that God is judging as we go through them.

Deuteronomy 8:1-4 Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply and go in and possess the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers. And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness [the whole time He was there in the cloud and the pillar of fire], to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord.

That is our responsibility. We are on our wilderness journey. God is testing us. He is humbling us. He wants to know what is in us. He wants to see whether we are going to be faithful to every word of God. Jesus taught us that if we are faithful, it will come back to us in spades. Maybe not now, but at least it will be there in the Kingdom of God. As was mentioned earlier, Solomon is not a fatalist; he is acknowledging the sovereignty of God over our lives.

There are fourteen related opposites in the poem of Ecclesiastes 3:

1. A time to live and a time to die.
2. A time to plant and a time to pluck what is planted.

These things are called a figure of speech or merism; a figure of speech consisting of related opposites. A merism consists of two polarities, a positive and a negative, that make up a whole. There are a couple merisms that are clear and go all the way back to Genesis 1.

Genesis 1:1 In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth.

Heavens and earth are merism, two related opposites. Heaven is above and earth is beneath. A merism contains everything that is between them. It does not matter too much what is in

between heaven and earth. Merisms become important when the events of life come between the one and the other. There will always be events. Merism includes, not only the start and not only the end, but all that is in between too.

Genesis 1:5 God called the light Day, and the darkness He called Night. So the evening and the morning were the first day.

Evening and morning contains everything that happens between the evening that begins it and the daylight that ends it. What happens in a day of life? All kinds of things can happen.

In Ecclesiastes 3, each one of those pairs, "a time to be born, and a time to die" in its broadest application, merism encompasses everything that happens between the time you are born and the time you die. There can be thousands, even tens of thousands, of events that occur in those times. How many choices and decisions do we make between birth and death? The merisms are meaningful personally and individually. Solomon is truly glorifying God's sovereignty in these statements.

The next things he does in Ecclesiastes 3:1, the use of the term "season" (followed by the word "time") is also appropriate. He is not talking about the four seasons of the year; he is talking about a fixed, predetermined time and purpose.

In the Septuagint, Greek version of the Old Testament, this is more clearly seen. The Greek scholars had two choices that they could have used to indicate time.

1. Kairos – indicates time viewed as an opportunity. It is time to wash the car because it is not raining.
2. Kronos – a chronometer or a watch. It indicates time in terms of duration. What time is it? We would use kronos in that situation.

The translators into Greek used kairos every time the word time was used in Ecclesiastes 3. What is God telling us? He is saying time is a gift. It is an opportunity to do something. Therefore, Solomon is saying when these merisms occur in a person's life, it is fitting and suitable; like it is time to wash the car. It is suitable to do so. It is appropriate for it to occur then, because the Almighty One has ordered it so.

While we look at this, I hope you are thinking, "What a God! What a mind!" As Solomon builds this out, it begins to fade as it were from God's children until he is doing for everybody in the world. We sang a song, "For it is God who orders life." Think about that again how awesome that is. He is pushing the buttons for thousands of years in people's lives all over this earth. He has taken the time, as it were, from His love to call us specifically into a situation where He is doing far more than He has ever done for anybody on earth. That is because He loves His children, and He is going to train them to do something that will glorify Him forever and ever. They have to be prepared. We have to make choices within that time to show Him that we are willing to cooperate with Him and will not be fighting Him all the time like the rest of the world is.

Numbers 9:15-17 Now on the day that the tabernacle was raised up, the cloud covered the tabernacle, the tent of the Testimony; from evening until morning it was above the tabernacle like the appearance of fire. So it was always: the cloud

covered by day, and the appearance of fire by night [God was there, He was right there in the camp with His people.]. Whenever the cloud was taken up from above the tabernacle, after that the children of Israel would journey; and in the place where the cloud settled, there the children of Israel would pitch their tents.

Are you beginning to see God's direction? It is considered a minor circumstance, but God directed the movements of the children of Israel. He is directing the movements of His people in the church as well. God orders life.

Numbers 9:18-23 At the command of the LORD the children of Israel would journey, and at the command of the LORD they would camp; as long as the cloud stayed above the tabernacle they remained encamped [They did not hear Him say start/stop, anything, but He communicated it through the cloud, through the pillar of fire, and through Moses.]. Even when the cloud continued long, many days above the tabernacle, the children of Israel kept the charge of the LORD and did not journey. So it was, when the cloud was above the tabernacle a few days: according to the command of the LORD they would remain encamped, and according to the command of the LORD they would journey. So it was, when the cloud remained only from evening until morning: when the cloud was taken up in the morning, then they would journey; whether by day or by night, whenever the cloud was taken up, they would journey. Whether it was two days, a month, or a year that the cloud remained above the tabernacle, the children of Israel would remain encamped and not journey; but when it was taken up, they would journey. At the command of the LORD they remained encamped, and at the command of the LORD they journeyed; they kept the charge of the LORD, at the command of the LORD by the hand of Moses.

God changes not. He is doing the same thing with His church. It moves on His command, not Satan's, not man's, God. You feed that principle back into the fourteen merisms and what Solomon is saying, "God does this." It is not the matter of journeying over a piece of ground; it is a matter of journeying in our pilgrimage. They were going somewhere; so are we going somewhere. They experienced all kinds of things. How many of those merisms do you think that God put the children of Israel through while they were going through the wilderness for forty years? If I was a betting man, I would bet He put them through every single one of them. Because they were circumstances that He wanted them to pass through, and we will find out later why He wanted them to pass through.

I will tell you now. I cannot hold back.

We say they are tests. Do you know why God gives us tests? It is not so He knows where we are in terms of our growth. He knows far better than we do. He does it for our benefit so we know where we are. We need a GPS, and that is part of Gypsy talking to us. The test that God gives to us so we understand, "I am weak in this area. I have something to overcome. I need more experience. I really have been stupid." The test is to inform us, not Him.