

Difficult Texts In The Bible

A Poignant Preacher's Perspective

(Ec 2:1-9)

INTRODUCTION

1. Good Evening
 - a. Greeting...
2. Series of lessons on the "Difficult Texts In The Bible."
 - a. We've looked at a number of these.
 - b. You can find all the outlines and from last week on the audio of the sermons on our website or my website.
3. Ecclesiastes
 - a. Is the 21st book in of the Old Testament.
 - b. It was written about 977 B.C. by Solomon (from Coffman's Bible Commentary, Copyright © 1971-1993 by ACU Press, Abilene Christian University. All rights reserved.)
 - i. It would appear to be at the end of Solomon's life.
 - ii. Hence all the things he did and then coming to the conclusion of the matter.
 - c. The Hebrew title is "קֹהֵלֶת" or "Qoheleth" which means book of the teacher.
 - i. The English title is derived from the Greek LXX title.
 1. "Εκκλησιαστής" or "Ecclesiastes"
 - ii. The root of the Hebrew word "Qoheleth" means "to gather."
 1. The LXX title is related to the Greek word "Εκκλησία" or "ekklesia"
 2. This related word is where we get our word church, ie "the called out." (<http://goo.gl/yihk4>)
 - iii. Thus the idea here for the title is "The Book Of The Teacher/Preacher" ie him whom others gather to hear.
 - d. The seven things that are disappointing/in vain without God.
 - i. Labor (2:4-6)
 - ii. Possessions (2:7)
 - iii. Money (2:8)
 - iv. Human knowledge & wisdom (2:8)
 - v. Political power (4:13-16)
 - vi. Youthfulness (11:9-10)
 - vii. Physical pleasure (2:1-11)
 - e. Ecclesiastes could be outlined as such...
 - i. The vanity of human wisdom (1-2)
 - ii. The disappointing experiences of life (3-5)
 - iii. The vanity of wealth and fame (6-8)
 - iv. The injustices of life (9-11)
 - v. Life in light of eternity (12) (O.T. Survey Notes "Survey of Ecclesiastes and Song of Solomon" by Parrish, Eddie pg. 97)

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4. Understanding the purpose of Ecclesiastes helps with understanding the "difficult passages."
 - a. Thus Ecclesiastes was written by Solomon as he tried earthly things to bring about happiness.
 - b. Keep in mind, therefore, that many of the things Solomon says are not inspired truths but inspired truthful dictation of what Solomon felt/wrote and so on.
 - i. The Bible is truth (**Jn 8:32; 17:17**).
 1. In other words it is the standard and there is nothing untruthful about it. It is perfect in every way.
 - ii. However not everything said in the Bible is true...let me explain.
 1. For example Satan told Eve that "You will not surely die" (**Gn 3:4**).
 - a. Did the Bible accurately and truthfully dictate what Satan said, yes, was what Satan said true...no!!!
 2. Example of man saying God doesn't hear sinners prayers, "Now we know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is a worshiper of God and does His will, He hears him" (**Jn 9:31**).
 - a. Did this man really say this, yes, does God hear sinners...sometimes (**Ac 10:1-4**).

I. The Forever Earth (1:4)

- A. The verse
 1. **Ec 1:4** "One generation passes away, and another generation comes; But the earth abides forever."
- B. False ideas
 1. There are some that teach a perpetual earth, ie an earth that will be remade and last forever.
 2. In the Mormon's Articles of Faith number ten it states, "We believe in the literal gathering of Israel and in the restoration of the Ten Tribes; that Zion (the New Jerusalem) will be built upon the American continent; that Christ will reign personally upon the earth; and, that the earth will be renewed and receive its paradisiacal glory." (<http://goo.gl/ShGsx>)
- C. The truth
 1. Keep in mind that Solomon was conducting and concluding human experiments with human conclusions.
 2. We know this because the Bible is clear that there will be no renewed earth at the second coming, based on plain simple scriptures.
 - i. **Gn 8:22** "**While the earth remains**, Seedtime and harvest, Cold and heat, Winter and summer, And day and night Shall not cease." (emphasis mine)
 - ii. **Ps 102:25-26** "Of old You laid the foundation of the earth, And the heavens are the work of Your hands. 26 They will perish, but You will endure; Yes, they will all grow old like a garment; Like a cloak You will change them, And they will be changed."
 - iii. **Mt 24:35** "Heaven and earth will pass away, but My words will by no means pass away."

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- iv. **II Pt 3:10-11** "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. 11 Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness"
- D. Why say forever?
 - 1. First remember this is Solomon's conclusion.
 - 2. Second remember that forever often simply means "throughout the duration of the span under consideration." (Fort Worth Lectureship 1982 "Difficult Texts From Ecclesiastes" by Nichols, Flavil H. pg. 327)
 - i. "Young's Analytical Concordance lists this very reference (Eccl. 1:4) under the Hebrew word (olam) which he defined: "Age-lasting" (page 311)" (Ibid)
 - 3. Example
 - i. **Ex 31:16-17** "Therefore the people of Israel shall keep the Sabbath, observing the Sabbath throughout their generations, as a covenant **forever/perpetual covenant**. 17 It is a sign forever between me and the people of Israel that in six days the LORD made heaven and earth, and on the seventh day he rested and was refreshed.'" (ESV) (emphasis mine)
 - ii. The Sabbath was ended at the cross (**Co 2:14**).
 - a. Thus forever or perpetual means "age-lasting."

II. Nothing Better Than Eating & Drinking (2:24)

- A. The verse
 - 1. **Ec 2:24** "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."
- B. False ideas
 - 1. There are those that teach, "eat, drink and be marry, God wants us happy."
- C. The truth
 - 1. Once again we must remember that Solomon is using human desires to look for human satisfactions.
 - i. **Ec 2:3** "I searched in my heart how to gratify my flesh with wine, while guiding my heart with wisdom, and how to lay hold on folly, till I might see what was good for the sons of men to do under heaven all the days of their lives."
 - 2. It is true that a "labor is worthy of his hire."
 - i. **I Ti 5:18**
 - 3. But Jesus also taught...
 - i. **Mt 16:26** "For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?"
 - 4. Thus there is something better than just living up the spoils of your labor.

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III. The Profit Of The Earth Is For All (5:9)

- A. The verse
 1. **Ec 5:9** "Moreover the profit of the land is for all; even the king is served from the field."
- B. False idea
 1. Some use this verse to promote socialism and/or communalism.
 2. We can see where that could happen, the "profit of the land is for all."
 3. How many people today are saying we need to take from those that have and distribute to all making everyone equal. It is one political party way.
- C. The truth
 1. First this verse nowhere says that the profit of the land is to be distributed equally.
 2. Second God has always said there would be rich and poor.
 - i. **Mt 26:11** "For you have the poor with you always, but Me you do not have always."
 3. Third God does teach to take care of each other but it is based on other striving to take care of themselves, say certain instances like widows and orphans.
 - i. **Ga 6:10** "Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith."
 - ii. **Ja 1:27** "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this: to visit orphans and widows in their trouble, and to keep oneself unspotted from the world."
 - iii. **II Th 3:10** "For even when we were with you, we commanded you this: If anyone will not work, neither shall he eat."

IV. The Dead Know Not Anything (9:5)

- A. The verse
 1. **Ec 9:5** "For the living know that they will die; But the dead know nothing, And they have no more reward, For the memory of them is forgotten."
- B. False ideas
 1. Some use this verse to teach materialism.
 2. This is the idea that all there is, is this material world. When we die there is no more.
 - i. This is basically the Sadducees philosophy.
 - ii. Remember they did not believe that there was an afterlife.
 3. There is a group that teaches that once we die we go unconscious from death to the resurrection.

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C. The truth

1. Solomon was not talking about the afterlife but the state of the dead physical body.
2. Paul clearly teaches that man's physical body dies but his spiritual body (soul) lives.
 - i. **II Co 4:16-18** "Therefore we do not lose heart. Even though our outward man is perishing, yet the inward man is being renewed day by day. 17 For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal."
3. Moses & Elijah talked with Christ thought their physical bodies were long gone some 1500 years back at least (**Mt 17:1-5**).
4. The rich man & Lazarus' physical bodies died but they are seen with living spiritual bodies (**Lk 16**).
 - i. Moses, Elijah, the rich man, and Lazarus' physical bodies neither "knew" anything" nor "was aware" of anything. They had long perished.
5. Thus Solomon was right here in saying that the dead know nothing because the dead physical body knows nothing but he is in no way talking about the afterlife here ie eternity.

CONCLUSION

1. Thomas Wolf wrote "For of all I have ever seen or learned, this book seems to me the noblest, the wisest, and the most powerful expression of man's life upon this earth – and also the highest flower of poetry, eloquence, and truth. I am not given to dogmatic judgments in the matter of literary creation, but if I had to make one I could say that Ecclesiastes is the greatest single piece of writing I have ever known, and the wisdom expressed in it the most lasting and profound." (<http://goo.gl/Og3ia>)
2. Let us each ask ourselves the question...do I strive to find truth in every way or am I easily led astray?
 - a. Remember the word's of Solomon as he concluded his journey in Ec 12:13 "Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, For this is man's all."
3. Invitation¹
 - a. God's Plan of Salvation
 - i. Hear/Study **Rom 10:17; II Tim 2:15**
 - ii. Believe Jesus Is The Christ **Jn 3:16; 8:24**
 - iii. Repent/Turn To God **Ac 17:30; Lk 24:47**
 - iv. Confess Jesus As Lord **Mt 10:32; Rom 10:9**
 - v. Immersed For The Forgiveness of Sins **Ac 2:38; 22:16; I Pt 3:21**
 - vi. Live A Faithful Life **I Jn 1:7; Eph 5:8**

¹ Flavil H. Nichols sermon "Difficult Texts From Ecclesiastes" was very instrumental in this outline.