

The Meaning Of Life

(Ecclesiastes)

The most perplexing book of the Bible?

- It is flavored with despair: life is empty and disappointing. Ec.4:2-3
- It seems to sanction conduct that is generated by evil. Ec.3:18-22

Ecclesiastes is best read
from back to front

Yet: life is meant
to be enjoyed.

2:24; 3:12-13; 5:18

I. Introduction

Name

- Ecclesiastes – one who convenes an assembly ...
 - Speaker, preacher, teacher

Author: Solomon

- 1:1, 12, David's son; king in Jerusalem
- 1:13, 14, 16, 17 (2:9): great wisdom.
– 1 Kings 3; 10:...3, 7-8)
- 2:4-9, splendor of Jerusalem. 1 Chr.29:25
- 7:26, 28, historical agreement.
- 12:9-10, collector of proverbs; writer.
1 Kings 4:32

Jewish tradition

- Solomon wrote **Song of Solomon** in his youth . . .
 - **Proverbs** in middle years . . .
 - **Ecclesiastes** in last years.
 - Not inspired, but makes most sense.

Characteristics

- General, not special revelation
 - “Under the sun” ... “vanity” ... “nothing new”
 - Key to understanding Ecclesiastes:

Determine if the passage is an ‘under the sun’ passage, or a God-centered alternative.

- 1 Co.2:14, natural man...
 - Learned view of life by watching news?
 - Bible is foolish – there is no truth?

Usefulness

- Ecclesiastes is a negative preparation for the gospel: **smartest man on earth can go only so far “under the sun.”**
- The Law was written to lead people to Christ.
 - Ecclesiastes, to lead those “under the sun” to the Son of God. Hb.1:1.

I. Introduction

II. Inspection

1-2a: vanity

- **Meaninglessness, emptiness, futility, uselessness** (5x in v.2; 38x in book).
- Vanity of vanities: Hebrew superlative; 'holy of holies' = Most Holy.
- Utter vanity; **vanity in highest degree.**
- Ro.8:20 = LXX, Ec.1:2:
 - **Creation is subjected to frustration**
 - **¹Swiftly pass away; ²offer so little**
 - Ja.4:14 . . . Ps.90:3-10

2b: idols = nothings

They have provoked Me to jealousy by *what is not God* [*no god*]; They have moved Me to anger by their foolish idols. But I will provoke them to jealousy by *those who are not a nation* [*no people*] –Dt.32:21

3a: what profit in human endeavor?

- Without meaning; pointless. Mt.16:26
 - Gain world = life “under the sun”
- All our work...yet nothing really changes

3b: under the sun (29x)

- Down here on earth; view from ground level
 1. Life without God
 2. Rat race

Jesus said to her, “Everyone who drinks of this water will be thirsty again” – John 4:13

4: generation follows generation

- Earth ... forever (ancient)
- 1 Sm.27:8, Amalekites inhabited land from 'of old' (forever?)
- Ps.102:25-26
- Earth is not a moveable tent, but a 'permanent' structure that stays as generations (we) come and go.

5: monotony

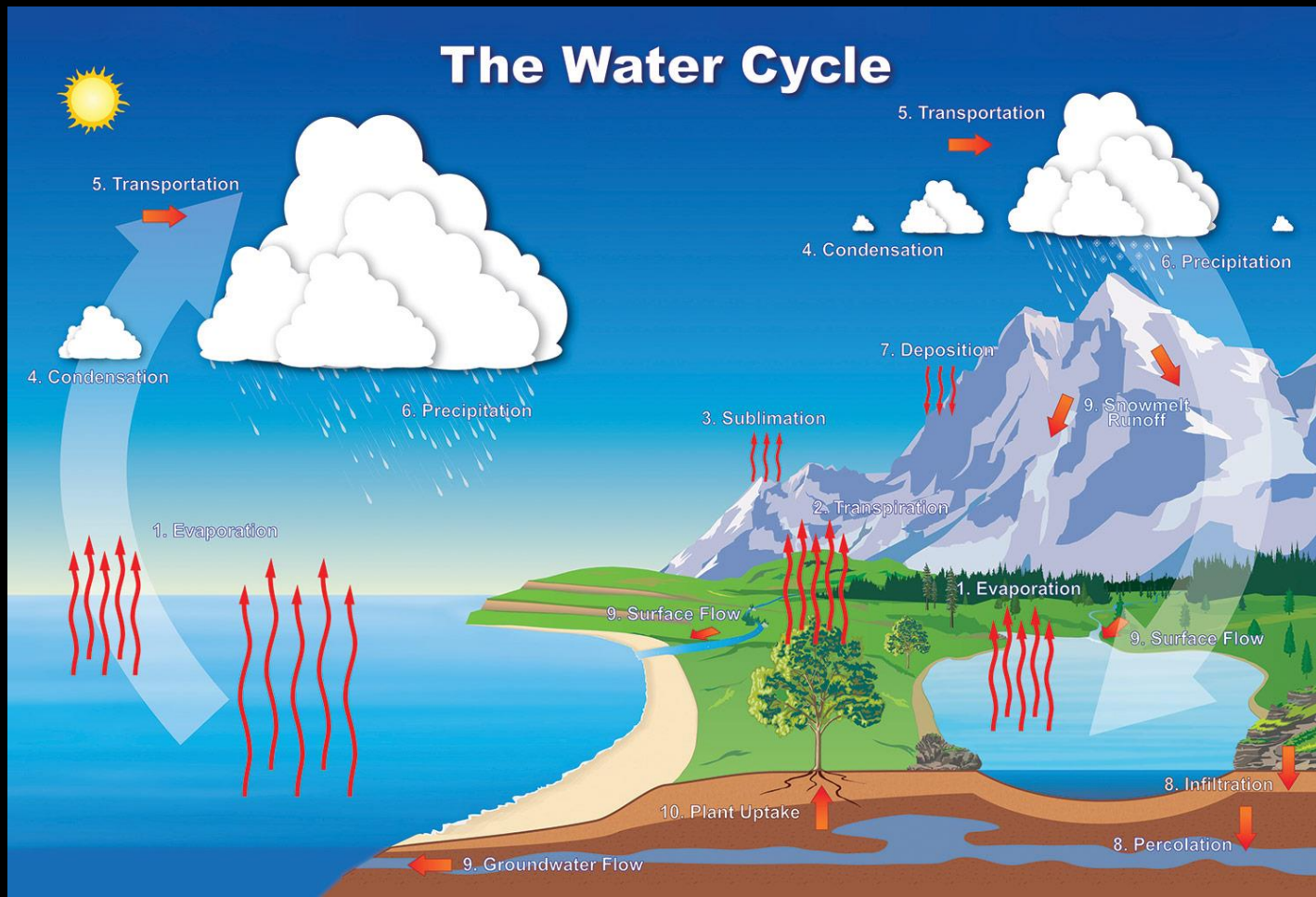
- Sun rises / sets
- Treadmill
- Daily grind

6: wind

- South . . . North
- Lk.12:55
- Weather forecast

7: rivers . . . sea

- Water cycle
- “The sea, though all the rivers flow to it, increases not in volume” – Aristophanes



8: all things . . . wearisome

- Never satisfied ... but very tired.
- Life's plans...

9-10: nothing new “under the sun”

- History repeats
- “They that come after us will see nothing new, and they who went before us saw nothing more than we have seen” – Aurelius, *Meditations*
- Leeches
- Surgery
- History — wars
- Travel...?

“The more things change, the more they stay the same”

“*Work, eat, sleep. Work, eat, sleep. Then you die.*”

11: more and more: “I don’t remember”

- After all our work, we die.
- No one will remember us.

12-13: 'have been'

- King in Jerusalem.
- Devoted to exploring new things.
 - **Seek:** penetrating the depth of object
 - **Search out:** complete survey of matters

“As man is doomed to get his bread, so his knowledge, by the sweat of his brow (Ge 3:19)” – Gill.

14: everything is meaningless

- Chasing wind . . .
- What future in it?

15a: crooked cannot be made straight

- Wreck health to get wealth
- Live to make a difference (straighten out the crooked)
- Solomon did not change morals in Jerusalem; it continued to decline...

15b: you can't count what is not there

- Too many unsupplied wants.
- Dn.5:27

16: greatest, wisest of kings

- Solomon is most qualified to write Eccl.
- 1 K.4:29-31
- 1 K.10:24

17: know madness / folly

- “If you haven’t tried it, don’t knock it”
- Result: same as grasping for wind (9x)
 - 1:17; 2:11, etc.
 - Frustrating!
 - 7:13, must accept things as they are.

18: great wisdom = great grief / sorrow

- Watch the news
- Worldly wisdom, by itself, only increases a person's ability to see what a mess the human race is in.

Conclusion (1)

Climb ladder of success; reach top . . .

1. 2:1, pleasure seeker reaches end of life
2. 5:10, acquire fortune, then diagnosis...
3. 9:11, break the records...

Conclusion (2)

1. Boris

2. Jack

Ecclesiastes in miniature

Conclusion (3)

What to do when the
good life does not satisfy?

Go back to the basics – four questions

1. Origin.
2. Meaning.
3. Morality.
4. Destiny.

“God is like the sun.
You cannot look at it,
but without it,
you cannot
look at anything else”
– G.K. Chesterton