

ECCLESIASTES – Encapsulated

(The Wisdom of Solomon, Summarised by Donald Chalmers 2004)

The following is a quotation from the Introduction to the book of Ecclesiastes, as written in the “Good News Bible, Australian Edition 1989”. The book of “Ecclesiastes” (book of Wisdom) names “the Philosopher” as the son of David (Solomon ?!), “King” of Israel, who lived almost 1000 years before Christ, as follows:

“The book of Ecclesiastes contains the thoughts of “the Philosopher”, a man who reflected deeply on how short and contradictory human life is, with it’s mysterious injustices and frustrations, and concluded that “life is useless”. He could not understand the ways of God, who controls human destiny. Yet, in spite of this, he advised people to work hard, and to enjoy the gifts of God as much and as long as they could.”

I have presented this to you in abbreviated form, and have tried to include all of Solomon’s thoughts, without too much repetition, and having regard to Solomon’s conclusions (as contained in “Proverbs”) discussed earlier, but without quoting Chapter and Verse references. As old men often will, Solomon wonders if life was worth the living. His questions are still just as real to us today, 3000 years later. We must all ponder on these questions if we are to lead a worthwhile and meaningful life, to be remembered with gratitude by those we leave behind to take our place.

Take a look at this common-sense, centrally placed, important, but most neglected book of the Bible !

Life is Useless: (Editor’s note: this begs the question, “or is it ?”)

“Life is useless, all useless. You spend your life working hard, and what will you have to show for it in the end? Generations come and go; the sun still rises (and sets); the winds continue to blow; but the world stays just the same. Although our eyes and ears can never see or hear enough to be satisfied, what has happened before will happen again, as it has from the very beginning.

It is like chasing the wind. You can’t straighten out what is crooked, and you can’t count on things that aren’t there. And so I started to think about the differences between wisdom and knowledge, and foolishness, and madness.

Wisdom (enlightened knowledge) is better than foolishness, just as light is better than darkness, for wise people can see a little of where they may be going. Fools cannot, but we must all die, wise and foolish alike.

All we can do is to be happy and do the best we can, while we are still alive. All of us should eat and drink and enjoy what we have worked for. This is life’s benefit (gift). A human being is no better than an animal, because we all die and return to the earth (creator). Sometimes I envy the dead, and even those never born, for they have never seen the injustice that goes on in this world.

It is better to have only a little and have peace of mind (i.e. be satisfied); for one can rise from poverty or prison to become a leader, but if in old age will not take kindly advice, is not as well off as an intelligent poor person.

If you go to church or temple, go to learn, rather than offer sacrifices as foolish people do. Think before you speak, and don’t make rash promises which you can’t keep. The more you worry, the more likely you are to have bad dreams; the more you talk, the more likely you are to say something foolish. And no matter how much you dream, how much useless work you do, or how much you talk, always stand in awe of your God Creator.

Have respect !

Know that every bureaucracy oppresses the poor in some way, and that every official tries to protect their own position and interests. But we leave this world just as we entered it – with nothing. There is nothing we can take with us! The best thing anyone can do is to eat and drink and work and enjoy the short life which has been allotted. Be grateful. **Be kind – even to your animals.** Be satisfied with what you have, rather than always wanting something else. Internal happiness is the gift of God, our Creator.

The living should remember that death is waiting for us all, and that the day you die is better than the day you were born. Remember also that sorrow is better than laughter; it may sadden your face, but it sharpens your understanding. Wise people think about their death. If you take a bribe, you ruin your character. Patience is better than pride. Keep your temper under control; it is foolish to harbour a grudge. Don't wonder why "things were so much better in the old days", because that is not an intelligent question. Wisdom should keep you safe, but bad luck can happen to anyone.

When things are going well, just remember that life sends both happiness and trouble, and we never know what is going to happen next – good people may die while other evil ones live on. Strive to find a balance. There is no one on earth who does what is right all the time and never makes a mistake.

Beware of those who would trap you with undue lust, for their arms around you will hold you like a chain, catch you like a trap, or a net. Watch out for people who grin and wink at you, for they have thought of something evil already. Wisdom can help you avoid these traps, so that you are not filled with worry, and can smile a lot.

None of us knows what is going to happen, and there is no one to tell us. No one can put off dying, or put off the day of death. That is a battle we cannot escape; we cannot cheat our way out.

Sometimes righteous people get the punishment of the wicked, and sometimes the wicked get the praise and reward of the righteous. Wise people may claim to know all, but they don't! All we can tell is that the same fate will come to the righteous and the wicked, to the good and the bad, to those who are religious or who are not, to those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. One fate comes to all alike.

While we are alive in the world of the living, there is hope, so enjoy life with the people you love, as long as you can. Eat your food and be happy; drink your wine and be cheerful. It's all right with God. Work hard at whatever you do.

Fast runners do not always win races, and the brave do not always win battles. However they try, wise persons do not always earn a living, intelligent ones do not always get rich, and capable folk do not always rise to high positions. Bad luck happens to everyone. You will never know when your time is coming – when we will be trapped at some evil moment when we least expect it.

It is better to listen to the quiet words of a wise person than to the shouts of a leader at a council of fools. Just as wisdom does more good than weapons, and one fool can undo a lot of good, so dead flies can make a whole bottle of perfume stink, and a little stupidity can cancel out the greatest wisdom.

A country is fortunate indeed if its leader can make wise decisions for the benefit of all, and who control themselves so as not to be gluttonous or drunk with power. Make sure you do not criticise unnecessarily, and if you do, think ahead and question thoroughly, with solutions in mind, so that a way can be found to move forward, not backwards.

Put your investments in several places – many places even – because you never know what kind of bad luck may happen at any time. This principle applies also to the people we love. Love, and be good to as many as you can.

Be grateful for every year that you live, for no matter how long you live, you will be dead much longer. You aren't going to be young very long, so enjoy your youth. Be happy while you are still young. Do what you want to do, and follow your hearts desire, remembering always to respect your Creator God, for we must all return to the dust of the earth, and the breath of life will go back to God who gave it to us.

These words are like the sharp sticks that shepherds use to guide sheep, and are as lasting as firmly driven nails. They have been given by God, the one Shepherd of us all.