

# **A Study of the Wisdom Literature**

## **(OT Survey Lesson 296—Eccl. 2:24-3:22)**

**Introduction:** Having shown the inadequacy of the secularist world view, the Preacher now shows us a better way to view life—with faith in God. In this part of Ecclesiastes we are impressed with the emphasis upon understanding God’s providence and judgment as giving life on earth meaning.

**Lesson aim:** To show the spiritual view of life.

Note: Up to this point the emphasis has been upon the vanity of life without God, but now the argument changes. There are frequent references to God in this next section. Hence we conclude that in this section the preacher wants to present:

### **The alternative to pessimism, faith in God—Eccl. 2:24-26**

What course does the preacher encourage one to pursue in life? (v. 24) Is this equivalent to a hedonistic lifestyle? From whom does he say one has this ability? (v. 24-25)

Note these “it is nothing better than statements”—2:24; 3:12,22, 8:15. What does this tell us about God’s purpose for us here on earth? Yet this enjoyment of life is not the Epicurean philosophy of the Greeks (1 Cor. 15:22) or sheer hedonism or covetousness (Lk. 12:15)

This enjoyment of life is made possible by the Lord (v. 25)

What does God give to those who are good in His sight? (v. 26) What does He give to the sinner?

God sees two classes of men and in general rewards them according to their deeds. There is a blessing in the wisdom we receive from God in enjoying life. The preacher sees the consequent losses of the “sinner” not as mere misfortune but judgments of God to him. Prov. 13:22 This is not however the answer to all of life’s injustices, for they exist too; yet, it is an affirmation that there is an advantage to those who live the life of faith under God.

And so in contrast to the futility of the secularist world view there is a hope and assurance in these verses of God’s providence and judgment. Interestingly, he begins to expound upon both in chapter 3.

### **Faith in God’s providence—Eccl. 3:1-15**

What heading begins this section? (v. 1) What do you think the preacher means by these statements?

The preacher begins here to state the reasons for the optimistic exhortations he has just stated. All of life, every event, has its part in the purpose of God. Everything is under God's ultimate control; though, the preacher is not saying that everything is directly caused by God. God uses it all to fulfill his purpose.

**How does the Preacher describe the “times” of life? (v. 2-8) What do you think is the point of this lengthy and specific analysis of life's events?**

The preacher is calling our attention to the whole of life. Everything is subject to God's purpose. We cannot always choose our times; we can only experience them. They are not always pleasant, there are occasions of blessing and loss, pleasure and pain. Yet knowing that God is in control of them should both humble and comfort us. Here we shall see the view of providence illustrated by Job's life (a mix of blessing and adversity with God at the helm, not the active agent of everything but master of all, using it for his purposes).

**What question is now raised for the second time in the book? (v. 9-10)**

Up to this point Solomon has focused on the events themselves with little comment about their goals or purpose. But, now he evaluates them in view of God's purpose. This view of the world does not remove the fact that the world has no profit. What it does do is enables us to see meaning in the fact that it has no profit. God made it that way on purpose.

**These questions are answered in part by the affirmation that God does what two things? (v. 11) What you think these two statements mean?**

He has made everything appropriate or beautiful. God has taken these events that seem meaningless in their raw existence and given them a beauty in the fact that they fulfill his purpose for us.

He has also placed within us “eternity”. We have the capacity to do more than think of what is happening at the moment, like, for example, an animal might do. We have a sense of “time”, of “timelessness”. There is within us a corresponding ability to evaluate the past, to think of the future and seek to take in all that God is doing. Yet, we have a limitation. We never live long enough to take it all in, or figure it all out. We take our place in the sphere of time and live out our own little measure of eternity and then we die. The result, “man will not find out...”

**Consequently, what should these two truths imply about how the life of faith is lived? (v. 12-13)**

So then, in view of these concepts, the faithful man, trusting in God's providence enjoys the life God gives him. Moreover, he recognizes the limitations under which he lives and he knows that it is unchangeable.

**Did the preacher believe that life under the sun would change? (v. 14-15)  
What did he believe was the reason for the order God has established in the world?**

All events, whether good or bad, work to accomplish one grand purpose—to enable man to see His need for God, to respect Him. Already, Solomon has arrived at “the conclusion of the matter”. Yet, enjoying the good God gives does not satisfactorily answer the pain he experiences. The preacher has more to say.

## **Faith in God's judgment—Eccl. 3:16-22**

What observation did the preacher make about life? (v. 16) How did faith enable him to offer a satisfactory explanation of this feature of life's vanity? (v. 17)

To know that there is a time for every deed is also know that there will then be justice for those who do wickedly and exoneration and blessing for those who unjustly suffer. But there still remains one other issue to address in faith: What about death?

What explanation did the preacher offer to the fact that all die? (v. 18-21) In what way was the preacher affirming that there is no difference between man and beast?

Verse 18 is critical here: Eaton translates from Hebrew: "God is making it clear to them so that they may see that they—they by themselves—are animals. Solomon is not affirming that there is no difference between man and animal; but that this is the demand of the secularist view. Without God, how are we different? And who knows what are destiny beyond death is? By presenting the stark reality of this truth before us, he hopes that we will recoil from the pessimism of secularism to see the vivid truth which he affirms. We are more than an animal!!! Yet, if secularism is right, we are nothing more than an animal.

Thus, the preacher asks, "Who knows that the breath of man...." In general, men do not acknowledge his difference and it is this that the preacher is observing.

However, faith presses past the stark reality of death to see judgment and life afterward. What was once a grounds of vanity viewed only from this world's perspective now becomes a strong argument for something beyond!

Consequently what course of life does he recommend? (v. 22)

Now the Preacher comes back to his original idea. If indeed we must all die, if we have no control over our future, then the position of faith makes the most sense. Let's enjoy life under God's providence in faith.

So the preacher takes us in these first three chapters from atheism to theism, from pessimism to optimism, from human frustration to human enjoyment, from personal autonomy to submission to the divine purpose, from vanity of earthly pursuit to the satisfaction of life lived in faith. One word has made the difference—God!