

01-02-04b Ecclesiastes

We're ready now to resume our study in Ecclesiastes chapter 1 and what I'd like to do very quickly is write this translation down on the board for you. This as the introductory set of ideas defines the parameters that govern what is said in the entire book and understanding this goes a long way toward helping us to understand each individual verse. So I already gave you verse 1, the words of Kohelet, son of David, king in Jerusalem.

And verse 2, of vapors said Kohelet and the said is in the past tense because he's referring back, he's going to go on and tell us about all of his investigations but what sparked this? What was the beginning point of this whole set of ideas, this whole line of investigation? Well, he began by looking around and saying it's all an ultimate vapor. So that's why it's said in the past tense instead of current because he's referring historically to what caused him to set his mind to seek out and explore wisdom concerning this idea. Vapor of vapors said Kohelet, vapor of vapors, all is vapor.

So this is what we're trying to get past. Is there a way to have something be more than just vapor? You've seen these, I was talking about time lapse earlier but those where they look up at the sky and you see the clouds forming and disappearing and you always thought clouds were sort of a substantial thing that would float across the sky but a cloud was a cloud. When you see the time lapse, you realize that you're looking at moisture-laden air hitting a layer of cooler air, this warm moist air hits the cool dry air and it causes this vapor to condense and that's what makes clouds and so the clouds can actually form.

You say you look up and there's a clear blue sky and ten minutes later you look up and it's all clouded over and you think where did those clouds move in from? You would expect them to blow in from the horizon but they've actually formed right over your head and then just as quickly they can disappear, it can be overcast. One minute you look up five or ten minutes later and it's a clear blue sky and you think where did the clouds go and they've just vanished. So vapor is an excellent metaphor for this idea and then in verse three where he talks about the idea of what is the profit to a man.

What is the profit? This is our word Yitron, Y-I-T-R-O-N, to a man. It's important if you're taking notes it will be beneficial to write this translation down because you're going to be able to go in and circle the similar words when we get finished. What is the profit to a man in all his toil? And the word for toil in verse three, let me move back up there in my Hebrew text.

The word for toil here is Amal. In all his toil which he toils under the sun. Toil which he toils.

It's the noun and the verb together from Amal, under the sun. The Hebrew noun for sun is Shemesh, S-H-E-M-E-S-H. You'll see this as a place name in the Old Testament, Beth Shemesh, his house of the sun.

It's not in New Orleans, it's over in the ancient world, house of the rising sun. So that's verse three. Then in verse four, this is the theme statement in verse three, verses two and three actually.

Verse two raises the question, why is everything a vapor? What's he talking about? What's the locus of the metaphor? Well verse three, where's the profit to a man? What can he take away after the sun sets? He's toiled under the sun. I've got two unders there, don't I? That's what we get for talking and writing at the same time. Okay, so then in verse four, a generation goes forth, and this is Halak, H-A-L-A-K, and a generation goes or comes in, and that's Bo, B-O.

A generation comes forth, a generation goes in, and the earth stands, and I would put in parentheses, still, the idea here is it stands still. Everything else, generations going out and coming in, the sun, the wind, the streams, are all moving around the earth, is the constant. The earth stands still unto the ages, and that's Laolam, L-O-L-A-M.

That's verse four. Verse five, and the sun rises, or if you like the literary title that came from it, the sun also rises, but literally it's and the sun rises, and the sun goes in, and I'm using a little bit of an awkward translation because I want to show the equivalences here because this is Bo. In verse five, the sun rises, the sun goes in, and unto its place, panting, literally, which is the idea of hurrying or hastening, it rises again.

So verse six, and the sun rises, and the sun goes in, and unto its place, panting, it rises again. I think you could find here perhaps even a loose allusion to the toil or sorrow of childbearing, the statement that God made in the garden to Eve when He said, in sorrow you shall bring forth children, because there is a reference here. Why doesn't He just say, unto its place, it goes and rises again, but panting, the idea of the sun hurrying, there is some effort involved for the sun to rise.

There was some labor, something that caused panting, and what makes a sun rise in the sense of physical birth, when you look at the metaphor, it's the labor, which we call labor, involved in giving birth. So I think that this is another fleshing out, if you will, of the metaphor. Why does He even refer to the fact that the sun has to pant in order to rise? There's an idea of labor involved for that to take place.

Verse 6, going forth unto the south, and this is going forth, this is our friend Halak, H-A-L-A-K, put that in parenthesis, going forth unto the south, and turning around, and turning around is Sabab, S-A-B-A-B, turning around to the north, unto the north. Then you have Sabab repeated two more times, turning, turning, or turning around, turning around, these are both Sabab in the participle, which is Sobaib, sometimes say that, Sobaib, what do you want to do now? Now, Sabab, Sabab, we'll say, turning, turning, then you finally get the subject of the sentence. All of this motion comes before the statement of the subject because the emphasis is on the motion, it's the traveling and the turning about, the circuit, but it's all the way up to this point before you have the

wind, and this is Ruach, R-U-A-C-H, it's turning, turning, the wind is going forth, and that's Halak again, H-A-L-A-K, the wind is going forth, and upon turning, that's Sabab again, upon turning, the wind returns, so everything emphasizes the traveling path of the wind.

The word for returning there is Shav, S-H-A-B, or S-H-A-V, depending on how you want to translate it. Okay, hang with me here because this translation is important, this is the key, understanding what Solomon is talking about is the key to understanding what he's talking about. So we've got to be sure we get this right, so bear with me.

That's verse 6, going forth under the south and turning around under the north, turning around, turning around, the wind is going forth and upon turning, the wind returns. Virtually all of those except the last verb are participles which indicates the ongoing action, the constancy of the action. Then we get to verse 7, all the rivers are going forth, you can guess what that verb is, Halak.

It's a shame when we translate in English and we change around and we say flowing here and blowing there and we lose a lot of the correspondences, all the rivers are going forth, Halak, to the sea. Remember how smart Solomon is. When he chooses this, he could have used some other imagery of animals going out to pasture and coming back in or something, but what does the sea represent in the Old Testament? Virtually always, when you find the sea, what is it a symbol of? The chaotic uncontrollable forces of evil.

So when you see all of these streams running into the sea, it kind of reminds you of the negative view of death that you have in the Old Testament. What's the termination point of all of these streams? They all go to the same place and it's the sea. The sea is not a happy symbol in the Old Testament, in the Old Testament days.

All the rivers are going forth to the sea, they start out high and they end up low. But the sea is not filled, no end of evil in a sense. The sea is not filled, I put a semicolon there.

To the place where the rivers are going forth, to the place where the rivers are going forth, of course going forth is Halak, H-A-L-A-K, there they return, and that's Shav, S-H-A-V, to go forth, which is Halak again. One of the things about Halak, I mentioned to you that it tends to emphasize the beginning of the action, the aggressive idea, but also think about Halak with its primary meaning of to walk. To walk, you're touching the ground, you're earthbound, you're trudging along the surface.

These are not jet stream winds, they had an interesting thing on TV, probably sounds like I watch a lot of TV, I don't feel like I really do, but I guess I see enough to provide me with abundant illustrations. They had a thing I saw a little bit of where a plane had gone missing back in 1948 down in South America where there was a high mountain range and a glacier, and they were trying to fly over the mountain range and land in a large city with an airport, but it was an overcast day and bad weather, and they went up into the clouds where their visibility, they couldn't see the

ground, and as they were flying over this mountain range, back then they didn't know about the jet stream, and essentially their airspeed, their speed through the air, they went up so high to get over the mountains and get over this storm that they got into the jet stream. Well, the jet stream was blowing in their faces at a hundred and something miles an hour, so they thought they were making much further progress than they really were.

They were making very little progress over the ground, but they had all of this wind going by and thought they were really traveling, so they got ready to do their descent to go down to the airport, and they weren't over the mountains, and they descended right into the mountain and crashed, and the plane vanished without a trace. And nobody, there were theories about space aliens and Bermuda Triangle type of activity because nobody ever found Heidner hair in the plane. Well, what happened is it got covered with snow and embedded in the glacier, and the glacier flow goes, from a human perspective, deep underground.

When they showed the mountain slope and how thick this ice is, the flow goes under the surface ice, and so this plane and its contents and the wreckage were carried under the ice for 50 years and just recently surfaced way down miles and miles where the glacier melts. And I forget how many miles, 20-something miles down the mountain slope, or I don't know if it was 20, it was quite a few miles down the slope, suddenly this wreckage is surfacing. But the point is they were flying way up high in these stratospheric winds, they were up in the jet stream.

But this idea of the wind using halak instead of some other word for blow, and there are other words, keeps it earthbound. Everything is tied to the ground. Halak is all down here where your feet contact the ground, the rubber meets the road, literally.

So once again here in verse 7, All the rivers are going forth, halak, to the sea, but the sea is not filled. To the place where the rivers are going forth, halak, there they return, shav, to go forth. And the idea is to go forth again.

But the word again is not there, it just says so they can go forth, and that's halak once again. That's verse 7. So then we come to verse 8, and verse 8 is bringing us back up from the use of these various metaphors to express the idea that's here. In all of these different metaphors for the generations that go forth and come in on the static earth, and the fact that you can't seem to find a prophet, there's nothing to take away that's permanent and lasting.

You come to verse 8, and verse 8 says, All words, all hadabrim, and let's put that, that's ha-h-a-d-b-a-r-i-m. And keep in mind that d-a-b-a-r is the verb for to speak or to say or to tell. And the word of the Lord, when it says the word of the Lord came to Moses saying, or in all these other Old Testament passages, it's d-b-e-r-h-a-l-o-h-i-m, or d-b-e-r-h-a-d-o-n-i is how they would have pronounced it, how they would have read it out loud.

The word of the Lord is d-b-a-r. All words are laborsome. The word here for laborsome is an

interesting word.

It's y-a-g-e-a, y-a-g-e-a, yagea. It's not used very often as an adjective. Y-a-g-e-a is a rough approximation.

But it's used by Moses over in Deuteronomy chapter 25, verse 18, where he's rehearsing the history of Israel's exodus. And he says in verse 17 of Deuteronomy 25, Remember what Amalek did to you on the way as you were coming out of Egypt, how he met you on the way and attacked your rear ranks, all the stragglers at your rear, when you were tired and weary, and he did not fear God. Well, the word translated tired there is yagea.

So all words are wearisome. All words are laborsome. But full of labor, it has the idea that it's exhausting, it's exceedingly difficult.

You can imagine the speed and the haste and the labor involved in getting out of Egypt, getting across the Red Sea, taking all night. Remember right after they crossed the Red Sea, they did that all during the night, they got no sleep that night. And then the second day, everybody is fatigued and operating without sleep.

And here comes Amalek to try to attack Israel when they're down, when they don't have any energy. So all words are laborsome, Solomon says. Yagea.

A man is not able to speak. Remember that that it that you have in italics there is not in the text. And if Solomon wanted to say it, he would have said it.

He didn't say it, so we shouldn't put it in there. A man is not able to speak, period. And this word for speak is dabar, D-A-B-A-R.

It would be odd, sometimes as I mentioned, dabar or dabarim is used for things, to talk about things. But you wouldn't switch meanings of the word in the same sentence normally. You wouldn't have it mean things as a noun and then have it mean speaking and saying as a verb.

So the immediate context would lead us to think that this is all talking about speaking and telling. All words are laborsome. A man is not able to speak.

Those two phrases are related. So what's the conclusion in verse 9? That which has been is that which will be. That which has been is that which will be.

And that which has been done, that which has been done. And the word for doing here is one you may be familiar with from Genesis. It's asah, A-S-A-H.

Remember bara, often people sort of simplify that and say, well to create something from nothing. It doesn't always mean from nothing because when it's used of humans, actually in the Old Testament it's always used of God. God is the subject for bara virtually everywhere you find it.

But asah means to make or to do, to produce, to manufacture. And asah is used when God made a woman from the rib of Adam. Asah means to manufacture.

You've got something to work with and you turn it into something. But that which has been done is that which will be done. And of course the second one is also asah.

Then he concludes verse 9 by saying, and there is nothing new under the sun. There is nothing new under the sun. Well with this before us as a translation, it's a little bit easier to understand because Solomon is not saying there is no new thing.

Look at all the inventions of this century. There are plenty of new things under the sun if you want to just talk about the advance of civilization and invention and science and so forth. What is he really talking about here? He's talking about the generations going forth, trying to figure out how to make a profit in the eternal sense.

How can you reap something beyond the temporary? How can you get beyond the temporary? Whether you look at it from the standpoint of the beginning and ending of life, birth and death, which the sun represents. Whether you look at the force that is exerted along your way, looking at the wind and the pushing around of things, the frothing up of the waves, the flapping of the clothing and so forth, as it goes and goes and turns and turns. Whether you are looking at the rivers and the various courses that they take and the erosion they might produce and the boats that they might float and the fish that they might harbor and so forth, it all ultimately winds up in the sea.

All words are laborious. A man is not able to speak. No matter where you look, there is not an answer.

There is nothing that can be said. The eye is not filled with hearing. The ear is not filled with seeing.

I guess I skipped that in verse 8, didn't I? After a man is not able to speak, let me insert that in. The eye is not satisfied to see. The eye is not satisfied.

This is one word used with the eye and another one used with the ear. The eye is not satisfied to see. That's an infinitive from R-A-H to see.

It's actually an infinitive construct. The eye is not satisfied to see. The ear is not filled.

These words are often used in parallel satisfying and filling our synonyms here. There is not a great distinction except that the senses are different. The ear is not filled to hear.

Both of these have the idea that there is not an answer that is found. No matter how much you look, your eye is not satisfied. Eyes are looking where is the profit.

No matter how you analyze it, no matter how you slice it, you don't find the profit. The ear is not filled to hear. You listen.

Why is it? Because there is nothing that you try. If you try to build a monument to make yourself last, somebody has already built monuments to themselves before. If you try to do it with many offspring and try to leave a legacy, people have been doing that for eons.

Everything that you see, everything that you hear in terms of this is the way to make a permanent profit out of your labor under the sun, it's all been said and heard and tried before. And the words fail. It's laborsome.

A man is not able to speak. So when you look at the close tie between all of these verses, all of these statements, the similar verbs and so on, you see that it really goes back to the generations. These are commentaries on human life.

And from a human perspective, no matter how much human wisdom you have, these efforts to find the permanent, all are just repetitions of efforts that have been made before. One thing I want to emphasize about these statements is everything that we have seen so far is true. This is not skepticism.

It's not pessimism. It's not human viewpoint. It's not man railing against the way things are.

These are observations that Solomon makes and they're all true. This is divine viewpoint. God inspires these words.

They're accurate. They're correct. There's no endorsement of pessimism.

He's not saying all things are vain. He's not saying that there's no point in looking or that there's no point in hearing. He's saying there's no permanent prophet under the sun.

No one has been able to find it. We're going to go forward in Ecclesiastes and examine how Solomon approaches this. But I want to return to our scripture reading for this morning as we close this lesson.

Turn with me back to Psalm 90. Having seen what we've seen in Ecclesiastes chapter 1, let's look at Psalm 90 once again. Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations.

What's the difference? Solomon, in stating this problem, this is like in a debate where the premise or the issue to be debated is stated at the beginning. When Solomon states the issue, he says, Generations come and generations go, and the earth stands still unto the ages. And so this is an earthbound terrarium or solarium or whatever the little sealed environment is.

It's on the earth. Halak, in all of these cases, is talking about moving across the earth. It's all a terrestrial view.

How does Moses start out? Lord, you have been our dwelling place in all generations. When Moses looks at the generations of Israel, he sees them dwelling in the Lord, not on the ground. So you have a fundamental difference in perspective.

Before the mountains were brought forth, before you had formed the earth and the world, all of this sun and wind and streams and so forth, before any of that was here, even from everlasting to everlasting, you are God. You are the one who turns man to destruction and says, Return, O children of men. Generation, come on back in.

Your time on the field is over. The next generation is going to have their shot. This thousand years, these endless circuits, it's like yesterday when it's passed on a watch in the night.

You carry them away like a flood. They're like a sleep, like grass, which grows up and flourishes in the morning, and in the evening it's cut down and withers. And Moses' perspective... See, Moses is outside the box.

Moses is looking beyond the under-the-sun limitation. He says, this is all in God's environment. Our generations dwell in the Lord.

He's the one that has determined the times and the seasons and the days and the years. He's the one that sends the generations forth and brings them back in. There's no mention of how this takes place, what set all of this in motion.

It kind of reminds you of modern science, when they talk about how great everything is and all the evolution and how these... Every time you watch a nature special and they say, well, this has evolved, and how sophisticated all of these animal attributes and functions are. But Moses has stepped back beyond that, and he says, God is the one that set this all in motion. You have set our iniquities before you.

There is a moral component that Moses brings in that Solomon, as of now, in chapter 1, has not mentioned, except by way of allusion with the sea. But he makes a similar statement in 9. Our days have passed away in your wrath. We finish our years like a sigh, 70, 80 years.

The boast is labor and sorrow. Soon cut off and we fly away. But he returns immediately to the subject of God.

Who knows the power of your anger? For as the fear of you, so is your wrath. So teach us to number our days that we may gain a heart of wisdom. And Moses cuts to the chase and says, we've got to make the most of the time.

We've got to redeem the time, because the days are evil. How do we do that? God's work needs to appear to his servants. We need to be focused on God's work.

Solomon's view is all man's work, isn't it? What did the wind do? What did the streams do? What

happened under the sun? Moses says, Lord, let your work appear to your servants. Let your glory appear to their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us.

And establish the work of our hands for us. There is something beyond under the sun. There is something beyond the wind and the streams and the sea and the rivers and so forth.

It's God that can come in from the outside, from outside that clear dome and establish our work. Cause it to last and go into the time beyond the end of the ages. Well, this is a great comfort to us and we know that there is a way to produce fruit, righteousness by faith.

There is a way to lay up for ourselves treasure in heaven. But keep in mind, Solomon is in the Old Testament age and Solomon is predicating this situation to people who haven't thought about that issue. Who are simply going along and when they think about the law and they think about their righteousness and they think about their efforts, they are looking for justification in time.

They are saying, if I do right by God, God will do right by me. God helps those who help themselves. I obey the law and God is going to prosper and bless me.

And their vision is restricted to time. You find this happening in the church today. People look around and say, well, if I bring my tithes into the storehouse, if I am faithful, if I witness, if I live a good life, then God is going to bless me.

And people look for the blessing. And if adversity comes into their life, I was reading a bunch of parenting books here recently and they talk about train up a child in the way that he should go and when he is old he will not depart from it. Well, some children seem to depart from it.

And they say, I did everything right, where is the payback? Where is the profit in all that hard work I put into raising my children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord? And here they turned out to have all kinds of problems. That time bound view of only seeing what is under the sun, this is what Solomon is getting ready to broach to his audience, to the people that he has under the sound of his voice as Kohelet. He is going to say, look, think about it.

If you just look at things under the sun, there is really no profit. Even if things turn out the way you think, how long does it last? Who is going to remember? Where is the eternal profit? He is trying to lift their viewpoint out of the mundane and into the eternal. And so, it isn't as though he doesn't know the answer to these things, but he is postulating, he is bringing it forward.

And it is a question we need to ask ourselves because as we seek to order our priorities in a way that is pleasing to God and in a way that is conducive to producing eternal fruit, we have got to think about it. If we are spending our effort and our time and our clock cycles in our brain on things that only have value under the sun, if it doesn't reflect faith, if we don't see in it the work of God, if we don't see in it the forward movement of God's plan, it is like the streams flowing into the sea. Plenty of people have done that before.

There have been untold generations of people that have lived too much in this world with setting their minds on earthly things and not on heavenly things. We are called to remember our heavenly citizenship, to remember our heavenly priorities, our heavenly calling, and it requires thinking outside the earthly box. And that will cause us to make decisions and take actions that don't make sense to someone who is only viewing things under the sun, who says, well, this is the way the streams have always flowed, this is the way the wind has always blown.

There needs to be that eternal component in our perspective and in our thinking. That is what lifts us out of the mundane. That is what gets us out of the halak, out of the walking along the surface and starts to put us in the realm of the eternal, the eternal weight of glory that is going to be revealed when the Lord Jesus Christ returns.

So it is great food for thought. We are going to see some fascinating twists and turns in Solomon's line of reasoning as he carries his audience forward toward that conclusion. We have the advantage of hindsight and believe me, we need it to understand what he is saying.

So that is where we are going to stop for this morning. Let's close in a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for the perspective that we have in this age where things that prophets and kings longed to see had not been revealed, but because of the Lord Jesus Christ and His victory on the cross, because of the...