

01-05-20a Ecclesiastes

As we continue our worship service this morning, turn with me for our scripture reading to Hosea. Hosea will begin in Chapter 5. Just to give us some background, the central portion of our reading is Chapter 6, but we need a little bit of context because there have been five chapters of, to put it mildly, commentary on the spiritual status of the Northern Kingdom of Israel. You can get a feel for this by scanning through Chapter 5, and I think we'll read Chapter 5 and Chapter 6, but keep in mind Chapter 6 is our target.

Hosea, he's been communicating this theme throughout the first four chapters, but in Chapter 5 he says he's addressing the religious leadership in his day and in his generation, and this call could probably be issued today with equal validity and equal force. Hear this, O priests, take heed, O house of Israel, give ear, O house of the king, for yours is the judgment, because you have been a snare to Mizpah and a net spread on Tabor. The revolvers are deeply involved in slaughter, though I rebuke them all.

I know Ephraim, and Israel is not hidden from me, for now, O Ephraim, you commit harlotry, Israel is defiled. They do not direct their deeds toward turning to their God, for the spirit of harlotry is in their midst, and they do not know the Lord. The pride of Israel testifies to his face, therefore Israel and Ephraim stumble in their iniquity.

Judah also stumbles with them. With their flocks and herds they shall go to seek the Lord, but they will not find him. He has withdrawn himself from them.

They have dealt treacherously with the Lord, for they have begotten pagan children. Now a new moon shall devour them and their heritage. Blow the ram's horn in Gibeah, the trumpet in Ramah.

Cry aloud at Beth-Avon, look behind you, O Benjamin. Ephraim shall be desolate in the day of rebuke. Among the tribes of Israel I make known what is sure.

The princes of Judah are like those who remove a landmark. I will pour out my wrath on them like water. Ephraim is oppressed and broken in judgment, because he willingly walked by human precept.

Therefore I will be to Ephraim like a moth, and to the house of Judah like rottenness. When Ephraim saw his sickness and Judah saw his wound, then Ephraim went to Assyria and sent to King Jerob. Yet he cannot cure you, nor heal you of your wound, for I will be like a lion to Ephraim, and like a young lion to the house of Judah.

I, even I, will tear them and go away. I will take them away and no one shall rescue. I will return again to my place until they acknowledge their offense.

Then they will seek my face. In their affliction they will earnestly seek me." Of course the picture

here is of apostasy, departure from faith, disobedience, apathy in both the northern and southern kingdoms. And God sends discipline that is designed to turn Israel, to turn Ephraim, which is the synonym for the northern kingdom.

And so God starts out being like a moth and like rottenness, which is something, you have a whole garment and a moth eats a little hole in it. Or you have a sack of vegetables and one of them starts to go bad. And you say, well this is the beginning of destruction.

I need to do something to remedy this. But instead of returning to God, where do they go? They go to Assyria. They turn elsewhere.

They turn, but they don't turn to God. And so the moth turns into a lion. The rottenness turns into a young lion.

And instead of this warning discipline, it goes into intensive discipline. And God is not going to come and heal that affliction until they acknowledge their offense, until they seek His face. You know, they've come.

He says they're bringing their flocks and herds. They're seeking me, but they're not going to find me. Why? Doesn't God say He wants them to seek Him? What kind of seeking is it? It's a superficial seeking.

It's a hypocritical type of seeking. They need to have a heartfelt response to God's discipline. They need to turn and seek the Lord in a genuine fashion.

Then we come to chapter 6. And He's once again exhorting Israel. And He says, come and let us return to the Lord. For He has torn, but He will heal us.

He has stricken, but He will bind us up. After two days, He will revive us. On the third day, He will raise us up.

Of course, it just gives you chills when you think of the overtones, the prophetic overtones of that, because the ultimate healing for Israel and for the human race in general is – we were just talking to the girls about the picture of water baptism as it existed in the first generation church, and of being buried with Him in baptism, and being raised up. And this – after two days, He will revive us. On the third day, He will raise us up.

It's identification with Christ in His death, burial, and resurrection that is part and parcel of our eternal salvation. And the same is true for Old Testament Israel. Verse 3, let us know, let us pursue the knowledge of the Lord.

His going forth is established as the morning. He will come to us like the rain, like the latter and former rain on the earth. Oh, Ephraim, what shall I do to you? Oh, Judah, what shall I do to you? For your faithfulness is like a morning cloud, and like the early dew, it goes away.

Kind of reminds you of Hevel, doesn't it? It's a vapor. Therefore, I have hewn them by the prophets. I have slain them by the words of my mouth, and your judgments are like the light that goes forth.

For I desire mercy and not sacrifice, and the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. This tells you that there is, even in the midst of all of the other problems in Israel, there is still superficial form of worship. People are bringing sheep and bringing sacrifices to God.

But He says, it's not what you're doing that I'm looking for. It's what goes on in your heart. Because your faithfulness is what doesn't last.

Your faithfulness is like the morning cloud. Have you ever gotten up early in the morning? A lot of us, especially in the summertime, if you're going to run, you want to get up early and run just as the sun is coming up because it's cool. And especially out in the country, I remember so many times getting up and running around the section in the early morning and the sun's not up yet, the eastern sky is just turning red.

As you run down the section road, there's this, not exactly a fog, but a mist. Especially anywhere there's a pond, you can easily spot the ponds even when there's trees all over the place because you have this vapor. But as soon as the sun comes up, that vapor vanishes.

It doesn't last. There's only a short time when you can see it, where it's light enough to see it, but before the sun comes up and burns it off. And God says, Ephraim, Judah, your faithfulness is like that morning mist, like the early dew.

It quickly vanishes. Therefore, I have hewn them. First He sent the prophets to rebuke and correct and instruct with God's Word, but that didn't produce a response, and so God has had to accelerate the discipline.

And of course, we all know this in raising children, nobody wants to go to the maximum discipline right away. We start out with warnings. When warning fails, we go to intensive discipline.

When intensive discipline doesn't work, we go to the corporal punishment phase. But we have to do whatever is necessary to produce a response. That's what God is doing with Israel.

I have slain them by the words of my mouth. God speaks and the discipline goes forth. He speaks healing or He speaks destruction.

He says, what is it He's looking for? What is He waiting for in their response? It's not just superficial obedience, it's a change in the heart. I can remember well disciplining my girls when they were small, and sometimes I would get superficial compliance, but there's a look in the eye, there's a tone in the voice, there's a posture and an attitude of rebellion even when the behavior is compliant. And it is the heart that has to change, and that's what God is looking at.

I desire mercy and not sacrifice, the knowledge of God more than burnt offerings. But like men they transgressed the covenant. There they dealt treacherously with me.

And of course these men are like the peoples other than Israel, the Goyim. That's not the word here, but that's what he's referring to. It's like the ordinary humans, not Israel.

They transgressed the covenant. They dealt treacherously with me. Gilead is a city of evildoers and defiled with blood.

There's a lot you can say. Anytime the Bible refers to a region you can go back and look at history. Gilead was the place where the balm was.

There is a balm in Gilead. They even made a song about that that makes the wounded whole. But instead of a place of binding up and healing, Gilead has become a city of evildoers and is defiled with blood.

Bands of robbers lie in wait for a man. And the company of priests, the priests are the communicators of the word of God. They are the stewards of the worship life and they are symbolically fulfilling the role of mediator between man and God.

They are the ones who are purified and sprinkled with the blood. And instead of being the ones sanctified by the sprinkling of the blood of the sacrifice, they are sprinkling the land with blood themselves. The company of priests murder on the way to Shechem and commit lewdness.

I have seen a horrible thing in the house of Israel. There is harlotry of Ephraim. Israel is defiled.

Also, O Judah, a harvest is appointed for you when I return the captives of my people. And that harvest imagery, I will gather the wheat into my barn but the chaff is going to be blown away. The stalks are going to be gathered and burned.

There is a day of judgment coming. But the particular section of this reading that is pertinent to our study is the beginning of chapter 6. Come and let us return to the Lord for He has torn but He will heal us. He has stricken but He will bind us up.

He will revive. There is a time for discipline. And when the discipline has had its effect, when there has been response, then there is a time for healing and binding up and restoration.

And these things are in the mind and in the knowledge of God. God is calling for a response, not a superficial response, not just bring some extra sacrifices, sacrifice a few extra sheep. It is mercy.

It is a change in attitude. It is a change in heart that God is looking for. And when that change of heart takes place, when something transpires in the soul, when faith begins to function and righteousness from faith begins to appear, then the time changes from a time of tearing down to a

time of building up.

And that, of course, should remind you of the section of Scripture that we are studying over in Ecclesiastes chapter 3. And we return to that study now. We saw last time this poem beginning in Ecclesiastes chapter 3 verse 1, to everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven. And if you look at this in the New American Standard, the word purpose has a little footnote on it and it says literally delight.

And we did a word study on that term and some of us saw that this is a desirable goal. We looked at the dying words of David and he says my desirable goals have not all sprung up. They have not been shoots that came out of the ground, but they will.

God has promised and in His time and in the perfection of His plan, these unfinished desirable goals are going to be accomplished. That's the word we have here. To everything there is a season, a time, and there is a time for every desirable goal under heaven.

So even in these first two lines, we can recognize that yes, there is a time for this and a time for that in the human realm. But the second line says that there is a desirable goal that can be accomplished. There is a better good, if you will.

And then we saw the time to be born and the time to die and the time to plant and the time to pluck what is planted. These lines are very carefully constructed. We've seen the structure.

We reviewed that last time and I've put the diagram back up here this morning and you can see that this is not just sort of a random listing. The chiasmic structure of verses two and three where you have the desirable thing listed first in terms of giving birth and then dying and planting and uprooting. And then in verse three, the undesirable thing is listed first.

A time to kill and a time to heal. A time to tear down and a time to build up. Well, it's one thing to observe the structure, but what is it there for? What is the truth that we can glean from this? Well, let's take another look at verses two and three.

We begin with birth and death, the concepts of birth and death. This is where Kohelet or Solomon began his book, began this discourse, was talking about the rising and the setting of the sun and about the cycles that we observe in nature. And these inanimate, the wind, the water, the track of the sun across the sky and so forth, define boundaries of time.

And things begin and they end and they return and start over. And this is repeated down through the generations of history. And so here we're talking about birth and death, but now we're talking about the human realm.

And there is a difference. The sun can rise and the sun can set, but the sun doesn't have a human soul. The sun hasn't been called by God to relationship and to function and to produce something that goes beyond time.

We know from what Peter tells us that the heavens and the earth are going to melt with a fervent heat. It's all going to be rolled up like a scroll and taken away. And however much flowing of water and evaporation and rain and returning to flow again down the mountainsides you want to talk about, however many cycles the wind makes as it blows from here to there and returns to the place from which it began, all of that is going to perish.

And in the eternal future, there's going to be a completely different heavens and earth. Well, there is a difference. And we had that poetic beginning that talked about the physical universe and making the point that there is a short time and it seems as though there is no profit, that there's nothing you can take away that lasts.

In this poem, we have a comparison with that first poem because here these times relate to human life. There is a time to be born and we're not talking about animals. We're not talking about the birth of the universe or something.

This is human life, giving birth and death. And the planting and uprooting, this is a human activity. What animal is there that goes out and plants seeds and harvests a crop for itself? This planting and uprooting, this is a human activity.

So we're seeing these cyclical ideas presented, but they're in the context of human life, not physical universe. You see the relationship here? And so we've progressed forward in thought and the idea here is that there is a way to take these things and gain something that goes beyond the moment, something that lasts beyond the bounds of the rising and setting of the sun. There is an eternal potential in these things.

This is not a prescription. Solomon is not saying, I'm telling you when to give birth, I'm telling you when to die, I'm telling you when to plant, or I'm telling you when to uproot. He's saying this is descriptive, not prescriptive.

So we're not getting guidance here. He's not giving us the criteria like, well, when you see the snow melting and the temperature rising, that's when you should plant or when you see the deciduous trees beginning to drop their leaves, then it's time to go harvest. He's just saying there is a time for one and there's a time for another.

And birth and death in the first line, to give birth, this was in the hands of God when we went through Genesis and we saw how the two sisters, Leah and Rachel, were striving. But when they would be fertile and when they would get pregnant and bear children, as much as they wanted to, a lot of times they couldn't. They had to just go through all kinds of contortions and pray and get mandrakes and get handmaidens.

Giving birth, man doesn't seem to have control of that. We certainly don't control the day of our death. If we did, we'd all probably be a lot older at the point of our death.

So these things we don't have a say in. But the second line, planting and uprooting, we do have a choice. We decide when to plant and we decide when to uproot.

And so in this first stanza of the poem, it's the same type of movement as we had from Chapter 1 to Chapter 3. Chapter 1, the cycles of the physical universe, we don't have any control over that. We can't make the sun rise at a different time. The only man that ever had anything to do with the movement of the sun was Joshua.

Actually, there are two cases where the sun went backward ten degrees, you remember that. But normally we don't have any control over the physical universe. We don't have any control over our birth and our death or even of giving birth.

A lot of people are surprised when a pregnancy occurs. It wasn't exactly in their plans. But planting and uprooting, we do have a choice in that.

This word for uproot is interesting. It's the Hebrew verb akar, A-Q-A-R. And it's in the Kal stem here, which is the normal, in the Greek we would call this a present active form.

But it's not found in the Bible elsewhere in this form. We have the nifal, which is the passive form in Zephaniah 2.4, talking about Ekron. It says Ekron will be uprooted.

But the P-L is what we find more commonly in Scripture. And the P-L stem in Hebrew is the intensive stem. We use the word really in, you know, we can say, well, I was sick the other day.

Or we can say, I was really sick the other day. But the Hebrew, the Semitic languages had an intensive stem that would oftentimes even change the meaning of a word. And the P-L, this verb akar means to hamstring.

Remember over in Genesis 49.6 when Jacob was pronouncing his final words and he said, I don't want to be in the fellowship of Simeon and Levi because they hamstrung an ox. And that verb that he uses in 49.6 is this same word that in the Kal means to uproot, but in the P-L means to rip out the tendon or to sever the tendon. And so my point here is that this has a generally negative connotation.

Any place you find this word used, a nation being uprooted, oxen being hamstrung, because some people have come and said, well, this is basically a planting and harvesting motif here. Well, there's a perfectly good word for harvest and that's not what is used here. Uproot is more the idea we saw in Hosea chapter 6 where planting is positive, uprooting is generally negative.

You also find this same hamstringing idea in Joshua chapter 11 verses 6 and 9 and in 2 Samuel 8, 4. The same verb is used there. And so you may see a commentary someplace where they say, oh, well, it's planting and harvesting. I really don't think so.

And so there is, this is sort of good times and bad times. People celebrate at a birth and mourn at

a death. Planting, there's a time of great potential when things are uprooted.

You can see fields after hailstorms or after tornadoes and so forth and this is a time of devastation. It's a sad time. So we're having polar opposites here of something beneficial or something not so beneficial.

It's hard to think of something good about being uprooted unless you're harvesting potatoes or carrots or something, but generally speaking, uprooted is a bad idea. Same thing in verse 3 and you have a correspondence because when you get to the undesirable thing, kill, that has a correspondence with the undesirable thing in verse 1, which was to die. Healing, and you notice there's not an exact opposite there.

You would say, well, there's a time to kill, that's taking a life. Well, the associated idea ought to be giving life, like maybe, I don't know, impregnating or something to produce a life. Healing, this puts a slightly different cast on verse 3 because there's a time to kill and there's a time to heal.

You almost get the idea that there's someone who's wounded on the battlefield. Well, do you kill them or put them out of their misery or do you bind them up and heal them? But the idea here is when you look at someone, is it time to get rid of them or is it a time to restore them? And it puts us in mind of what God looks at in terms of a believer who has, Baptists would say, backslid, gone off the road of faith. Is it going to be sin unto death time or is it going to be healing and restoration time? Well, in human life, there is a criteria for that.

There is a basis for deciding when to kill and when to heal. Think about capital punishment. You know, Timothy McVeigh and all of this stuff going on and it always, any time there's a publicly well-known execution, it always brings up the debate of capital punishment.

Should you put people in prison and try to rehabilitate them, heal them and restore whatever the malady is in their soul so that they'll be productive citizens or do you execute them and get them out of the system? Well, there's a criteria for that. Think about Hosea chapter 6. Is God going to heal and bind up and bring Ephraim back into the fold and restore Judah to blessing or is he going to send them out under national discipline to where their nation doesn't even exist anymore? There's a time for that. But there is a criteria.

It's not like the physical universe where it's just a cycle that takes place. There's a time and men in battle, kings of nations, judges in the judgment seat have to decide. There's a choice here.

There's a basis for making a choice and there's something in that choice that lifts this above the mundane and lifts it above what's time bound and has the potential to go into the eternal. And that's the point in each of these lines. We start with humans and go to plant life in verse 2. We talk about human life, giving birth and dying and then we talk about planting and uprooting crops.

And then in verse 3, once again, killing and healing is in the human realm and then tearing down

and building up, this is a human activity. In the same way that planting and uprooting is something human beings do with their hands, now you have either tearing something down or building something up. This is a human activity.

We tear down. We build up. As I mentioned last time, tearing down, this verb is often used in the Old Testament for human life.

We looked at Job 16.14 and Genesis 38.27-30. In both cases here this idea of tearing down has to do with taking something apart in terms of life. But the literal meaning, this verb is *parats*, P-A-R-A-T-S. And we have encountered this verb not that long ago in our studies.

Parats, if you put it in the context of Genesis and go back to Judah and the whole incident with his daughter-in-law Tamar and she winds up getting pregnant with him and has twins. Remember one of them started to come out and then the other one came out instead. What did she name the one who managed to edge out his brother? Perez.

Perez is the word for Perez because he broke through. That whole story there in Genesis 38.27-30 is centered on this word *parats*. It's used in the description of what actually happened with the babies and then the modified form of it is used for Perez, which means to break through.

So this idea of tearing down literally means to break through. We also find this idea in Isaiah 5.5 where God says, I had this field, I had this vineyard and I built a wall around it, but he says I'm going to break down the wall and I'm going to let people come in and trample the field because it didn't produce what it should. So there's a time to build up, there's a time to construct the wall and there's a time to break through.

Think of the bulldozers rolling right through a stone wall. When you get to verse four, once again we have intensification in the second line from the first and I think there's also an idea that goes from private feelings to a more public expression of those feelings. We talk about weeping and laughing at the beginning of verse four.

These are things that we can often do in private. We can be sad and weep. We can be exuberant and laugh, chuckle to ourselves.

These are things that can be done at least in private, but the mourning and dancing were more public. Mourning the sackcloth and ashes was a public exhibition. Your sadness is so intense that you communicate it to others in your dress and in your behavior.

Dancing is typically a public exhibition of joy. Think about David when the tabernacle was coming down to Jerusalem. Another feature of verse four is that in the second pair of infinitives, this is more obvious in Hebrew than it is in English, but normally the infinitive construct in Hebrew is the verb with a prefixed *lamed*.

In English, when we make an infinitive out of a verb, we put the word *to*, the preposition *to*, in

front of it. We say to swim, to walk, to run, to live, to die. That makes it an infinitive.

Well, in Hebrew, the lamed is that preposition. It means to or for, but the verbs in the second line of verse four lack that prefixed lamed. There's a lot of discussion about what that means or doesn't mean, but it does break up the pattern because we've had the pattern all the way through of these infinitives, and when you get to weeping and laughing, and then mourning and dancing don't have that prefix.

My thought is that it tends to make you translate this there is a mourning time and a dancing time where you take out the word to. You say a time to weep, a time to laugh, a mourning time and a dancing time. Once again, it heightens the contrast between what happens privately and what happens publicly.

You may be sad. There is a time to mourn publicly, and there's a time not to. When you're happy, there is a time to rejoice and celebrate.

An easy illustration of this is when you're playing a game and you win, you can celebrate so excessively that you make someone else feel bad. There is a time to sort of keep your sadness to yourself and weep in private, and there's a time to share your sadness with others. Of course, this is mentioned over in Romans 12.15, rejoice with those who rejoice, weep with those who weep.

If someone is rejoicing and shares that with you, then you can share in their rejoicing. If someone is weeping and they share that with you, you can participate in their sorrow. You can empathize and be a comfort in that way, but it's not always the case.

People don't always share their joy, they don't always share their sorrow, and so there is a time for these things. Dancing, I found particularly interesting because you remember over in Exodus 15.20, after the episode of the Red Sea, Exodus 15.20, this is the song of Miriam and the children of Israel have gone through and the horses of Pharaoh, in verse 19 of Exodus 15, the horses of Pharaoh went with his chariots and his horsemen into the sea and the Lord brought back the waters of the sea upon them, but the children of Israel went on dry ground in the midst of the sea. Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances.

And Miriam answered them, sing to the Lord for he has triumphed gloriously, the horse and his rider he has thrown into the sea. And so this was a time of dancing. They got out their tambourines and all the women went out and did a big dance on the shore, looking at the, I imagine there were a few little chariot wheels and things floating out there in the Red Sea, and they're doing the hoochie-coochie on the shoreline there, just celebrating.

Well, not very far in the future, if you turn over to Exodus 32, along about verse 19, there is another time when they're dancing in Israel. And if you've ever seen the movie The Ten Commandments, Charlton Heston comes down with Joshua, he's got the tablets in his hand, and

you've got John Houston in the background narrating the, let's see, is it John Houston that did that? Anyway, he's narrating the thing and he comes down and as soon as he came near the camp, he saw the calf and the dancing. It says they sat down to eat and they rose up to play and Moses comes down.

Well, they're doing the watusi again down in the camp, but now why are they dancing? Well, it's golden calf worship. Instead of worshiping and praising God, they're worshiping and praising the golden calf. The interesting thing about that calf deal is that it was not presented to Israel.

They didn't give it to themselves as a different God. They didn't say, let's all go and worship Baal, the calf God or something. What did they say when Aaron made that thing? He pointed to it after he made it and he said, this is the God that brought you up out of the land of Egypt.

This is Yahweh Elohim, basically. The God that's done all of these good things for you, well, this is him. What have they done? They've taken the eternal almighty God and scaled him down to something tangible.

They've redefined God. They've said, this is the God that brought you up out of the land of Egypt. So we're still worshiping God.

We can dance in front of this calf just like we danced on the shore of the Red Sea. It's the same thing. Well, it's not the same thing, is it? But this same thing happens today.

We create God in our own image or in some other image. We redefine God and we say, oh, this is the God of the Bible. This is the God of Scripture.

This is the God that saved us and sent his son to die for us. But we turn him into a golden calf, something we can manage, something we can haul around and put in a particular place. We say, well, the calf is over on that side of the camp and I'm over on this side of the camp.

I can do stuff over here. And we make a manageable God. We make a definable God and put him in his place.

Well, anyway, the dancing got me to thinking about that because, you can dance by the shore of the sea when you've seen God's almighty power. That's the biggest scene in the movie is the parting of the Red Sea and then the drowning of the Egyptians when that thing all collapses. And then you make this calf and hammer gold all over it and then rise up and dance in front of that.

And it's dancing and joy in both cases, but one is good and one is not. So we get here to the weeping and laughing and the mourning and the dancing. In verse 5, and this is kind of where we left off last time, casting stones.

There's been a lot of debate over what it means to cast stones because stones were used for a lot of different things in ancient Israel. They were used to keep track of accounts. Merchants

would use stones as an accounting tool, kind of like an abacus without the wires.

Shepherds used to keep track of their sheep. This is interesting in the light of what David does with the stones as he goes to face Goliath because shepherds would keep a stone in a pouch corresponding to each sheep. And as they would bring the sheep into the fold, they would transfer the rocks.

They'd say, okay, what do I have, 37 sheep, I've got 37 rocks. Well, maybe they weren't big math wizards, so as they were accounting for the sheep, they would use a rock for each sheep. And so it was also used for what you do with a field.

If you go over to 2 Kings 3.19, you find a case where in order to render a field unusable, they would throw stones into it. Over in 2 Kings 3, you have a case where they have Elisha talking. He says, as the Lord lives, this is 2 Kings 3.14, before whom I stand, surely were it not that I regard the presence of Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, I would not look at you nor see you.

But now bring me a musician. So it happened when the musician played that the hand of the Lord came upon him. See, there's blessing in music.

And he said, thus says the Lord, make this valley full of ditches. For thus says the Lord, you shall not see wind nor shall you see rain, yet that valley shall be filled with water so that you, your cattle and your animals may drink. And this is a simple matter in the sight of the Lord.

He will also deliver the Moabites into your hand. Also, you shall attack every fortified city and every choice city, shall cut down every good tree, stop up every spring of water and ruin every good piece of land with stones. So what do you do? You haul rocks in there and strew the field with boulders and rocks so that it can't be planted and it doesn't produce good crops.

Ruin every good piece of land with stones. So this would be casting away stones, casting them into the field. That's the idea that could be included here.

Of course, stones are used in slings. You've got Goliath casting a stone. Didn't do him a whole lot of good.

There's also some funeral practices that involved, as a part of mourning, casting away stones along the idea that a shepherd, if he lost some sheep because wild animals got them or they fell into a ditch and were killed or something, well, he would have to take their stones out of his pouch and cast them away. If you had a bad year and the sheep got diseased or you lost them for some reason, well, you had to cast away those stones. That's a bad thing.

But if you have a real good year, have a bumper crop of new lambs and so forth, well, then you had to go pick up some extra rocks to put in your pouch because you've got more sheep. So gathering stones, casting away stones. In accounting, the more stones you have, that means the more stuff you're keeping track of.

It's prosperity versus adversity. So all of these ideas can be viewed in this context. And of course, the rabbi commentary, the Jewish commentary on this passage associated it with intercourse, with gathering stones being a refraining from intercourse and a casting away of stones, meaning procreation.

And there is a biblical association of stones with children. You remember over in Matthew where he talks about Matthew 3.9, God can from these stones raise up children to Abraham. There is some secular Semitic literature that talks about this.

But what's the idea here? The second line talks about embracing and refraining from embracing. And these are both things that you do with your arms. Whatever you want to say these stones are, and it could be that all of these ideas are included, and that's why it's kind of a general statement.

But you use your hands and arms to gather these stones, to pick them up, or to cast them away. And you use your arms to embrace or to refrain from embracing. But these are decisions.

These are decision points where we have to decide, is it the time to embrace or is it the time to refrain from embracing? People do family planning based on their education plans, their job situation, their economic situation. Hopefully, whether or not they are married. Anymore, people that aren't even married decide they're going to have children.

These are decision points. This distinguishes human beings from the natural course of inanimate nature. Abstaining from marital relations took place in times of mourning.

You can go to 2 Samuel 12, 24 or 1 Chronicles 7, 21-23, where people didn't engage in normal physical relations during a time of mourning. It was a decision that you make. I'm going to recognize this situation and act in a different way.

Well, the idea, and it hasn't yet been revealed if you're reading in a linear fashion through Ecclesiastes, but where we're headed is that God expects human beings to take what on the surface look like happenstances that look like, well, this is a response to physical circumstances, but it's not like the wind. It's not like the streams. It's not like the sun.

You're a human being. You have a soul and you have the opportunity to partake of something, to find that Yitron, that prophet that goes beyond the physical universe in your soul. In the process of making these decisions, of evaluating and establishing priorities and setting courses of action, this is where the potential is to partake of the divine and partake of the eternal.

And isn't this what we miss today in a lot of Christianity, by thinking that our Christian life is measured by what we do instead of what we think, by the impact we have instead of the level of our faith. We can take these times of doing commonplace things that seem to be a part of the

cycle of life, but use those to partake of the divine and the eternal. That's what Solomon, as an Old Testament saint, is figuring out.

And it's a great reach forward. He's the wisest man of the Old Testament age. And this is the idea that he's getting a hold of as he looks at life and uses the wisdom that God gave him.

And it is something that is well worth remembering for us each and every day. We don't have to wait for a big opportunity for ministry. We don't have to wait for an opportunity to evangelize or to clothe the naked or feed the hungry.

Everything we do, when we make a decision and decide that it's time for this or it's time for that, that is an opportunity to reach beyond time and beyond space into God's eternal realms of glory. And we're going to see this explicitly mentioned after the poem. Let's pause here and take our break.

When we come back, we're going to finish this poem, do a little bit more analysis of these lines, and then move forward to what Solomon says afterward, because that's where he really brings this all together. Let's pause here and take our break.