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Volume XIX
Issue 468

Studies in Ecclesiastes

The Words and Work of God and Man

Part 2 of 5

by — Vladimir Gelesnoff (1877-1921)

THE SUMMARY

It only remains to sum up all duty in one concept: human works regulated by wise words pointing to a future readjustment (12:13-14).

The terminus of the whole matter has been heard: Fear the One, Elohim, and keep His instructions, for this is the whole duty of humanity. For the One, Elohim, shall bring every deed into judgment concerning all that is obscured, whether good or whether evil.



WISDOM AND TOIL

Within the book of Ecclesiastes there are five “books” presenting the words of the Assembler concerning the works of the human, viewed finally as God’s Word concerning His works. In the first “book” (1:12-2:26) the author analyzes the perplexing problems of *individual* experience in the spheres of wisdom and toil. First of all he takes up wisdom, and in tracing knowledge finds that the condition of affairs under the sun is not what it should be, and that it is beyond man’s power to correct. “*What is distorted cannot be set in order, and what is lacking cannot be counted*” (1:15).

Further pursuit of knowledge yields nothing beyond this positive idea. To go beyond is useless labor (“*a grazing on wind*”) which, while augmenting vexation and pain, contributes nothing of value towards the solution of the riddle (1:12-18):

12 I myself, the Assembler, came to be king over Israel in Jerusalem.

13 I applied my heart to inquiring and exploring by wisdom

concerning all that is done under the heavens: It is an experience of evil Elohim has given to the sons of humanity to humble them by it.

14 I saw all the deeds that are done under the sun, And behold, the whole is vanity and a grazing on wind.

15 What is distorted cannot be set in order, And what is lacking cannot be counted

16 I spoke with my heart, saying, Behold, I have grown great and have added in wisdom

Over all who were over Jerusalem before me; My heart has seen much of wisdom and knowledge.

17 Then I applied my heart to know wisdom, As well as to know about raving and frivolity; I realize that even this, it is a grazing on wind.

18 For in much wisdom is much vexation, And he who adds knowledge adds pain.

DEEDS AND TOIL

The Assembler turns to the sphere of toil. As a king, he is endowed with the combination of all objects of human envy, and enters upon an experiment by which the several kinds of good things are successively subjected to review. First, he accumulates with-

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This free weekly electronic publication (52 times a year) is dedicated to:

- the proclamation of the riches of God's abundant, exceeding grace (Romans 5:20; 11:6; Ephesians 1:7);
- the affirmation of God's purpose to save all mankind through the death, burial, and resurrection of Christ (I Timothy 2:3, 4; 4:10; Titus 2:11);
- the "preaching of Jesus Christ, according to the revelation of the mystery, which was kept secret since the world began" (Romans 16:25);
- true freedom and liberty apart from law (Galatians 5:1);
- the organic nature of the church, the Body of Christ (I Corinthians 12);
- the distinct message and ministry of Paul, the apostle to the nations (Romans 11:13);
- the importance of receiving all whom Christ has received (Romans 14-15);
- the recovery of rich Biblical truth that has too long remained hidden under the veils of traditionalism, prejudice, misunderstanding, and fear (Mark 7:7, 13);
- the completeness of the believer in Christ (Colossians 2:10), with:
 - total freedom from sins (Colossians 1:14);
 - identity in His death, burial, and resurrection (Romans 6);
 - adult sonship position (Galatians 4).

This publication is a joint effort of a few members of the body of Christ. It is a product of our individual lives and ministries together. We do not claim infallibility for its contents. Our readers are asked to be as the Bereans and search the Scriptures (Acts 17:10-11; I Thessalonians 5:21).

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STUDIES (continued from front page)

out limit all possible objects of pleasure, and then engages in all kinds of human effort. The experiment includes the pleasures that are called frivolities; he gives himself freely to them, but while experimenting in frivolity he retains all the while “wisdom of heart” that could reflect on the frivolity.

The experiment is successful considered as an experiment. Success in achieving these enterprises brings with it an impression of pleasure; but when reflection is turned on them there is no satisfaction. Ability to gratify his every wish and carry out his extensive undertakings has, after all, only met the wants of physical existence. Rich delights have pandered the soul, pleased the eye, tickled the palate, but have only appeased the feeling of hunger the same as a common meal, providing nothing for the spiritual cravings (2:1-11):

- 1 I said in my heart: *Do* come then,
Let me probe you with rejoicing;
Now look at *what is* good.
But behold, even this *was* vanity.
- 2 Mirth, I said, *is a* raving,
And rejoicing, what then *is it* achieving?
- 3 I explored *within* my heart by stimulating my
flesh with wine
(While my heart *was* leading with wisdom)
And by *getting a* hold on frivolity,
Until I should see just where good *may be* for
the sons of humanity
In what they do under the heavens
during the number of days *in* their lives.
- 4 I made great *things as* my works;
I built houses for *myself*;
I planted vineyards for *myself*;
- 5 I made gardens and parks for *myself*,
And I planted in them trees of every fruit.
- 6 I made reservoirs of water for *myself*,
To irrigate from them *the* sprouting grove of
trees.
- 7 I acquired *menservants* and *maidservants*,
And *any* sons *born in the* household became
mine;
Moreover, abundant cattle, herds and flocks
became mine,
More than all who were over Jerusalem before me.
- 8 I collected also silver and gold for *myself*,
The valuable *treasures* of kings and provinces;

I provided *male* singers and *female* singers for
myself,
And *with the* rich delights of *the* sons of hu-
manity,
a wine waiter and *wine* waitresses.

- 9 As I *grew* greater and added *more* than anyone
who was over Jerusalem before me.
Indeed my wisdom, it stayed by me.
- 10 All that my eyes asked for I *did* not deny to
them;
I *did* not withhold my heart from any rejoicing,
For my heart *had* rejoicing from all my toil,
And this *itself* was my portion from all my
toil.
- 11 Yet *when* I faced all my deeds that my hands
had done,
And *the* toil that I had toiled in doing *them*,
Behold, the whole *was* vanity
and *a* grazing on wind,
And *there* was *nothing* of advantage under the
sun.

TO SEE WISDOM

Next, with burdened heart, the Assembler turns reflection on to wisdom itself, together with its opposites, raving and frivolity (2:12), to see if here any genuine satisfaction is to be found. He sees at once that wisdom excels as light excels darkness; but this is neutralized by the further consideration that both are involved in the same destiny of death, so that, in the presence of the King of Terrors, the pursuit of wisdom, despite infinite superiority to its opposite, seems not only profitless but “evil” (:17). “*Since the destiny of the stupid man is also mine, and it shall befall me, to what advantage then have I been wise? Hence I spoke in my heart, This too is vanity*” (2:15).

- 12 Then I turned around to see wisdom *com-
pared* with raving and frivolity
(For what *will* the man who comes after the
king *do*
Beyond what *others* have already done?),
- 13 And I saw *there* is *more* advantage for wisdom
than *for* frivolity
Just as there is more advantage for light
than *for* darkness;
- 14 The wise *man* uses his eyes in his head,
While *the* stupid *man* walks in darkness; ►

Yet I realized indeed that *the* same destiny
befalls them all.

- 15 So I said in my heart,
Since *the* destiny of the stupid *man* is also
mine, *and* it shall befall me,
To what advantage then have I been wise?
Hence I spoke in my heart, This too *is* vanity.

FRUIT OF TOIL

Next he returns to survey the fruit of his toil wherein he had toiled under the sun; but this again appears hateful in the light of death and the necessity of leaving it to a successor, who may prove to be frivolous. The thought and energy expended in the accumulation of goods do not even guarantee that, after his departure, they will be used in accordance with his wish. The survey has, in all of its departments, ended in illusion (2:16-23):

- 16 For *there* is no remembrance of *the* wise *man*
or the stupid *man* for *the* eon;
In the days which *are* already coming every-
one is forgotten;
Alas, the wise *man* dies *along* with the
stupid *one*!
17 Then I hated life,
For to me the work *was* evil that was done
under the sun,
For the whole *is* vanity
and *a* grazing *on* wind.
18 And I hated all *the* fruit of my toil for which
I *was* toiling under the sun,
That I *would* leave to *the* man who shall come
after me.
19 Who knows *if* he shall be *a* wise

or *a* frivolous *man*?

- Yet he shall *have* authority over all *the* fruit
of my toil for which I toiled,
And *in* which I was wise under the sun;
This too *is* vanity.
20 So I *turned* around *again* with despair *in* my
heart
Over all the fruit of toil for which I had toiled
under the sun.
21 For *there* is a man whose fruit of toil *is*
in wisdom and in knowledge and in success,
Yet to *another* man who has not toiled for it,
he *must* give it *as* his portion;
This too *is* vanity and *a* great evil.
22 For what *is* coming to *a* man for all his toil,
And for *the* shepherding of his heart which
he *is* toiling under the sun?
23 For all his days, pains and vexation *are* his
experience;
Even in *the* night his heart will not lie *still*;
This too, it *is* vanity.

THIS, TOO, IS FROM ELOHIM

The knowledge that the Assembler has gained is now summed up and wisely related to the hand of Elohim (2:24-26):

- 24 *There* is *nothing* better for *a* man
than that he should eat and drink,
And cause his soul *to* see good from his toil;
This too I see that it *is* from the hand of
Elohim.
25 For who *can* eat, and who *can* have pleasure
outside of Him?
26 For to *the* man who *is* well pleasing before



56 pp., PB

Growing in the Realization of God

by — Robert McMahon

This work, firmly rooted in the sovereignty of God, shows the vital importance of acquaintance with the Almighty God leading to a realization that He is our Father and will be “ALL in All.”

See order form.

Him,
 He gives wisdom and knowledge and rejoicing;
 Yet to *the* sinner He gives *the* experience
 of gathering and of collecting *together*,
 To give *it* to *one who* is well pleasing before
 the *One*, Elohim;
 This too *is* vanity and *a* grazing *on* wind.

These concluding verses gather up the results. Thus far the experiment has shown that, while the processes have been satisfactory and enjoyable, the result has invariably been disappointing, even despairingly so when considered in light of the future. Evidence forces the conclusion that present enjoyment is man's only portion; but the important thought occurs that even appreciation of life as it passes is a gift of God, and is not in the power of the seeker.

THE TIMES AND SEASONS

In the First Book, or chapter, of his work Ecclesiastes was wholly occupied with the problems of individual experience in the sphere of mental and technical activity; the Second Book (3:1-5:9) is wider in its outlook: The writer approaches the task of surveying the work of God.

- 1 For *everything there is* a stated *time*,
 And *a* season for every event under the
 heavens:
- 2 *A* season to *give* birth and *a* season to die;
 A season to plant and *a* season to chop
 down *what is* planted
- 3 *A* season to kill and *a* season to heal;
 A season to breach and *a* season to build;
- 4 *A* season to weep and *a* season to make merry;
 A season of wailing and *a* season of dancing
- 5 *A* season to fling *away* stones
 and *a* season to collect stones *together*;
 A season to embrace and *a* season to *stay* far
 from embracing
- 6 *A* season to seek and *a* season to count *as* lost;
 A season to keep and *a* season to fling *away*;
- 7 *A* season to tear and *a* season to sew;
 A season to hush and *a* season to speak;
- 8 *A* season to love and *a* season to hate;
 A season of war and *a* season of peace.

The times and the seasons as a whole are subjected to review. They are introduced with the phrase, "*To everything there is a stated time, and a season for every event under the heavens*" (3:1). These important words indicate the special points dealt with in this section. Two distinct terms are used, referring to stated (or set) times and appropriate times (or seasons): (1) The word rendered "stated times" signifies a time definitely set apart for a special purpose, by royal edict or divine appointment, as is clear from its occurrences. It is used in Ezra to denote the time specified by the chief officials for the adjustment of the mixed marriages among the returned captives (Ezra 10:14). (2) Similarly it is used concerning the leave of absence granted to Nehemiah by letters of Artaxerxes (Nehemiah 2:6), the Divine appointments relative to the temple services (10:34; 13:31), and the establishment of the feast of Purim by decree of Esther and Mordecai (Esther 9:27, 31).

The meaning which inheres the word translated "season" is clear from its usage in other parts of Ecclesiastes. We will take two of the most typical occurrences.

... *The wise heart shall know season* [appropriate time] *and judgment* (Ecclesiastes 8:5b).

Note the setting of the passage. The whole section deals with subjection to authority, and the thought is emphasized that within the limits of obedience to the king there is safety:

He who observes instructions shall know no evil matter ... (8:5a).

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In what follows, Ecclesiastes seems to have in mind the possible objection that resistance to evil is as much of an obligation as submission to right, to which answers Ecclesiastes that the wise know when each is in proper order. Akin to this is a passage further on, “*Happy are you, O land, whose king is a son of notables, and whose chiefs eat in season for mastery and not for a drunken bout*” (10:17). The idea is doing a thing in the proper manner at the proper time; its meaning is what we should express by the metaphor of *place*: “Everything is good in its proper place.”

The connections, therefore, in which the two terms are used suggest the ideas of divine appointment and appropriateness, so that the import of 3:1 is that, since for every work there is a time divinely determined, the events of our lives must be seen in relation to God’s arrangement of things. Hence the idea (developed in Book Four) that events are neither good nor evil in themselves, but according to their relation to God’s time of approving them. Hence, too, the thought (which forms the special subject of Book Five) that human happiness does not consist in carrying out one’s every wish, but in fitting them with God’s season; so that while the drift of things is irresistible, the individual can, by adapting himself to it, achieve satisfaction in his undertakings.

HISTORIC EPOCHS

The times and seasons spoken of in Ecclesiastes 3:1, then, are the predetermined times which pass over Israel and over all of the kingdoms of the countries (1 Chronicles 29:29), the phases in the experience of nations which constitute historic epochs, the historic stages which mark the accomplishment of God’s purpose among the nations of the world.

That this is the meaning is abundantly clear, not only from the scope of the passage, but also from the usage of the same phrases in other parts of Scripture. Can anyone believe, for example, that there is a proper time for any individual to kill and to heal? What are we to make of “*a time to heal*” according to this interpretation? Can one heal or restore the life of his fellow man which he has taken away? When all of the passages where the same phrase is used are read together, it becomes evident that the expression “kill and heal” refers to the administration of justice, the sentenc-

ing and pardoning of transgressors against civil law. In this poetic enumeration of the times and seasons, our author unfolds a procession of history – the great underlying principles of historic movements. The piecemeal experiences which make up the history of nations are passed in review, each touched with that marvelous felicity of descriptive suggestion which is the chief charm of the Assembler’s style.

The seasons are twenty-eight in number. They commence with “birth,” (3:2) *i.e.*, creation, when God gave outwardness, *expression*, to the archetypal thoughts of His mind, and they conclude with “peace” (3:8). The intervening times are times of estrangement, marked by confusion, waste, ruin, toil, sweat, pain, passion and blood. They are an epitome of the history of mankind: they begin with “death” (3:2), pointing back to the sentence pronounced in Eden, and end with “war” (3:8), looking forward to the great battle (later prophesied on the fields of Armageddon) which closes the history of Man’s day.

(To be continued.)



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by — Frank Viola & George Barna

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This book represents many years of work. The author believes that it is one of the most important books that he will ever be privileged to write, simply because it concerns one of the most vital scriptural subjects that could ever be addressed.

The home is central to all of God's dealings with man throughout the course of time. It is His Divine "institution" and "organization" on the earth; for the believer, it is the *Embassy of Heaven*. An embassy is "**the residence or office of an ambassador.**" Since the believer is an ambassador of the Lord Jesus Christ (II Corinthians 5:14-21), his home is thus the *Divine Embassy* of heavenly ministry.

Pauline ministry is centered in the homes of believers. This is even the true sphere of the Body of Christ; for this reason our apostle speaks of "*church in thy house.*" This book doesn't focus on the *external* specifics of the ministry of *Heaven's Embassy* (such as *hospitality*); that will be saved for another volume. Instead, it looks at the inner-workings of the *Embassy* itself, focusing on its very nature, *internal* purpose and function.