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Volume XIX
Issue 469

Studies in Ecclesiastes

The Words and Work of God and Man

Part 3 of 5

by — Vladimir Gelesnoff (1877-1921)

FITTING IN ITS SEASON

- 9 What advantage *does* the worker *have* in what he *is* toiling?
- 10 I see the experience that Elohim gives
To the sons of humanity to humble *them* by it.
- 11 He has made *everything* fitting in its season;
However, He has put obscurity in their heart
So that the man may not find *out* His work,
That which the *One*, Elohim, does
from *the* beginning to *the* terminus.
- 12 I know that *there* is no good for them
But to rejoice and to achieve good in one's life;
- 13 And, moreover, *anyone* of humanity,
That he should eat and drink and see good
from all his toil,
It *is* a gift of Elohim.
- 14 I know that whatever the *One*, Elohim, is doing,
It shall be for *the* eon;
Onto it *there can* be *nothing* to add,
And from it *there can* be *nothing* to subtract;
The *One*, Elohim, He does *it* that they may fear
before Him.
- 15 That which is, it already *was*,
And what *is* to come already has been;
And the *One*, Elohim, He shall seek *out* what
has been pursued *away*.



from the revealed character of God (3:9-15); then he considers them from a matter-of-fact view of the actual condition of things (3:16-4:8). Considering the times which God has appointed for Adam's sons in the light of the Creator's character, Ecclesiastes expresses the conviction,

He has made everything fitting in its season; however, He has put obscurity in their heart, so that the man may not find out His work, that which the One, Elohim, does from the beginning to the terminus (3:11).

No one can find out how God is working out His purpose through the "seasons." His ways transcend human thought, but He has made everything fitting in its season and is working from the beginning to the terminus.

GOD'S APPOINTED PURPOSE

Ecclesiastes next gives expression to the thought that God's appointed times were, in the very nature of things, intended for man's profit and enjoyment.

I know that there is no good for them but to rejoice and to achieve good in one's life, and, moreover, any one of humanity, that he should eat and drink and see good from all his toil, it is a gift of Elohim (3:12-13).

Having stated the times in poetic form, Ecclesiastes proceeds to consider them. First, respecting them he draws certain deductions which necessarily follow

Whatever is, is for a purpose, and that purpose is

(see *STUDIES*, page 4155) ↗

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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).

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STUDIES (continued from front page)

God’s thought in creation. This is true, not only of the works of nature, but also of the events of history.

Another fact which follows from the truth of the Creator’s supremacy is the immutability of the times. God acts on fixed principles which no effort of the individual will ever influence or alter.

I know that whatever the One, Elohim is doing, it shall be for the eon; onto it there can be nothing to add and from it there can be nothing to subtract (3:14).

Ecclesiastes will develop in a subsequent chapter the tremendous importance of this truth in its bearing upon man’s conduct. Meanwhile, he ventures to suggest one of its practical values: to foster man’s dependence on God.

The One, Elohim, He does it that they may fear before Him (3:14).

In this statement Ecclesiastes is borne out by Paul who, in his sermon to the Athenians, declares that God has determined the seasons of the nations that they should seek Him (Acts 17:26-27).

Ecclesiastes concludes this side of the survey with voicing the oft reiterated belief (emphasized at the close as the chief aim of the book) in a future rectification.

That which is, it already was, and what is to come already has been; and the One, Elohim, He shall seek out what has been pursued away (3:15).

Here are two ideas: the law of “recurrence,” in virtue of which the times ever repeat themselves; and the seeking out or “inquisition” of the times. He has already stated, in the preceding verse (:14), that the times are leading up to *the eon*: They contain the seeds which will then yield their fruit. In other words, we may compare the times to a flight of stairs, leading step by step to the golden age of peace.

PRESENT CONTRADICTIONS

16 Yet further, I have seen under the sun,
Where the place of judgment is,
there is wickedness,

And where the place of justice is,
there is wickedness.

17 I said in my heart:

As for the righteous and the wicked, the One, Elohim, shall judge *both of them*.

For He has set a season for every event and for every deed.

18 I said in my heart:

It is on account of the sons of humanity
That the One, Elohim, seeks to manifest them
And to show them that they themselves
are beasts.

19 For the destiny of the sons of humanity

And the destiny of the beast,

It is one destiny for them;

As death is for this one, so is death for that one,

And one spirit is for all;

There is no advantage for the human over the
beast,

For the whole is vanity.

20 All are going to one place;

All have come from the soil, and all return to
the soil.

21 Who is knowing about the spirit of the sons of
humanity,

Whether it is ascending above,

And the spirit of the beast, whether it
is descending below to the earth?

22 So I saw that there is nothing better for a man

than that he rejoices in his works

Since that is his portion;

For who can bring him to see what shall come
after him?

4:1 And again I saw all the exploitings

that are done under the sun;

Behold, the tears of those being exploited,

And there is no comforter for them;

Vigor is in the hand of their exploiters,

And there is no comforter for them.

2 So I lauded the dead, those who had already
died,

Over the living, those who are still alive;

3 Yet better than them both is the one who still
has not come into being,

Who has not seen the evil work that is done
under the sun.

4 And I saw all the toil and all the success
of the work done,

That it was jealousy of one man over his
associate;

- This too is vanity and a grazing on wind.
- 5 The stupid *man* folds his hands and eats his *own* flesh;
- 6 Yet better is *one* palm full *with* rest Than both hands full *with* toil and a grazing on wind.
- 7 And again I saw a vanity under the sun:
- 8 There was one *person*, but *there* was no second; There even was no son or brother for him; Also *there* was no end to all his toil, Yet his eyes were not satisfied *with his* riches. Then *he said*, For whom *am* I toiling And making my soul lack good? This too is vanity, and it is an experience of evil.

In these verses Ecclesiastes proceeds to show that the previous representation is not borne out by the actual state of things.

Yet further, I have seen under the sun, where the place of judgment is, there is wickedness, and where the place of justice is, there is wickedness (3:16).

In spite of the reasonableness of the earlier deductions, they are at variance with actual experience. The actual condition of things in the world tells a very different tale. The times are often seen reversed: wickedness is seen in the place of justice, and while this fact may be construed to argue for a future rectification, it more often leads to the view that man is not different in his end from the beasts (3:16-22); suffering under oppression which makes death preferable to life (4:1-3); skill attained at the price of baneful rivalry and bitter competition fostering idleness in some and egotism in others (4:5-6); tireless effort dismayed by the recognition of its lack of its

satisfaction (4:7-8) – all of these realities which cannot be ignored force totally different conclusions.

The survey has yielded the following result: the theoretic side, founded on deductions flowing from the character of the Creator, argues that the “times” are for man’s good; the practical side, resting on stubborn facts which everywhere stare us in the face, argues that the times and seasons contribute to man’s misery and suffering. The reflective process has established an antagonism between good and evil. Here, for the present, the consideration of God’s work is allowed to rest; but the clash between the ideal and the actual – the discrepancy between the traditional of the works of the Lord, and the growing difficulty of the recognition of evil in the world – has given rise to a number of perplexing practical questions. These are dealt with in a string of “notes” (4:9-5:9).

Notes

When studying the form of this work we find that the intervals between some of the “books” are filled with strings of sayings, which sustain some relation to the preceding matter; in fact, they are in the nature of “notes” dealing with the practical side of certain points that have emerged in the course of investigation.

In the group before us we have a series of four maxims arranged in pairs, each pair being founded upon an antithesis.

1. The Value of Friendship (4:9-12)

- 9 Two *are* better than one
Because *there* is better reward for them in their toil;



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See order form.

- 10 For if they fall, one *can* raise up his partner;
But woe to him, the one who falls when
there is no second *person* to raise him up.
- 11 Also, if two lie *down together* it is warm for
them,
Yet for one, how *can* he *keep* warm?
- 12 And if *somebody can* overpower him *who*
is single,
Then two *can* stand *firm* in front of him *who*
attacks.
A *threefold* thread *cannot* quickly be pulled
apart.

In a previous paragraph our author has been speaking of competition as fostering idleness in some (*The stupid man folds his hands*, 4:5), and isolation in others (*Better is one palm full with rest*, 4:6). In this maxim Ecclesiastes seeks to show that both these attitudes towards rivalry are as harmful as rivalry itself. The word “toil” is elsewhere rendered by “misery” (e.g. Judges 10:16). The point is, that the trouble involved in human associations, arising from differing mental attitudes, interests, temperaments, etc., is amply rewarded by such advantages as sympathy, help, strength. *Two can stand firm* (4:12) here has the sense of *holding one’s own*: two or three can hold their own where one would be overpowered.

2. The Vanity of Adulation (4:13-16)

- 13 Better *a* boy, provident and wise,
Than *a* king, old and stupid, who *does* not
know
how to *take* warning *any* more.
- 14 For from *a* house of prisoners *one* came forth
to reign,
Even though in his kingdom he was born des-

titute;

- 15 Yet I saw all the living *who*
were going *about* under the sun
Staying with the second boy who stood up in
his stead.
- 16 *There* was no end to all the people, to all before
whom he was *set*,
Yet *those* coming later were not rejoicing in
him;
Indeed this too *is* vanity
and *a* grazing *on* wind.

There is no historical allusion here: it is a pictorial representation of matters of general experience.

Better is a boy, provident and wise, than a king, old and stupid, who does not know how to take warning any more. For from a house of prisoners [i.e., the womb] one [the foolish king] came forth to reign; even though in his kingdom he was born destitute. I saw all the living who were going about under the sun, staying with the second boy [i.e., the successor, as in 4:8] who stood up in his stead. There was no end to all the people, to all before whom he [the successor of the stupid king] was set, yet those coming later were not rejoicing in him; indeed this too is vanity and a grazing on wind (4:13-16).

The thought of the whole is: In essence, apart from the trappings of royalty, the king is as destitute as any youth born in obscurity; both were born naked (cf. 5:15) and what does this external finery amount to? When the old king is gone, all of the world flocks to his successor; but that successor will equally be forsaken in his turn. ►

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3. The Vanity of Folly (5:1-7)

- 1 Guard your feet when you go to the house of Elohim;
To go near to hear is better than that the stupid should offer sacrifice,
For they know *nothing but* to do evil.
- 2 Do not be rash with your mouth,
And your heart must not hasten to *bring forth* speech before the *One*, Elohim;
For the *One*, Elohim, *is* in *the* heavens,
And you *are* on the earth;
Therefore, let your words become few.
- 3 For *as a* dream comes with much responsibility,
So *the* voice of a stupid *person comes* with many words.
- 4 Whenever you vow *a* vow to Elohim, do not delay to pay it,
For *He* has no delight in those *who are stupid*;
That which you vow, pay.
- 5 *It is* better that you should not vow
Than that you should vow and not pay.
- 6 Do not allow your mouth to cause your flesh *to* sin,
And do not protest before the *temple* messenger that it *was an* error.
Why should the *One*, Elohim, be wrathful at your voice
And bring harm *to the* work of your hands?
- 7 For in many dreams and vanities, *there are* many words;
Therefore fear the *One*, Elohim.

This obviously has in mind the materialism produced in some by the spectacle of wickedness seated in the place of justice. Two maxims enjoining reverence in things divine are contrasted with the folly of speaking against God. The drift of thought is best apprehended from the parallelism of clauses:

- ❖ Obedience better than sacrifice (5:1)
- ❖ Ignorance better than neglected light (5:4-5)
- ❖ Hasty words improper because God is greater than man (5:2)
- ❖ Hasty words dangerous because God may requite man (5:6)
- ❖ Image: Dream (5:3)
- ❖ Image: Dreams (5:7)
- ❖ Speaking against God is like the talking in sleep of an overworked brain.

4. The Value of Wisdom (5:8-9)

- 8 If you should see extortion of *the* destitute
And pillage of judgment and justice
in *a* province,
Do not be amazed over the event,
or *one* lofty *official* above *another* lofty *official*
is observing,
And *other* lofty *officials are* over them.
- 9 Yet *an* advantage *to the* land in all respects
is this:
A king *devoted to the* field *that* it be served.

The writer has before him the effects of oppression noticed in the survey. We follow the reading of the Septuagint:

If you should see extortion of the destitute and of judgment and justice in a province, do not be amazed over the event, for one lofty official above another lofty official is observing, and other lofty officials are over them (5:8).

The object of the passage is to emphasize the fact that, strange as it may seem, God has a purpose in all that takes place. Verse 9 seems to illustrate the effects of recognizing or ignoring that truth by rulers: the one looks at the province as a thing to be developed, the other looks on it as a field of extortion.

(To be continued.)



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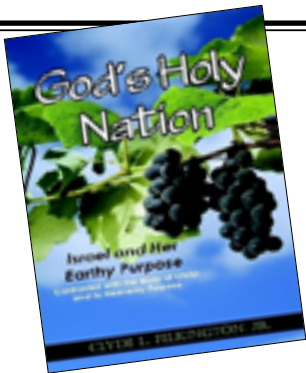


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Today, God is operating His purpose in the ecclesia – the Church, the Body of Christ. The Scriptures provide us with the clear, critical distinction between God's *earthly* nation and Christ's *celestial* body.

Christendom, however, has diminished Israel's divine significance in an attempt to advance their artificial homogenization of Scripture's grand theme, thus obscuring the glorious evangel of our day – "*the Good News of the Happy God*" committed to the trust of Paul, our Apostle.

This work highlights some of the more prominent distinctions which belong to God's literal, physical, earthly nation. In so doing, it is our desire to allow the reader to see more clearly God's dealings with God's favored nation, so that they may in turn embrace a *far greater* calling and purpose.