

A Fleeting Enigma

Ecclesiastes

by Don Falkos

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Koheleth was a sage, a teacher continuing the Wisdom tradition of King David's son Solomon. In his investigation of life, Koheleth had experienced everything, done everything, but in the end found nothing to be a reliable means to understanding God. He even found the pursuit of wisdom to be insufficient. God, though plainly good, remained hidden, unfathomable. Koheleth called together an assembly of interested parties in order to impart what he had learned through a lifetime of exploration and analysis.

Everything in life is a fleeting enigma, like vapor – here one moment and gone the next. No matter what you do in life, it's like chasing the wind. Generations come and go. The sun rises and sets and then rises again. The wind blows one way and then the other. Rivers constantly flow to the sea, but the sea never fills up. History keeps repeating itself. There's nothing new under the sun. In time no one's going to remember you and all you care about will be gone.

Like Solomon, the wisest of all the kings in Jerusalem, I have sought to understand everything under the sun. I sought pleasure and found it in laughter, in drinking, in amassing wealth, and yes, even in hard work. Along the way I've gained great wisdom. But so what! The wise and the foolish both die and are forgotten. We all return to the dust from which we came.

There is a time for everything:

a time to be born, and a time to die;
a time to weep, and a time to laugh;
a time to be silent, and a time to speak;
a time to love, and a time to hate;
a time for war, and a time for peace.

We were made for eternity, yet we can't possibly understand eternity. God has given us a wonderful world to live in. The best we can hope for is to be happy and to find satisfaction in meeting the needs of others – this is a gift from God.

Still, there is so much mistreatment of others in the world. It makes me think the dead are better off than the living – they don't have to put up with it any more. And maybe it would be even better to have never been born at all and never to have seen all the evil perpetrated under the sun.

So really, there's nothing better than to enjoy your work. That is your lot in life. But working hard out of envy, striving to be more successful than your rival, will not make you happy any more than idleness will. Fame and fortune are fickle.

Advancement is meaningless without God. And as fulfilling as hard work can be, it is empty without loved-ones to share your successes with – they are a gift from God.

Don't make rash vows. When you swear an oath to God, keep it! It's better not to swear at all than to swear an oath and not follow through.

Don't be surprised when you see a miscarriage of justice, when you see wealthy politicians taking advantage of the poor. Corruption among the powerful is widespread.

Those who love money will never have enough. But wealth is a mixed blessing. It doesn't bring happiness. And those who are constantly seeking more never have time to enjoy what they already have – they are chasing the wind.

No one has the power to prevent death. There is no escape – just as there is no escape from the consequences of your own wickedness. Oh, I know... Often good, righteous people are treated as though they were wicked and the wicked as though they were good and God-fearing. So I say, don't worry about that. Enjoy life as you may – eat, drink, be happy in your work – this is a gift from God.

I've spent my whole life trying to understand God's work in this world. There are some who claim to know the meaning of life, but that's not true. No one can comprehend it. The future is in God's hands, and no one knows what it holds, except that all will die – righteous or wicked, good or bad, pure or impure, those who worship God and those who don't – all share the same fate.

So enjoy the time you have with your spouse, whom you love. Whatever you do, do it as best you can. And know this... It's better to be criticized by someone who is wise than to be praised by a fool. The fastest runner doesn't always win the race. The strongest warrior doesn't always win the battle. The wise sometimes go hungry. You may be intelligent, an expert in your field, but that doesn't necessarily mean you'll be wealthy or respected. It's all decided by chance, by being in the right place at the right time. And what's more, you never know when your time will come.

There was once a small city besieged by the army of a powerful king. A poor but wise man lived there, and through his wisdom the city was saved. Wisdom proved to be better than strength. Yet no one thanked him because he was despised for being poor – they were blind fools.

Suppose a powerful person became angry with you. What should you do? Mind your work and don't even think about complaining. It won't help. And if you do complain, a little bird might carry your words to that powerful person, and you would regret having spoken out.

Cast your bread upon the waters. Be adventurous in your business undertakings. And if you're prosperous, share your wealth with those in need. You never know... You might need help some day. You don't know which way the wind will blow. You don't understand how a new life is formed in a mother's womb. God's work in this world is beyond your comprehension. So just enjoy life. Don't worry. Be happy all your days. This is a gift from God.

Remember your Creator. Before you grow old and feeble, before the thread of life snaps, before you die, before your body returns to dust and your spirit returns to the One who gave it, remember God who made you.

Without God everything in life is a fleeting enigma, like vapor – here one moment and gone the next. Without God no matter what you do in life, it's like chasing the wind.

Koheleth was a wise man who studied hard and imparted the truth clearly and eloquently to those who would listen. A shepherd uses a sharp goad to drive the sheep. Koheleth's wise words are like a goad – painful but helpful. And they all come from the one true Shepherd.

Let me give you one more piece of advice. I think Koheleth would agree. Books are good; you can learn a lot from them; but don't waste your whole life in them; they will simply wear you out. The ultimate answers regarding God's work in this world are not found in books. God will judge everything we do, whether good or bad. Fear and obey God; that's what being human is all about.