

ECCLESIASTES

All Talk and no Follow Through: **Ecclesiastes 5:1-7**

I. REVIEW

A. The Title, Teacher and Framers

1. The Hebrew word for the book is **קֹהֵלֵת** *Qoheleth* which means “one who collects together” [people and teachings]” or “one who calls an assembly together.”¹
2. The English title “Ecclesiastes” comes from the Greek translation of the Hebrew and is where we get the word for church leadership and structure in Latin and English “ecclesia”.
3. There are two writers, the “Teacher and a “Framer” who opens and closes the book.
 - a. Ecclesiastes is an invitation to gather around the lessons of the teacher
 - b. There is a problem. The teacher casts off moral and ethical restraints in certain tests he explores.
 - c. The teacher is also approaching much from a secular humanistic perspective “embrace pleasure avoid pain.” **Ecclesiastes 2:10 I denied myself nothing.**
 - d. It’s not that he has a broken moral compass or lacks sails and an anchor, he has chosen to discard them and see where pleasures, pursuits and passions currents arrive.

B. **Meaningless Meaningless, a chasing after the wind.** (The conclusion arrived at over and over).

1. “**Meaningless**” **הֶבֶל** *hevel*’s used 37 times in Ecclesiastes and is the word used for a vapor or mist. This is actually the name we incorrectly pronounce “Abel”. His life was so brief it was like a mist. Snuffed out by his brother. There is an irony in **Abel’s-Hevel’s** name.
2. The reason most English versions translate the word as “useless” or “meaningless” is that our life is so short and so brief it’s as if anything we accomplish, attempt or do is of no meaning.
3. **But Don’t make the mistake this cynical teacher made. All life and every moment is meaningful** Though life, pleasure and achievement is a vapor so brief it seems worthless, every second of life is precious. “**By faith Abel brought God a better offering than Cain did. By faith he was commended as righteous, when God spoke well of his offerings. And by faith Abel still speaks, even though he is dead**” (Hebrews 11:5).
4. I think vapor helps us see the focus is on our brief short mortality. It requires explanation but “useless” and “meaningless” come short conveying the point.

C. The Conclusion

1. **Ecclesiastes 12:13-14** Now all has been heard; here is the conclusion of the matter: Fear God and keep his commandments, for this is the duty of all mankind. For God will bring every deed into judgment, including every hidden thing, whether it is good or evil.

II. TEXT

Ecclesiastes 5:1-7 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God. Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few. A dream comes when there are many cares, and many words mark the speech of a fool. When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, “My vow was a mistake.” Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands? Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore, fear God.

III. 30,000 ft. VIEW

A. FINALLY, SOMETHING USEFUL:

1. The teacher/Qoheleth won’t say “meaningful, meaningful, useful, useful, worthy, worthy! But he finally offers something instructive other than an example from his destructive life experiments.
2. In previous chapters, the teacher focused on things ‘**under the sun**’. Now he turns our eyes ‘**above the sun**’ worship and words. Oaths and offerings. **He’s warning us while God is worthy**, we **can** make worship meaningless **if we’re not careful.**²
3. All talk and no walk lead to a bad place.

¹ Ecclesiastes. The Bible Project. June 10, 2016. <https://bibleproject.com/explore/video/ecclesiastes/>

² Jim Winter, *Opening up Ecclesiastes*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 67.

4. All talk and no follow through are not good for you.
 5. **Grammar Lesson:** Chapter 5 begins with a string of imperatives, the grammar of command. He hasn't done this until this chapter.³ He's not experimenting or exploring. He's warning.
- B. **Vs. 1 Guard your steps when you go to the house of God.** English equivalent 'Watch your step!'⁴
1. How many of us take time to prepare for worship?⁵
 2. Most fights happen in a Christian home Saturday night or on the ride to church.
 3. They set a sour tone rather than tuning us into Jesus Christ.
 4. We should "guard our steps" to and through church.
 5. Paul commands Christians to examine themselves before taking communion (1 Cor. 11:27–28).⁶
 6. The teacher is schooling all of us to be careful not to have good intentions in wrong directions.
- C. **Vs 1-2 Go near to listen rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, who do not know that they do wrong. Do not be quick with your mouth, do not be hasty in your heart to utter anything before God. God is in heaven and you are on earth, so let your words be few.**
1. When you approach God be circumspect. Listen! That is better than sacrificing like a fool.⁷
 2. "Don't let what comes out of your mouth cause your whole being to fall into sin."⁸ What you say has consequences...⁹
 3. **The U.S. President, Calvin Coolidge**, was noted for his reluctance in using more words than were necessary. At a dinner party he was seated next to a well-known actress who informed him that she had bet someone that she could make him say at least three words during the evening. The president replied, 'You lose,' and remained silent for the rest of the meal.¹⁰
 4. **Matthew 6:7-9** And when you pray, do not keep on babbling like pagans, for they think they will be heard because of their many words. Do not be like them, for your Father knows what you need before you ask him. "This, then, is how you should pray: " 'Our Father in heaven, hallowed be your name,
 5. **The opposite can be true:** Silence is not godliness but the right words and motives can be.
 6. **God is in heaven and you are on earth** There's a profound distance between people and God. If we truly understood the gulf between a holy, enthroned God and a defiled, self-centered sinner, we would be rendered speechless.¹¹ **God and me are good. We have an understanding.**
 7. Those who draw near simply to listen (i.e., in reverence) do not give themselves any occasion for getting into trouble¹² **James 1:19** Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger;
 8. **Psalm 19:13** Let the words of my mouth and this meditation of my heart be pleasing in your sight, LORD, my Rock and my Redeemer.
 9. **God near to Listen שמע (Hear).**
 - a. **To listen** has double force of meaning in Hebrew to pay attention and to obey.¹³
 - b. The Prophets used this double meaning constantly "hear, listen and obey" the word of the LORD (Isaiah 28:14; Jeremiah 22:2; Ezekiel 6:3; Hosea 4:1; Amos 7:16). The word of the prophet was a call to obedience of their message.
 - c. This understanding expands the force of Saul's disobedience to God's command through the Prophet Samuel; **1 Samuel 15:22** "to obey (listen, שמע) is better than sacrifice..."
 10. **Your word is your bond. It's the only thing you have to give. So don't cheapen it.**
 11. How many idle promises do we make to God in the heat of the moment or in the charged atmosphere of a particular circumstance?¹⁴

³ Peter Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, The Two Horizons Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2011), 65–66.

⁴ Derek Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes: A Time to Mourn and a Time to Dance*, ed. J. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, The Bible Speaks Today (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 53.

⁵ Jim Winter, *Opening up Ecclesiastes*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 68.

⁶ Jim Winter, *Opening up Ecclesiastes*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 68–69.

⁷ Peter Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, The Two Horizons Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2011), 66.

⁸ This is a slight paraphrase of the Hebrew, which reads more literally, "Do not allow your mouth to make your flesh/body sin."

⁹ Peter Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, The Two Horizons Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2011), 68.

¹⁰ Jim Winter, *Opening up Ecclesiastes*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 71.

¹¹ Jim Winter, *Opening up Ecclesiastes*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 72.

¹² Duane A. Garrett, *Proverbs, Ecclesiastes, Song of Songs*, vol. 14, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1993), 311.

¹³ Derek Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes: A Time to Mourn and a Time to Dance*, ed. J. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, The Bible Speaks Today (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 53.

¹⁴ Jim Winter, *Opening up Ecclesiastes*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 73.

12. No amount of emphasis on grace can justify taking liberties with God, for the very concept of grace demands gratitude; and gratitude cannot be casual. Gratitude becomes active obedience.¹⁵
 - a. **Hebrews 12:28-29**²⁸ Therefore let us be grateful for receiving a kingdom that cannot be shaken, and thus let us offer to God acceptable worship, with reverence and awe,²⁹ for our¹⁶ God is a consuming fire.¹⁷

D. Vs. 3 A dream comes when there are many cares, and many words mark the speech of a fool.

Vs. 7 Much dreaming and many words are meaningless. Therefore, fear God.

1. One proverb twice is used to drive home the point by linking the chatter of fools to the unreality of dreams.¹⁸ It seems to have been a common proverb.¹⁹
2. This passage is more about insincere impulsiveness than dedication that over reaches.
3. Fools are not a fixed type, They're not all loud extraverted personalities. Fools behave a certain way. They pour out a stream of pious phrases that outrun intentions to follow through.²⁰
4. We talk a lot of promises when things look promising.

E. Vs 4-6 When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it. Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, "My vow was a mistake." Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands?

1. Vows or promises were an integral part of Jewish worship. Worshippers committed themselves to some kind of action, usually the offering of sacrifices, if God would grant their requests (**Gen. 28:20-22; 1 Sam. 1:11; Ps. 132:2-5**).²¹
2. A Temple messenger would collect unfulfilled vows on behalf of the priests—the vow has not been made to him but to God!²²
3. For gifts, it functioned as a credit system of a desire to bless God at a future time or for an ongoing time. "A recent tither from someone that helped in the summer months."
4. Vows were one way of expressing service to God.²³ They are gifts we intend to give (like our tither or an offering) but they also encompass what resolutions or commitments we intend too.
5. The Last chapter of Leviticus is dedicated to vows **Leviticus 27**.
6. **Deuteronomy 23:23** Whatever your lips utter you must be sure to do, because you made your vow freely to the LORD your God with your own mouth.
7. The New Testament continues the practice.
8. Tragic Consequences Regarding Vows:
 - a. A rash vow Jephthah and his daughter (**Judg. 11:29-40**).²⁴
 - b. A deceptive vow for appearance with Ananias and Sapphira (**Acts 5:1-11**).²⁵
 - c. **Acts 18:18** After this, Paul stayed many days longer... he had cut his hair, for he was under a [Nazarite] vow (see Numbers 6:18).
 - d. **Matthew 5:33-37** "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth... All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.
 - e. **Proverbs 24:16** "for though the righteous fall seven times, they rise again, but the wicked stumble when calamity strikes."
9. **How many idle promises do we make to God** in the heat of the moment or in the charged atmosphere of a particular circumstance?²⁶
10. The implication is that God does not delight in the tardy fulfillment of vows, which fools do.²⁷

IV. CONCLUSION

¹⁵ Derek Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes: A Time to Mourn, and a Time to Dance*, ed. J. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, The Bible Speaks Today (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 53.

¹⁶ Cited from Deut. 4:24; See 2 Thess. 1:8

¹⁷ *The Holy Bible: English Standard Version* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles, 2016), Heb 12:28-29.

¹⁸ Derek Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes: A Time to Mourn, and a Time to Dance*, ed. J. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, The Bible Speaks Today (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 53.

¹⁹ See Gordis, *Kohleth*, 248; and Whybray, *Ecclesiastes*, 93-94.

²⁰ Derek Kidner, *The Message of Ecclesiastes: A Time to Mourn, and a Time to Dance*, ed. J. Alec Motyer and Derek Tidball, The Bible Speaks Today (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1984), 53-54.

²¹ Jim Winter, *Opening up Ecclesiastes*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 73.

²² Jim Winter, *Opening up Ecclesiastes*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 74.

²³ Peter Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, The Two Horizons Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2011), 67.

²⁴ Jim Winter, *Opening up Ecclesiastes*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 73.

²⁵ Jim Winter, *Opening up Ecclesiastes*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 74.

²⁶ Jim Winter, *Opening up Ecclesiastes*, Opening Up Commentary (Leominster: Day One Publications, 2005), 73.

²⁷ Peter Enns, *Ecclesiastes*, The Two Horizons Commentary Series (Grand Rapids, MI; Cambridge, U.K.: Eerdmans, 2011), 67.