

Dr. Al Fuhr, Ecclesiastes, Session 4

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So far as we've been surveying the Book of Ecclesiastes with a thematic motif-driven approach, we've found that the heaviness of life is absolutely essential to understand in interpreting and reading the Book of Ecclesiastes. We've looked at different families of meaning that the heaviness of life reflects, the fact that life is transient, the fact that it is fleeting, and the fact that we're all aging and moving towards the grave.

This is one element or aspect of life's heaviness that Kohelet ponders. We find that the vanity, the inability of man to be able to achieve any solution to the dilemma of heaviness is itself heavy. It's vain, it's futile, and we see that reflected in the Book of Ecclesiastes.

We find that life is oftentimes seen as absurd. Things happen in this world, this fallen world of existence, that just don't make sense. They're an affront to human reason, and that too Kohelet proclaims to be heavy.

And we find that throughout all the Book of Ecclesiastes, Kohelet is in great vexation. There's great angst as he observes these things, as he reflects upon them and experiences them. And even with the wisdom that he has, everything that he's able to bring to the table to be able to resolve these problems of heaviness, of fallenness in this world, he's utterly frustrated by the fact that he can't do a thing about it.

And when he observes life's absurdities, and when he sees things that are beyond the grasp of any kind of ability that he has to be able to resolve or bring a solution to the problem, it frustrates him greatly. And it's almost as if we see him pounding his fist and uttering his great vexation at these things. And so, understanding the heaviness of life is absolutely essential to reading the Book of Ecclesiastes.

We also looked at the under-the-sun perspective. The idea is that Kohelet's journey is taken from a horizontal perspective. That doesn't mean it's a backslidden perspective.

It doesn't mean that he is an idolater or that he's using man's reasoning as opposed to God's reasoning. It just simply means as a wise sage, he's not speaking thus saith the Lord. He's rather making his observations through the full capacity that he has as a wise man, but he's not able to bring some kind of revelation knowledge directly down from heaven to the problem.

We see more of that later on throughout Scripture. Certainly, the Apostle Paul in Romans chapter 8 hints at a solution to the dilemma of Hevel. And of course that comes through revelation, that comes through Christ.

We also find that the wisdom motif is very essential to understand in the Book of Ecclesiastes. Actually, Kohelet undertakes his journey to find a solution to the dilemma of Hevel, what I call Yitron. It's the Hebrew word that we find periodically throughout the Book of Ecclesiastes.

That's translated variously as gain or surplus or profit. I would understand that rather enigmatic and rather difficult term to be reflective of that solution to the dilemma of Hevelness that Kohelet seeks to be found in his wisdom journey. And so what he does in undertaking this journey seems to be done through the lens of wisdom.

As a matter of fact, in chapters 1 and 2 at least four times you find Kohelet proclaiming once again that what he is doing he is undertaking through wisdom and that his wisdom has not left him and he has excelled beyond all others in wisdom. We also find that wisdom is explored throughout the Book of Ecclesiastes. We find that wisdom is seen to be good, it brings good things to mankind.

It's certainly better than folly but ultimately wisdom is unable to provide that solution. As a matter of fact, in Ecclesiastes chapter 8 verses 16 and 17 Kohelet states this very clearly. It reads when I applied my mind to know wisdom and to observe man's labor on earth, his eyes not seeing sleep day or night, then I saw all that God has done.

No one can comprehend what goes on under the sun. Despite all his efforts to search it out, man cannot discover its meaning. If even a wise man claims he knows, he cannot really comprehend it.

And so at the end of the matter as Kohelet observes what wisdom is and is not able to do, he's rather frustrated at the fact that even though a wise man may excel, ultimately he never is going to have one up on God. He's ultimately not able to answer what the future may bring. He does not know.

And so ultimately there is only one who knows the future, who can dictate the future and that is God himself. And so, this brings us to the next motif. The next motif is a more theological one.

Really when you read the book of Ecclesiastes you find that it's extremely practical. I mean when Kohelet seeks after the solution to the dilemma of Hevel, he's looking for a way in which man can get out of the muck of fallenness. And you find that even as he explores Hevelness and discovers that there may be no Yitron that wisdom is able to find, nevertheless wisdom does find what is tov, what is good.

And so, he gets into a very practical thread of thinking as you would expect in wisdom literature. Kohelet explores the variable ways in which man might be able to find advantage in this world. Ways in which a man may be able to find success even in the midst of a fallen and uncertain world.

And so, in that sense, the book is very practical. But the wisdom sages of ancient Israel dealt not only with the practical but also, they did explore theological questions. Certainly at the front of the theological questions in the book of Ecclesiastes is this relationship between the sovereign God and limited mortal man.

And what we find is that there is a great chasm between the two. As a matter of fact you see that reflected in chapter 5 in verses 1-7 where Kohelet gets into some of the elements of cultic or ritual reverence even in ancient Israel, in the context of ancient Israel. In any case in chapter 5 in verse 2 it reads, Do not be quick with your mouth and 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. And so, this great chasm that we see between the sovereign God, the holy other, and man, who even in his wisdom is nevertheless limited, this great chasm is explored. One of the terms that I've come across in my study concerning this theological anthropology, this relationship between God and man in the book of Ecclesiastes, is sovereignly imposed limitation.

In other words, it's not just that man is limited in what he is able to do and what capacity he is able to bring in this fallen world, but it's also that this seems to be imposed upon him by God. And God periodically is going to make man realize over and over that he really does not have a Tower of Babel moment, that he is not able to achieve the highest heavens, and he's not going to have his own sovereign day, but ultimately it is God who is the one who has the final say in things. And so this tension between the sovereign God and the limitations imposed upon mankind seems to be the theological issue that is explored most front and center in the book of Ecclesiastes.

And so, to that we now turn. Now certainly as we explore this tension we're going to find that both the theology of God and the theology of man in the book of Ecclesiastes need to be understood in relationship to one another. But it's a little bit easier to explore each one at a time, so we're going to go ahead and begin to do that.

First of all exploring what Kohelet has to say about the sovereign God who rules over man, the one who is wholly other, who is wholly transcendent. God is referred to some 40 times in the book of Ecclesiastes, but interestingly enough he is uniformly

referred to as Elohim. Translated in English translations as God with a capital G, referring of course to the only true God.

But you never find the covenantal name Yahweh, the tetragrammaton, the four Hebrew consonants that come to be understood in the Hebrew Old Testament as a covenant name for God. We oftentimes pronounce it as Yahweh in English, and even some English translations now translate or transliterate the tetragrammaton as Yahweh. You'll actually find many English translations traditionally translating Yahweh as Lord, but with all four letters capitalized.

And so that kind of sets it apart from Adonai where the Lord is capitalized with the capital L but not the O-R-D. In any case, you don't find Yahweh in the book of Ecclesiastes, and so scholars question what is the reasoning behind this? Is there anything that can be drawn or extrapolated from this observation? And I would suggest to you that the book of Ecclesiastes, while certainly being orthodox in its theology of God, is certainly not reflective of the relational aspects of Yahweh's covenant relationship with Israel. As a matter of fact, it seems like Ecclesiastes is very much centered on God's relationship with all of mankind, and it seems to draw some sense of distance between God and man, not again in an unorthodox way as fully in line with the rest of Scripture, but it's dealing with one side of what we know of God from Scripture.

In other words, you don't see that kind of relational sense of God dealing with man in such a way that you find in the prophets, for instance. In the book of Hosea, you find that God is pictured as a jilted husband whose heart has been wounded, and who grieves over Israel's sin. You find that God is long-suffering towards Israel, and He loves Israel, and you find that this almost compassionate sense of relationship, you find that in the prophets, you don't find that in the book of Ecclesiastes.

God is sovereign, God is great, and God is good in the book of Ecclesiastes, but you don't see God loving on mankind in the same way that you find in other portions of Scripture. Again, that doesn't mean that Ecclesiastes is unorthodox, it just simply means that it's not reflecting all aspects of God's relationship and being, as you see throughout the whole of Scripture. You find that there's no prayer language in the book of Ecclesiastes.

The wisdom of Ecclesiastes certainly reflects the reverence that is due to God, but you don't find mankind praying to God, you don't find that relational sense. And so perhaps that's one of the reasons why you'll find the emphasis on Elohim rather than on Yahweh. But that doesn't mean that God is not imminent, that He is not active in the affairs of mankind.

It does not mean that He does not hear man. As a matter of fact, the verse that I just read, 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, implies that God does hear, that He is not a deistic deity who is wholly transcendent in the sense that He is not involved in the affairs of mankind.

As a matter of fact, in the book of Kohelet in Ecclesiastes, you find that God is intimately involved, and that lends itself to some of the vexation of the wise man because he can't understand God's involvement in the affairs of mankind. You'll find that in some of these reflections, you'll find that God is pleased and God is also angered by the things which man does. As a matter of fact, in the Enjoy Life Refrains, this is often times reflected in chapter 2 and verse 24, A man can do nothing better than to eat and drink and find satisfaction in his work.

This too I see is from the hand of God, for without Him, who can eat or find enjoyment? This implies some sense of goodness that comes from the hand of God. Now, to the man who pleases Him, so obviously there you have implied that God is paying attention to what men do. God gives wisdom, knowledge, and happiness, but to the sinner, He gives the task of gathering and storing up wealth and handing it over to one who does please God.

So, God is paying attention is the point. And so, God is involved, but God is also pictured primarily as a transcendent being in the book of Ecclesiastes. If there is anything that is being said about God in the book of Ecclesiastes, it is certainly His sovereignty that is emphasized.

A quick survey of verses that reflect this, and actually what is interesting here is that the sovereignty of God in the book of Ecclesiastes is seen from the very beginning of the book all the way through to the end of the book. In chapter 1 and verse 15, many of these statements reflecting God's sovereignty are found in proverbial statements in the book of Ecclesiastes. Chapter 1 and verse 15, What is twisted cannot be straightened.

What is lacking cannot be counted. Kind of in some way implies the sovereign hand of God, and again with that the imposition of limitation on mankind. Even a wise man is not unable to undo what God has twisted.

In chapter 6 and verse 10, Whatever exists has already been named, and what man is has been known. So, no man can contend with one who is stronger than he. Again, this implies the fact that man, even a wise man, is limited in what he is able to do to upend the sovereign decisions of the divine.

Chapter 7 and verse 13, and this is actually much more explicit, Consider what God has done. Who can straighten what He has made crooked? Kind of makes you think back to chapter 1 and verse 15. When times are good, be happy, but when times are bad, consider.

God has made the one as well as the other. Therefore, a man cannot discover anything about his future. So, this is something that Kohelet reflects upon frequently in the book, that man knows nothing about his future.

As I stated in one of the earlier lectures, even a wise man who hedges his bets, who makes wise decisions and investments and other things that he is involved in in life, does not know the future. So ultimately, whatever decisions you make and whatever you deem to be proper as you move forward in life, you really don't know the outcome because we don't have anything over God to determine the future. And then beyond this, we find in chapter 9 and verses 11 and 12 more reflections on the sovereignty of God.

I have seen something else under the sun. The race is not to the swift or the battle to the strong, nor does food come to the wise, or wealth to the brilliant, or favor to the learned, but time and chance happen to them all. And I would suggest that in the context, the thematic context of Ecclesiastes, implied here is not some time and chance that is absent from any theistic involvement, but rather it's God's sovereignty that Kohelet is dealing with here and dwelling upon.

Chapter 9 and verse 12, Moreover, no man knows when his hour will come. Kind of thinking about the inevitability of death, a motif that we're going to be exploring here soon. As fish are caught in a cruel snare or net, and as birds are taken in a snare, so men are trapped by evil times that fall unexpectedly upon them.

And so whatever wise man may do to make wise decisions in the present, he ultimately has no ability to determine the future. It's all up to God. And so, for Kohelet, we find that it is not God's power or sovereignty that is ever questioned, but rather his sensibilities, his sense of justice.

Much in line with the book of Job. Job never questioned God's power or God's involvement regarding his suffering. For Job, the question was, where has God screwed up the accounting system here? Is God really a God of justice? And so, the wisdom sages in the Old Testament dealt with this theological dilemma, which is very much in line with the heaviness of life.

In a fallen world, oftentimes things do occur that are an affront to human reason, that don't make any sense, and are actually all the more problematic knowing that there is a sovereign God whose hand of involvement is present in the affairs of mankind. Now in relationship to the sovereignty of God and the theology of God, of course, we are exploring the theology of man, the anthropology of the book of Ecclesiastes. As I've already suggested, the main problem that Kohelet observes is that man is limited, and it's not just that he is limited because he is mortal, but he is limited in his mortality, and God even seems to be imposing this actively upon him.

And so even though a man may excel, even though a man may achieve, even though a man may expand his kingdom, God ultimately is the one who is able to bring him down. Of course, you see that reflected in the narrative of the Tower of Babel back in Genesis chapter 11, and that kind of thinking seems to be front and center in the wisdom of Ecclesiastes. So, God controls the future, and he controls man's own fortunes.

And so, let's take a quick look at a few verses that reflect this. Again, much in line with some of the verses we just read regarding the sovereignty of God. Man has limited control over his future.

God is ultimately the one who knows what will occur after him. A wise man has no idea. Chapter 3 and verse 22, So I saw that there is nothing better for a man than to enjoy his work because that is his lot.

Very interesting word, by the way, here with a lot. We'll explore this in a later lecture. For who can bring him to see what will happen after him? Again, a wise man does not know.

Chapter 6 and verse 12, For who knows what is good for a man in life? During the few and meaningless or hevel days he passes through like a shadow. I would suggest in this context, it's the fleeting nature of heaviness that is being highlighted, not a purposeless or meaningless life. Who can tell him what will happen under the sun after he is gone? Man is passing away, and after he is gone, he has no activity under the sun.

He does not know anything of his future or what will occur after his days. Chapter 8 and verse 7, Since no man knows the future, who can tell him what is to come? No man has power over the wind to contain it, so no one has power over the day of his death. In this way, God continually and regularly demonstrates his sovereignty by the fact that no man has power over the day of his death.

No one knows the future regarding when he will die and under what circumstances he will pass. Chapter 9 and verse 1, So I reflected on all of this and concluded that the righteous and the wise and what they do are in God's hands, the sovereignty of God, but no man knows whether love or hate awaits him, man's lack of knowledge concerning the future. Chapter 10 and verse 14, No one knows what is coming.

Who can tell him what will happen after him? And then chapter 11 and verse 2, Give portions to seven, yes to eight, for you do not know what disaster may come upon the land. So much of the proverbial wisdom in the book of Ecclesiastes is oriented at the wise man hedging his bets because he doesn't ultimately know what is going to occur in his future. Beyond the lack of control that man has over his future and over

his own fortunes, we find that in the book of Ecclesiastes, Kohelet dwells upon the fact that man is ultimately unable to leave a lasting legacy beyond his own years.

And so, in chapter 1 and verse 11, we find that Kohelet, at the end of a poem on the cyclical nature of life under the sun in a hevel world, we find this statement, There is no remembrance of men of old, and even those who are yet to come will not be remembered by those who follow a lack of lasting legacy. In chapter 2 and verses 16-21, we again find this idea, Verse 16, For a wise man like the fool will not be long remembered, and days to come both will be forgotten. Like the fool, the wise man too must die.

And then chapter 9 and verse 6, For their love, their hate, in other words, the activities of man and their jealousy have long since vanished. Never again will they have a part in anything that happens under the sun. And so, man is ultimately on a path to leaving nothing.

And so Kohelet again is vexed by man's inability to have anything that is long-lasting in this mortal existence. And then beyond this, man is limited in his ability not only to know his own future, but also to understand the activities of God, to understand the ways of God. What is very interesting about this is that God seems to do this actively in such a way as to keep one up on man.

In other words, so that man will never be able to claim, I've figured it out. I'm able to control the divine. What we find is that God ultimately is the one in control of the futures and the fortunes of mankind.

And so what we find reflected in the book of Ecclesiastes is a kind of wisdom that seeks to navigate in a very practical way what man might be able to do even if he's not able to have one up on God, even if he is not able to control what God is doing and what will happen or occur in his own future. And so, we find some of the wisdom that seems to demonstrate man's inability and yet provide some possible wisdom on how to best navigate through these very difficult and hevel events and circumstances that occur in life. Some of my favorites here, chapter 8 and verses 11 through 14, when the sentence for a crime is not quickly carried out, the hearts of the people are filled with schemes to do wrong.

In other words, people are motivated to do more evil, to do more wickedness when they see that there seems to be a lack of justice meted out by the divine in the present. Although a wicked man commits a hundred crimes and still lives a long time, in other words, Kohelet has observed a wicked man getting away with it, I know that it will go better with the God-fearing man. It will be good for the God-fearing man who is reverent before God.

So, this idea of reverence before a sovereign God is not very much in line with the fear of God motif that we'll later explore. Yet because the wicked do not fear God, it will not go well with them and their days will not lengthen like a shadow. And so it seems to me that Kohelet is very much in line with conventional wisdom in the sense that he observes that it is better for a man to fear God and he seems to hold on to confidence that even though he has observed things that are hevel, he nevertheless realizes that it is better not to tempt fate or to put it in a more theistic way, to tempt God.

In other words, and I've used this illustration before in an earlier lecture, a guy can get away with eating donuts every day for only so long, eventually it's going to catch up with him. And that seems to be Kohelet's suggestion. Even though I've seen that person smoking all their life, even though I've seen that person drinking, even though I've seen that person eating in such a way that would seem to suggest that they will not live long, I nevertheless know that it will go better for a man or for a woman to eat healthy, to exercise, to do those things that provide long-lasting and active life.

And so Kohelet knows what is better to do, even though he has observed exceptions to the generalities or to the general rules of wisdom. As a matter of fact, this idea of not tempting fate or tempting God is reflected in chapter 7 and some of the wisdom there we find. Chapter 7 and verse 15.

In this evil life of mine, I've seen both of these, a righteous man perishing in his righteousness and a wicked man living long in his wickedness. So again, this idea of seeing the exceptions to wisdom's expectations of what God should be doing in regard to meting out justice, cutting off the wicked from the land, and rooting up and uplifting the righteous, Kohelet's observed exceptions to these things. And yet he tells us this.

Do not be over-righteous, neither be over-wise. Why destroy yourself? Do not be over-wicked and do not be a fool. Why die before your time? It is good to grasp the one and not to let go of the other.

The man who fears God will avoid all extremes. Now, these statements in verses 16 through 18 have oftentimes been, I believe, misinterpreted to suggest a kind of golden meaning. In other words, Kohelet is saying, don't be too good and don't be too bad.

You know, Kohelet's in some kind of a backslidden funk where he's not really able to suggest proper piety, but I don't think that that's really what Kohelet is saying here. As a matter of fact, the word that the NIV translates destroy, shamam, can also be translated astonish. In other words, you can kind of see the connection.

When a city is destroyed, it brings about great astonishment at what has occurred. And so, what we find here is that a few translations have even ventured forth to translate as such. Do not be over-righteous, neither be over-wise.

Why shock yourself? Why be surprised? Why astonish yourself? Because what he has just stated in the previous verse is that he's observed what? A righteous man perishing in his righteousness. In a world that is controlled by God and oftentimes is enigmatic, things occur that are senseless and beyond human reason, we would call them hevel. Kohelet certainly does.

In a world like that where the righteous sometimes perish in their righteousness, don't trust in your righteousness as a guarantee for a long and fruitful life. It is better to be righteous because things will go well with you, Kohelet proclaims, the confidence that he has in the normal expectation, but yet he sees the exception to the rule. And so, he says, don't be overly righteous in the sense that you would trust in your righteousness as a guarantee for prosperity and long life.

You may find yourself quite utterly astonished. And yet at the same time, don't be a fool. Don't be an idiot.

Don't be over wicked, tempting God, and be cut off from the land. Why die before your time? It is good to grasp the one and not let go of the other. In other words, recognize what is wise to do in this life, but don't live with the false assurance that you have any control over your future.

Even as you step forward in your righteousness, even as you eat your broccoli and you run your five miles every day, you don't know what tomorrow might bring. You might get run over by a car on your next run. In other words, there's no guarantee regarding the future.

And so, this kind of balance, this kind of tension is very much at front and center reflecting the theology of man's relationship with God in the book of Kohelet. Now it's very interesting that people who ponder the mysteries of this world and the injustices that occur in this world, look for an answer in scripture as to why these things occur. In other words, is there any answer, and apologetics certainly explores these things, is there any answer in scripture that explains why it is that the righteous perish in their righteousness sometimes and why the wicked get away with it sometimes? Why do bad things happen to good people? The book of Job explores this at some level, but it is interesting that in the book of Job, at no point is it ever stated in a theological way with an explanation as to why it is that Job was suffering.

As a matter of fact, in the narrative segments of the book and the narrative bookends of Job, at the end of the book of Job, Job is never made privy to the challenge that takes place between God and Satan at the beginning of the book. In

other words, Job is never told, Job, this is why things happened the way they did. This is why it all went down the way it did.

As a matter of fact, Job is simply told that God is in control, that God is just and righteous, that God knows what is going on, and God has a reason. But Job is never made aware of the events that took place at the beginning of the book. And so you find in the book of Ecclesiastes that man isn't given all the answers, and you find elsewhere in scripture that man is not given all the answers.

But the closest thing that I've found in scripture to an explanation as to why bad things sometimes happen in this hevel world, things that are an affront to human reason, things that are quite plainly hevel, is found in chapter 3 and verse 14. Chapter 3 and verse 14 reads, I know that everything God does will endure forever, kind of as opposed to mankind, whom we have seen as very limited. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken away from it.

God does it so that men will fear Him, or revere Him. In other words, it seems like God actively participates in imposing limitations on mankind, so that mankind is never able to really get a proper footing in such a way that He can say, I've figured it out, and I have one up on God. Again, I go back to the Tower of Babel situation.

God is not going to allow man to excel in wisdom to a point where He has that Tower of Babel moment where He's able to proclaim, I am divine, and I've got one up on God. God is always going to have one up on man. That's the theology of God and man in the book of Kohelet.

Now as a subsidiary, kind of complimentary theme or motif to the sovereignty of God and the imposition of limitation on mankind, Kohelet explores the issue of time throughout the book. And I'd like to take a few minutes to explore this issue of time, especially as it reflects in chapter 3 in the poem on time. Chapter 3 in verse 1, there's a time for everything and a season for every activity under heaven.

A time to be born and a time to die, a time to plant and a time to uproot, a time to kill and a time to heal, a time to tear down and a time to build, a time to weep and a time to laugh, a time to mourn and a time to dance, a time to scatter stones and a time to gather them, a time to embrace and a time to refrain, a time to search and a time to give up, a time to keep and a time to throw away, a time to tear and a time to mend, 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. And many of you are familiar with this poem on time where we find these binary pairings in a very arranged manner. It's pretty obvious that this is a kind of independent literary unit found within the book of Ecclesiastes.

And you find that these binary pairings on time reflecting various aspects of time relationship in a hevel world, very enigmatic. It's just a very challenging text to interpret. And one of the reasons for this is the fluidity and the inherent ambiguity in the term time.

It's the Hebrew word *et*. And much like our word time, it can be used in many flexible ways. You could be pointing to a point in time on the kind of time-space continuum.

In other words, you know, 8 o'clock on June 21st, 2016. You could be referring to a particular event that has taken place in past time or a particular occurrence that is meant to occur in the future, at a future date, or at a future point in time. But you can also talk in a more substantive way about time.

You can talk about the appropriate time. For instance, if it's just snowed 2 or 3 feet, you might refer to that as a good time to go skiing. Or you might think about time in an appropriate sense.

For instance, if a person dies before their time, we might refer to time in a rather less pointed manner. In other words, if a person dies at 80 years old, 90 years old, or 100 years old, we're not necessarily pointing at the specific date of time, but we might say, well, that's a good time to die. In other words, it's an appropriate time to die.

Whereas if a person dies when they're 20, 30 or 40 years old, we would say that that person has died before their time. And so, the word time can be very fluid in the English language just as it was in the Hebrew language. And so, the question becomes, how does time reflect some aspect of God's involvement, and how does time reflect some aspect of man's involvement and somewhat of the tension between the two? It's interesting that in the subsequent commentary following the poem on time, Kohelet actually does seem to reflect upon God's involvement and man's limitations.

In verse 9 we read, What does the worker gain from his toil? There we find the Hebrew word *yitron* once again. In other words, there seems to be no *yitron* in all of his activity. I have seen the burden, it's a Hebrew word *'inyon*, which is actually quite interesting because this word is used four times in the book of Ecclesiastes, all four times pointing to the imposed limitations on mankind, and yet nevertheless the desire that man might have to have one up on God to figure these things out.

I have seen the *inyon*, the burden God has laid on man. He has made everything beautiful. I would suggest that the word beautiful here probably is best translated suitable.

He has made everything suitable in its time. He has also set eternity in the hearts of men, yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end. We just

talked about the various places in Ecclesiastes where man's inability to figure these things out in their proper time is front and center.

I know that there is nothing better, actually, this is, I believe, the third example of an enjoy life refrain here that we find encapsulated within this segment. I know that there is nothing better for men than to be happy and do good while they live, that everyone may eat and drink and find satisfaction in his toil and his labor. This is the gift of God.

I know that everything God does will endure forever, again, as opposed to the activity of man. Nothing can be added to it and nothing taken away from it. God does it so that men will revere him.

And so here again we have this reflection on time and the activities of God and the affairs of man and all of these things involved in relationship to one another. But as we explore the poem on time, it is interesting that the question again comes up in what sense is Kohelet reflecting upon time? And there are about five different options that I've come up at least with regarding Kohelet's emphasis on time. Many interpret the poem on time to be driven at divine determinism.

In other words, God determines when things occur and so the poem on time is saying that God is in control of the actual timing of events occurring on the time-space continuum. In other words, God's sovereignty is being emphasized there, divine determinism. And certainly, divine determinism at least some level is suggested throughout the book of Ecclesiastes.

We've read many verses that would suggest so. Others would say that God's providential establishment of cyclical occurrences is front and center in the poem on time. We see that reflected in an earlier poem, in chapter 1 verses 4 through 11, Kohelet deals with the cyclical nature of events that occur in this world, even cyclical patterns that occur in nature.

And it might be that God has sovereignly established cyclical occurrences so that things happen according to those times. God determines that things happen, not necessarily exactly when they happen, but that they do occur. Another option would be that God's suitable design for things to occur according to their right times is front and center here.

And that's certainly supported by chapter 3 and verse 11 in the subsequent commentary. He has made everything suitable in its time. And so, God in establishing patterns has also established appropriate times for things to occur.

All three of these options seem to suggest that God is the subject of the poem on time. But another set of options suggests that man may be the subject of the poem

on time. For instance, it could be that the poem on time is reflecting wisdom's role in responding to things at their appropriate time.

In other words, a wise man knows when to act because he knows when the appropriate time is for certain things to occur. Or it might be that wisdom's role in determining good or demonstrating good timing is front and center. In other words, a wise man is able to make decisions at the right time, not necessarily dealing with appropriateness in time, but rather with timing in actually making decisions and moving forward at the right time.

It's kind of like if you would have bought real estate in the United States in 2009 or 2010, you probably had better timing than if you would have bought real estate in 2007 when prices were elevated right before prices crashed. And so, the appropriateness of time is not necessarily being emphasized, but rather wisdom's timing. And so it might be that all five of these things are reflected in the poem on time.

It doesn't seem that any one of these fits in every one of the binary pairings. For example, under divine determinism, you might find that chapter 3 and verse 2, a time to be born and a time to die, reflect God's activity in determining those times. As a matter of fact, Kohelet throughout the book has said man doesn't know.

He has no control over the timing of his death. And so, it's not a matter of man being the subject of determining an appropriate time to die, but rather God is the one who determines that time. But you'll find in other examples the determination of time doesn't seem to really be reflected.

In other words, it's not a matter of God determining when the right time is to plant and to uproot in the sense of him determining a specific time. Rather, in other examples, you might find that God's providential establishment of cyclical occurrences or God's suitable design for things to occur may be best reflected. For example, in chapter 2, a time to plant and a time to uproot, God determines the seasons.

He establishes the seasons. And he has designed suitable times for things to occur. And so you might find in other examples of binary pairings in the poems that God's suitability is perhaps front and center.

And then you find other examples where it might seem that a more appropriate approach is man as subject, man's activity, or wisdom's activity in determining appropriate times to do this or to do that. For example, in chapter 3 and verse 5, a time to embrace and a time to refrain. It's not that God determines the time to embrace and the time to refrain, but rather a wise man knows when it is appropriate to embrace and when it is appropriate to refrain.

Or in chapter 3 and verse 8, a time to love and a time to hate. It's not that God determines a time to love and a time to hate, but rather a wise man knows when it is appropriate to do one or to do the other. Or you might find that the emphasis is on good timing.

For example, in chapter 3 and verse 7, a time to be silent and a time to speak. A wise man knows not only the appropriate time to speak and to be silent, but he's going to have good timing in doing those things. Or perhaps a time to search and a time to give up in chapter 3 and verse 6. There you have timing probably being front and center.

So, my point here is that the poem on time even seems to emphasize the idea that there is an appropriate reaction from man, from a wise man, in relationship to God's sovereign control, over the times. And so this kind of tension and relationship is very much saturated throughout the entirety of the book of Ecclesiastes. But one interesting point that I would like to conclude with.

In the poem on time, you find that the unit itself is bracketed, we called that inclusio earlier in the introductory lecture, is bracketed by statements regarding a time for everything and a time for every activity in verse 1, under heaven. And then in verse 17, we'll find the back end of that inclusio, where Kohelet ponders, I thought in my heart, God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed. And grammatically and in terms of vocabulary, you find great proximity and you find that verse 1 and verse 17 relate.

And so it seems beyond accidental that Kohelet has actually bracketed and is intentionally drawing attention back to verse 1 in the observations and the reflections in verse 17. God will bring to judgment both the righteous and the wicked, for there will be a time for every activity, a time for every deed. And so it seems like even in God's involvement in determining the times and orchestrating the times and man's response, wisdom's response, in appropriate timing and knowing the right time to do things and to venture forth, there seems to be a dilemma that still is yet unresolved in the book of Ecclesiastes, and that is God's sense of justice in the right time.

In other words, the righteous gets away, the righteous sometimes perishes in his righteousness and the wicked seem to sometimes get away with it. And Kohelet ponders whether or not there's ever going to be a time, a day of reckoning. And it seems like Ecclesiastes is pushing forward the envelope to suggest that there will be a day of reckoning, there will be a time for God's judgment.

But it might not be a time here in this present, hevel existence. It may in fact be a time in a post-life existence, a time for God's judgment. And we'll explore that issue later on as we explore the fear of God motif in the book of Ecclesiastes.