

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Seven)

Time and God's Sovereignty

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A lot of the reason Ecclesiastes is considered to be pessimistic is because so much of life is bad. It is trying. It is difficult, painful, and sometimes just downright scary for the population of this world.

Now consider Solomon himself. One can easily say that he was born with a silver spoon in his mouth. He had every advantage in life and thus he would naturally be someone that everyone would envy, and yet he begins his teachings in the book of Ecclesiastes as claiming the opposite, saying, "vanity of vanities, all is vanity," including his life.

So it seems, as he begins, that having every advantage perhaps really is not an advantage. This certainly gives the impression that he concluded that life is of no value because vanity is by definition something that is absolutely useless. That is an arresting beginning that could easily throw one into thinking that the writing itself is of no value, but that statement is also not the end of the story.

Ecclesiastes is not a book that gives short, sweet, specific answers regarding the overall purpose of life. However it has much practical, good counsel to give to all who seriously consider what it says. It is a book that gives insight regarding specific aspects of life that help, in general, toward making the overall use of life exceedingly better if the wisdom given within the book is followed. It thus provides a great deal of advice regarding specific choices but most especially regarding one specific choice.

I have drawn the last several sermons from Ecclesiastes from themes appearing within specific contexts. The first involved the overall importance of work. Work appears in Ecclesiastes 2. It does not earn us salvation, but it is exceedingly important to one's preparation for the Kingdom of God because without work we will not be prepared. Being a Christian requires work and often goes against the grain of nature.

The second theme involved time. Though Genesis 1 reveals that time is God's invention, Ecclesiastes 3 reveals that time is God's *gift* to us. That can be very different. We live our life within time and we find that God manipulates the uses of time for each and every person by causing circumstances to occur within their time for their development.

The third theme was on wisdom. There is a wisdom, we found out, that is easily found; it

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is all over the place, God says. He says, "Wisdom [personified as a woman] is shouting in the streets." He is telling us that it is everywhere. Where do we look to find it? It is in God's creation. It is in the way that people act and react to things, and if we are observant and we see wisdom or foolishness in what the people do or what is happening, and we process it, it gives us the opportunity to get a great deal of wisdom, in a sense, doing nothing but a great deal of thinking.

Now if we will only we use it. But we will also found out, if you recall from Job 28, where Job shows very clearly that there is a wisdom that must be given by God. It is a wisdom that He has and He chooses the times that He will give it. He is most likely going to give it to His children, even as He did to Job. So we have hope and comfort there that God will give us this wisdom. Of course we have to see that we have a need for the wisdom that God has, and ask Him for it and He will respond.

Now I want you to turn to Ecclesiastes 2:24-26. This is after Solomon concluded that his work was nothing but vanity. All the work that he did under the sun, all this building and projects that he had designed or contributed to in some way, but it gave him a way to spend his time, and he concluded that it was all vanity. In verse 24, after thinking things through again, he says:

Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 Nothing is better for a man than that he should eat and drink, and that his soul should enjoy good in his labor. This also, I saw, was from the hand of God. For who can eat, or who can have enjoyment, more than I? [There is the silver spoon.] For God gives wisdom and knowledge and joy to a man who is good in His sight; but to the sinner He gives the work of gathering and collecting, that he may give to him who is good before God. This also is vanity and grasping for the wind.

In other words, Solomon really could not figure this out as perfectly as he would like to, but still nonetheless he acknowledged that what God gives is nonetheless good.

I want to draw your attention to these three verses because this is the first, truly positive statement about life and God that appears in Ecclesiastes. Most of us and the world pass over it as something of little consequence, but it is a direct and open acknowledgment of God and thanks given for His gifts and an appeal that we should also thank God. Acknowledgment of these is something none of us should fail to do because we are children of God by having His Spirit. And so we should be thanking God often because we are thinking about the gifts that He is giving to us.

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However not everyone passes over this three verse statement as though it is nothing. Martin Luther wrote that he believed that it is the principal conclusion of the entire book. I do not agree. I believe that it comes in the final paragraph of the book in the last chapter where Solomon says, "fear God and keep his commandments for this is man's all." That is the conclusion and he saved it for last, but he did an awful lot of thinking and experimenting along the way.

Something else I want to put in here regarding the last paragraph of Ecclesiastes, because that final statement is what everyone's life eventually is all about. That is why I think that it is the real conclusion. It is our major responsibility in life to fear God and keep His commandments, but I also believe that the statement in Ecclesiastes 3:14 is even more significant than Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 toward improving life if one believes what is said there and uses it.

Ecclesiastes 3:14 I know that whatever God does, it shall be forever. Nothing can be added to it, and nothing taken from it. God does it, that men should fear before Him.

I think I mentioned to you in my last sermon that there are those who feel that it would be better to translate that word "fear" into "awe" because it is more understandable to the modern English-speaking person. So, it would say, "God does it that men should stand in awe before Him." Now if we are standing in awe it means that we fear Him and we appreciate what He is and respect Him deeply and are impressed by what He is and by what He does.

I do not want to go beyond Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 yet, because what Solomon has said here is an important beginning and we need to begin thinking about. Are we even thankful to God for life itself? It is very easy to get down on life because it is difficult. Life is difficult and at best it is a mixed bag for all of mankind until God inserts Himself into the lives of some for His purposes, and it then becomes that person's lifetime responsibility to give his life over to God's purposes for him and the brethren. But we do not give ourselves up very easily and brethren I think you realize that this is what makes life difficult for us.

Do you know what is generally considered to be the most famous opening line in all the novels that have ever been written? That distinction, according to other authors, belongs to Charles Dickens as he began in *A Tale of Two Cities*, where he said, "It was the best of times, it was the worst of times." Now how can a situation in which one lives life be both the best and the worst at one and the same time? The reason that opening line is

so highly regarded is that, when properly pondered upon, it makes one think. Charles Dickens, by that line, captured the mind and imagination of those readers who were thinking.

When does that time appear for us Christians? I think that it is the time when the person realizes he has indeed been called by God. What are you going to do with your life? Oftentimes God's calling turns one's life upside down, as we might say, and this is because God introduces challenges into our life that we never before considered facing. We would probably ignore or run from them, but now we know that we have to make a decision. Do we reject what God is saying and doing, teaching us, or do we accept it and go on knowing that what we are going to do in submitting to Him is going to be costly?

Most of you here have read Herbert Armstrong's autobiography. Do you remember the experience he had when his wife was being called and he was not yet called, and he began to realize that "she was doing something that I considered weird. Keep the Sabbath?" Now to a man of his not-so-humble personality, that was disturbing. "What are people going to think of me if my wife is doing what the Jews are doing?" He got so disturbed by this that he put in his autobiography that he threatened to divorce her. But he at least went so far as to accept the challenge and tried to prove her wrong.

It took God to open up his mind and break down his resistance, and look at what it did to his life. He never made a million dollars like he wanted to, though he got involved in something that was not highly respected at all because he was part of a really strange, weird religion.

In a way, Ecclesiastes 2:24-26 is a statement that is somewhat along those lines because this is Solomon's first step towards helping us understand that a major part of making the best of life is when one understands that a purpose is being worked out by our Creator.

Gradually we find out that the difficulties are the result of human nature rebelling against that purpose, and thus the difficulties that we have to make in order to overcome and grow through submission to God's will.

Besides the difficulties faced from within that purpose, God is also providing good things, and this is what Solomon is admitting here, and that the very best of life will be gleaned by those making every effort towards developing that relationship with God that God intends that we have with Him. Giving thanks is very important to this relationship, because it opens up a major window of understanding, especially in terms of our

general attitude of life and God's working within it.

Turn to I Thessalonians 5. Most of us begin to realize that accepting God's challenge and His calling is going to cause problems, and Paul says here:

I Thessalonians 5:17-18 Pray without ceasing, in everything give thanks; for this is the will of God in Christ Jesus for you.

Notice that he does not say, “for everything”, he says “in everything.” He means every circumstance of life—all the difficulties that we have to go through. God wants us to thank Him for what He is putting us through and that we are submitting our life to accepting, overcoming, and growing within. That is not always easy to do, because what we are going through—the difficulty that God may be leading us into and through—is going to be something that is going to require a number of sacrifices and may be difficult, personally, for us to accept.

I Timothy 4:4-5 For every creature [or creation] of God is good, and nothing is to be refused if it is received with thanksgiving; for it is sanctified by the word of God and prayer.

With that word “creature” being changed to “creation,” we understand that God creates circumstances for us to go through or for us to experience and that creation of those circumstances is good just as the creatures that he creates are good and it is not to be refused, but rather, like it says in I Thessalonians, received with thanksgiving.

Within these two verses, we see enough of Paul's counsel regarding using our life, but also do not forget that this is counsel to all of those with whom a relationship with God exists, but God is leading and working with others as well.

Solomon and Paul are saying essentially the same thing. “Be thankful for the gifts that God gives,” because regardless of the circumstance, there is always something to give thanks to God for. So despite the difficulties and the disappointments of this life, there is good reason for those having a relationship with God to give thanks.

So what is so important about giving thanks? Giving thanks is an expression of an important attitude; it is one of indebtedness and an acknowledgment of knowing that God is with us. Do we always know that God is with us regardless of our circumstance? So giving thanks to God serves as a constant reminder to those having a relationship

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with God that what is happening in their life has a positive purpose built within it because of with whom it is that is overseeing the events of our life and within those the refinements of our creation into the image of Jesus Christ will occur.

I want us to think about the experiences of some who did not accept these challenges. In Deuteronomy 8 is an example of the Israelites:

Deuteronomy 8:1-5 "Every commandment which I command you today you must be careful to observe, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land of which the Lord swore to your fathers. And you shall remember that the Lord your God led you all the way these forty years in the wilderness, to humble you and test you, to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep His commandments or not. [Notice this manipulation of their lives by God.] So He humbled you, allowed you to hunger, and fed you with manna which you did not know nor did your fathers know, that He might make you know that man shall not live by bread alone; but man lives by every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. Your garments did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years. You should know in your heart that as a man chastens his son, so the Lord your God chastens you.

"Chastens" means discipline for the purpose of forming and shaping. So Israel is an example of people who, though pulled out of Egypt and liberated by God, did not take advantage of the opportunities that were given to them. As we would say today, they blew it. It should be obvious to us that life in the wilderness was not easy, even for a slave people who were more accustomed to physical hardships than us. The rigors of their hardships in the wilderness turned out to be far different than what they expected, and so does it for us today.

These people were accustomed to the physical rigors of a slave people, but almost totally unaccustomed to the rigors of the psychological faith issues of having a new Master Who owned them, body and soul, and could not see what God saw in the distance. They had a far different set of objectives in their mind for themselves than God had. God's objective in turn became their responsibility to meet the demands of and that they did not do. They did not accept the challenges of His way.

Part of the reason for this being in there is for our instruction. What does Paul say was the reason that they failed? He says this in Hebrews 3 that they did not live by faith. They did not trust God. Too many unexpected things occurred to them that was part of

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their experience and they could not bring themselves to trust Him. So in the wilderness, their new Master and Owner demanded of them that they voluntarily choose to give of themselves in obedience to Him and they failed because they could not bring themselves to trust Him, someone they could not see. They failed because their faith broke down.

I feel certain that if God suddenly appeared with a whip in His hand, they would have jumped to obey Him. But to give themselves over to a God that they could not see and who was asking and commanding them to obey things that they could not grasp spiritually, they could not do it. So they failed because they literally did not grasp what was going on in their lives.

Now why did Joshua and Caleb succeed? Well God reports on them that they had a different spirit in them. They had the Holy Spirit to put it bluntly. Under the New Covenant God has given us the same spirit that Joshua and Caleb had. So they stand as a witness to us that by that Spirit they could walk by faith, and they did. They fulfilled their responsibilities and we know that God rewarded them very greatly and used both of them. The difference was what God gave them and why they responded.

It is right here that Solomon begins to come to our rescue. Now let us set the stage for what follows in this sermon.

Ecclesiastes 3:1 To everything there is a season, a time for every purpose under heaven.

The important thing here, for the purpose of this sermon, are the words “every purpose.” It is important to recall that as we move through the chapter, it becomes ever clearer that the purposes mentioned here in verse 1 are God's purposes. Solomon is not talking about the purposes that we dream up for ourselves, because we are out in the wilderness that God has designed for you and me, and it is His purposes that are important. It is all these events that are in this wonderful poem at the beginning of this chapter. They are things He designs. We have plenty of skill for designing them for ourselves. We have a mind, imagination, and we can dream things up, but is what we dream up as important as what God designed for us? Not only are we going to find out *what* He designed for us, but *when* it is designed to occur. It is not just the trial or the difficulty or the challenge itself, it is when it occurs.

I think you and I have been in the church long enough to understand and know that as we go along this road, some are up, some are down. Some are going through terrible

experiences with their health, while others are out there and can do just about anything. Who is playing the tune? That is what this chapter is about. We have got to come to realize that God is the One playing the tune that we dance to. Do we believe it? Do we believe it enough to really make Him a part of our life and to look for the operations that He has designed for us to go through? This is very important to our faith. This is where Israel failed. They could not accept Him as the Master of their faith because they did not have any. All those over twenty failed and died because they would not let God lead them.

What is being talked about here in chapter 3 is what God designs for us, and that poem in the beginning of the chapter applies to Him picking the time and the place to put us through these events. It does not mean that God's plans and so forth for us are limited to this at all, but it does give us a wonderful overview and why He inspired Solomon to write these things down.

Recall that the overall subject of this chapter (chapter 3), is that God is sovereign over time. We went through that in a previous sermon. This is a fact that I am convinced that many people in the church are completely unaware of, let alone even seriously considering, but time is involved in faith issues. I know that when you start to think about it, you wish the trial was over, but time just seems to go on. Time and God's training work together, so the use of our faith in God, and time, is very important.

I think that what this has resulted in is that there is a strong possibility that many in the church are resentful of God's management of time. We always want things to be over quickly, but God operates on a different time schedule than we do because He sees everything that is going on.

Let us go back and take a look at God's sovereignty as it is seen from Ecclesiastes, but I am going to dovetail it into the time since the scattering of the Worldwide Church of God membership into a multitude of smaller groups. Since this has occurred what should be our response so that we should have the proper understanding, perhaps at any given time?

We have to believe that God is sovereign all the time. In other words, He is actively and dynamically involved continuously with His purpose, not just part time while we are going through a trial, but He is sovereign all the time and He has the intelligence to use time, to manipulate time, to manipulate trials or whatever for thousands of people at the same time. He is not limited in the same way that we are, so in order to appreciate and receive the benefits begins when we fully believe that God is sovereign all the time. Our God is not a part time sovereign and He knows exactly where He wants His creation to

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end, and that creation includes you and me. Now let us go to Isaiah 46.

Isaiah 46:8-10 “Remember this, and show yourselves men; recall to mind, O you transgressors. Remember the former things of old, for I am God, and there is no other; I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all [not just part, but all] My pleasure,’

That is a huge statement that nobody, not even Satan and his horde of demons, and all of mankind, all the kings horses and all the kings men against Him, will be able to deter Him from reaching His goal. And He is not only going to reach it, but He is going to reach it right on schedule as He programmed. That is how dominant His control over His operations are.

Perhaps I can look at this a little differently than some of you because I have been involved in this kind of work when I was much younger, when I was working with the steel mill in construction. We were always working with time constraints on things, we had so many hours to get a job done and it had to be accomplished within that time because when that time came, that mill or whatever was going to start operating again.

How many times have you read in the newspapers in your city or heard announced that such and such construction project is going to be built and it is going to be completed in September of 2013. See, there is a time constraint there and the contractors involved are supposed to have it operational by the time that date arrives. Now this gets a little more complex because projects of that scope often have certain parts of the job that have to be completed and finished before the whole project is completed because, this has to be done before this can be done, then once that is done this can be attached to it, then the whole project can be accomplished. Do you see what I am getting at here?

God is not working on everybody with exactly the same time schedule. Remember God has power over death and He is going to bring these people He is working with to the growth position that He wants and they are going to die or pass from the scene and somebody else is going to take their place and so forth. Do you gather what I am talking about here? Think about the mind that is operating all these things, the Governor that is controlling everything that is going on.

When you think about it, who cannot stand in awe of Him? How long has He been doing this? I can show you in Hebrews 1 where it says, brethren, that you were called before the creation began. Let that sink in for a moment. You were predestined to be called

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and all of the great things in our life begin then. That is mind-boggling, to consider the mind working with billions and billions of people. That is the God that we are dealing with and He is nothing to push aside.

Along with all this is a tremendous love for us because we are His creation and He is shaping us to bring glory and honor to Himself, and time is very important, not only to us but also to Him because He is following the program that He has worked out before He even began the creation of the heavenly bodies. He knew the end from the beginning. He does this even giving us the free moral agency so that we can foul things up.

You see, He gives us free moral agency knowing that we are going to make bad decisions every once in a while and He will not stop that, but one thing that He can do is that He can regulate the impact that bad decision is going to have on yourself and others. We still have the right to choose to do the right thing.

So the end goal is not just the overall timing for the plan, but to also reach the goal that He has set for all of those He is working with in order to create them into the image of Jesus Christ to the level that is acceptable to Him. So the natural conclusion of one who believes this must be that God's control over His creation is such that despite all the forces arrayed against Him and despite all the frustrating events that may impact upon our emotions, everything is moving at the pace that He wants them to move.

Ecclesiastes 3:10-11 I have seen the God-given task ["God-assigned tasks, " just as Paul clearly says in Ecclesiastes 2:10] with which the sons of men are to be occupied. [Who occupied them with these tasks? It is God. "He," the personal pronoun] He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

With the tribulation advancing towards us He has surely given us a serious task to be occupied with, but He tells us that He has made everything beautiful in its time. Let us understand what Solomon said within this context regarding time. Solomon is not merely saying that God has made everything beautiful when things were first created, rather he is saying that God, using His sovereignty, has ruled everything beautifully ever since and that includes His management and use of time as well as the events. Do you think that your creation is in good hands? Do you stand in awe of God? That is why He is doing it this way. That is what He says in Ecclesiastes 3:14—that we stand in awe of Him with thanksgiving.

Again, go back to Herbert Armstrong. I heard him say one time that the way he started his prayers was like this: "Thank you that you are God!" God knows precisely when to break down or build up. He knows precisely when to keep and when to cast away, when it is a time for war or a time for peace. God's timing is beautiful and He is always right on time. God is telling us that He does everything in the perfect time in the universe. You can see that those things that I mentioned just now are within the poem there. There is a right time in everybody's life that they go through something like this so that God can create something while that is going on in your life.

So it is God who is sovereign over time and what is happening within time, all the time within His purpose. It is not merely important that we believe that He is sovereign, but that He is sovereign all the time and is sovereign over time itself. There is never a time that He relaxes His attention on achieving His purposes for our lives within His calling.

Those who live by faith know that He never disappears from the scene. Do you recall what Abraham named God following God's last-second interruption of his sacrifice of Isaac, when it appeared that God was nowhere present or even aware of what was going on? Abraham called Him "the God who will provide," meaning that He is never missing from the lives of His children. He is showing us that they are too important to His purpose for them and He not only provides, He does it at the right time. He showed up, did He not, before Isaac was sacrificed. That is a lesson.

Grasping this concept is very important to us as Christ's return gets closer and the stress of living by faith becomes more difficult because of the direct persecutions against Christianity, combined with the general loss of liberties that Americans have been steadily experiencing.

The message here in Ecclesiastes 3 is that God controls time and timing of events. Is there a time for conditions in the church as they now are? My view is that God seems to think so, or He would change them. As we apply these principals, I think that is what He is telling us. So we are coming to a question here: What is your attitude regarding how things are in the church? Well, if we look at it on a big scale, it is likely that there are some who are not pleased with conditions as they are in the church at this time. I am not saying that is bad, I am only saying that they are not pleased. In fact, you may not have been pleased with conditions in the church beginning years before the Worldwide Church of God actually disintegrated. There is nothing wrong with being displeased about conditions, but we might have asked at that time, "Where is God, and why is He not taking care of this?" Did we in any way question His operation of things within it?

Well, I know that if you are anything like me, I really did not question that because I did

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not have the knowledge then that I have now. So the way I look at things, I know it was far less complete then the way I am able to look at them now.

A lot of the stuff I am telling you is buried within the book of Ecclesiastes and I know that my understanding of that book, for your benefit, has been opened up to me by God. This book may be stuck in the Old Testament, but man, it is filled with important principals for New Testament Christians' lives.

Solomon went through things that no one else, perhaps in the history of man, ever went through, in numbers or intensity of the experiences that he went through. Can you imagine this man having to go through these things with a mind like he had? It is really something to think about because it gives you an appreciation—if Solomon's mind is this great, think of how great God's is!

We have to learn from this, so let us take a look back over two decades to review a number of things and this will include a couple of personal experiences of mine.

At the time when things began to become disturbed within the church, I lost my job within the Worldwide Church of God. I was pastoring the North Hollywood and Glendale congregations and they just swept them away because their distrust of me was growing. I was not doing anything directly against them, I just was not preaching what they wanted me to preach because I just kept going with the things that I had learned under Herbert Armstrong. So now it is about 1988-89. I was still allowed to preach for a bit and I began to preach a sermon that I titled "Do You See God?" When we are going through something that does not look too good, where is God? Do you see God? I do not mean do we literally see Him, but do we see Him involved in what is going on within our lives?

Well, I got to preach that sermon in the Ambassador Auditorium, because the pastor of the auditorium congregation resigned, so that just left me, so when I got the opportunity, that is what I preached—"Do You See God?" Things kept getting worse within the church and finally I resigned in January of 1992 and it was just a week or so later that the Church of the Great God began. It was about a year later that I began putting together the series of sermons on the subject of God's sovereignty. Those sermons, I do not believe, are anywhere near as deep as I could make right now, but I did learn and I hope to show you through these sermons that He is sovereign and He at least allowed our actions to come to pass, but nonetheless oversees and controls their impact and results.

Never lose sight of the fact that what is being worked out and into which we are being fitted is God's purpose, not ours. That is why I began this sermon the way that I did.

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These things that are mentioned in chapter 3, they are God's purposes and God's planning is involved in the things that are occurring in our lives.

Eventually it came to me to understand who it was that blew the Worldwide Church of God apart. It was not Satan—that was the common preaching, that Satan blew the Worldwide Church of God apart, but he did not. God did. I will give you some support for that so that you can at least see the principal that is involved here. Let us go back to Leviticus 26, the blessings and curses chapter. I only picked this up to give you an example of the prophecies and show what God clearly says that He will do.

Leviticus 26:16 I also will do this to you: I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it

He clearly says that “I” will do this”. He is not delegating at this point, but He is showing His sovereignty over Israel.

Leviticus 26:33 I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste.

Now let us go to I Kings 14. God's is speaking to Jeroboam through the prophet here.

I Kings 14:14-16 “Moreover the Lord will raise up for Himself a king over Israel who shall cut off the house of Jeroboam; this is the day. What? Even now! [Who is doing it? God is speaking through the prophet that He is doing it.] For the Lord will strike Israel, as a reed is shaken in the water. He will uproot Israel from this good land which He gave to their fathers, and will scatter them beyond the River [Euphrates], because they have made their wooden images, provoking the Lord to anger. And He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, who sinned and who made Israel sin.”

I hope that it is very clear to you, just from those examples, that God says He will do it, and the prophet says that God will do it. That was Israel, now let us go to Judah. In Jeremiah 9:9 where it says:

Jeremiah 9:9 Shall I not punish them for these things?” says the Lord. “Shall I not avenge Myself on such a nation as this?”

Jeremiah 9:11-16 “I will make Jerusalem a heap of ruins, a den of jackals. I will make the cities of Judah desolate, without an inhabitant.” Who is the wise man who may understand this? And who is he to whom the mouth of the Lord has spoken, that he may declare it? Why does the land perish and burn up like a wilderness, so that no one can pass through? And the Lord said, “Because they have forsaken My law which I set before them, and have not obeyed My voice, nor walked according to it, but they have walked according to the dictates of their own hearts and after the Baals, which their fathers taught them,” therefore thus says the Lord of hosts, the God of Israel: “Behold, I will feed them, this people, with wormwood, and give them water of gall to drink. I will scatter them also among the Gentiles, whom neither they nor their fathers have known. And I will send a sword after them until I have consumed them.”

The question at this point is, do you believe that God is sovereign over these nations and that He actually triggered these things to occur? Let us apply this to the church. Do you honestly think that anybody could do this to the church unless God ordered it to be done? Is God sovereign over His church? Who blew the Worldwide Church of God apart?

Let us go to Lamentations, because it is talking about Jerusalem and Jerusalem is the type, in the Old Testament, of the church. Jeremiah probably wrote these things and listen to what it says here.

Lamentations 2:1-4 How the Lord has covered the daughter of Zion with a cloud in His anger! He cast down from heaven to the earth the beauty of Israel, and did not remember His footstool In the day of His anger. The Lord has swallowed up and has not pitied all the dwelling places of Jacob. He has thrown down in His wrath the strongholds of the daughter of Judah; He has brought them down to the ground; He has profaned the kingdom and its princes. He has cut off in fierce anger every horn of Israel; He has drawn back His right hand [like a parent spanking the rear end of His children] from before the enemy. He has blazed against Jacob like a flaming fire devouring all around. Standing like an enemy, He has bent His bow; with His right hand, like an adversary, He has slain all who were pleasing to His eye; on the tent of the daughter of Zion, He has poured out His fury like fire.

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Seven) by John W. Ritenbaugh (<http://www.cgg.org>)

And it goes on and on here. It matters not whom God uses to physically carry out the scattering. This book, and most especially this chapter—Ecclesiastes 3—shows God's personal involvement in exercising His sovereign authority to make sure the scattering was accomplished as God Himself desired.

I had one more thing here. God not only did the scattering, He did it on His time schedule. Is there any possibility that someone other than God, like Satan or a group of mere men, pushed God aside and carried out the destruction of the unity and the scattering His church? No way, because even what God did to Israel and Judah, He did it to the church for His purpose and He did it in His timing.

Now before we finish, let us look briefly at the term “beautiful.”

Ecclesiastes 3:11 He has made everything beautiful in its time. Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from beginning to end.

This word “beautiful” in Hebrew is more closely related to the English word “right.” Thus the term is used in Hebrew as something that is fair; comely; beautiful. So in Song of Solomon 6:4 the young lady is given the same word that is used here, she is described as beautiful.

Song of Solomon 6:4 O my love, you are as beautiful as Tirzah, lovely as Jerusalem, awesome as an army with banners!

You might recall in Job 42 that same word is applied to Job's daughters, they were more beautiful than others in the nation.

Job 42:15 In all the land were found no women so beautiful as the daughters of Job; and their father gave them an inheritance among their brothers.

I think that we can see that as it is used in Ecclesiastes 3:11, Solomon is saying that God's timing and His overseeing the events and what He wants the events to accomplish indicated that what He is doing is good, it is beautiful. Everything God does is beautiful, because it is timed perfectly and it is done in such a way that it is going to produce that which is good.

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So as we experience the stresses of the tribulation as they begin to approach us, one can seriously wonder how something so painfully stressful can be good. It is so easy to become depressed, and perhaps what has happened to the attitudes of the people in the church in addition to doctrinal matters may sadden you deeply, but Jesus made the remark that “those who endure to the end will be saved” and that term endure is an acknowledgment of difficulties.

Let us consider an important and true fact regarding God, us, and the matter of faith. We cannot see the beauty of what God is doing yet, but we can have faith because we understand and believe the Scriptures. Despite the way that it looks on the surface, God's Word assures us that what He is doing is good, so good, in fact, that it is beautiful. What we must always remember is that God knows the end from the beginning. Isaiah 46:10 says that. And His overview captures the entire span of time and events.

Isaiah 46:10 I am God, and there is none like Me, declaring the end from the beginning, and from ancient times things that are not yet done, saying, ‘My counsel shall stand, and I will do all My pleasure,’

His overview captures the entire span of time and events. He sees the entire picture, it is already in His mind, but we, brethren, live in a time-owned universe and all we have to work with is a mere point of view. God sees everything. His perspective is entire and we see only a small box, but by faith we see that it is beautiful from His Word and therefore we live through this difficulty with hopeful regard that it is going to work out for everybody's good—mostly God's.