

Ecclesiastes Resumed (Part Twenty-One)

Paradoxes, Conundrums, and Wisdom

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I am going to begin this sermon (which is a continuation of the sermons that I have been giving on Ecclesiastes, it seems like almost forever), by giving you three definitions of terms that are going to be important for this message. I am not going to be able to finish this message today, because this particular one is going to take at least two sermons in order to do a reasonably good job.

The first term is 'paradox.' The prefix *para* suggests an opposite. The definition for paradox is something, a circumstance, a statement, an activity, or conduct that is contrary to expectation. Its synonyms are inconsistency, anomaly, contradiction, enigma, and even absurdity in certain contexts. The word paradox is the opposite of a rule, or an axiom.

The second term is 'conundrum.' Conundrum is a fairly closely related word to paradox, but its specific meaning is a riddle, or a puzzle. I am going to tie paradox with conundrum because a conundrum is what a paradox creates in one's mind or life. We will see this come out here in Ecclesiastes.

The third term I am going to be taking from Cruden's Concordance and here is what it says regarding 'wisdom.' "The word is used in the Scriptures not only for learning, but for skill in the arts, the instinct of birds and beasts [that is that wisdom that God has created it into these animals], discretion, and spiritual insight."

I am going to string about five scriptures together that are related to the subject that is going to come up here in the book of Ecclesiastes. The first one is in Exodus 31. The context is in regard to the building of the Tabernacle.

Exodus 31:1-6 Then the Lord spoke to Moses, saying; "See, I have called by name Bezalel the son of Uri, the son Hur, of the tribe of Judah. And I have filled him with the Spirit of God, in wisdom, in understanding, in knowledge, and in all manner of workmanship, to design artistic works, to work in gold, in silver, in bronze, in cutting jewels for setting, in carving wood, and to work in all manner of workmanship. And I, indeed I, have appointed with him Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan; and I have put wisdom in the hearts of all who are gifted artisans, that they may make all that I have command you."

I want you to note some things there that apply to you and me as well. In verse 2, God called Bezalel personally, I want you to start thinking of yourself, and you know very well no one comes to Christ except God calls him. He does it personally, He picks people out that He wants to make use of and that He wants to be created in His image. God gifted Bezalel with wisdom, understanding, and knowledge for the calling that He called him for.

God went further than that. He did the same for Aholiab. He gifted him and what becomes more important for you and me, verse 6 says, I indeed have appointed with him, Aholiab the son of Ahisamach, of the tribe of Dan, and I have put wisdom in the hearts of all the gifted artisans. Not just those two, everybody that He called and set apart, He gifted. They did not have big names like Bezalel and Aholiab, but they were part of those who were working on the Tabernacle.

We are going to go back into the New Testament as I establish a platform on which we are going to continue to build.

Ephesians 1:22-23 And He put all things under His feet, and gave Him to be head over all things to the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him, who fills all in all.

The church of which you are a part is part of the body of Jesus Christ.

Ephesians 2:19-21 Now, therefore, you are no longer strangers and foreigners, but fellow citizens with the saints and members of the household of God, having been built on the foundations of the apostles and prophets, Jesus Christ Himself being the chief cornerstone. In whom the whole building, being joined together, grows into a holy temple in the Lord.

In Ephesians 1, we see the metaphor being used—Christ's body functioning within His body doing a work. Christ works, and we are part of that body metaphorically, and we are working then with Him in that body. In chapter 2, the metaphor changes from the body of Jesus Christ to a building, which is what the Tabernacle was, so the functions change within that picture that the apostle Paul is making.

From here we are going to go to I Corinthians 12 where we will get back into thought to

Exodus 31, back to the gifts aspects.

I Corinthians 12:4-7 [Paul is talking about the church] Now there are diversities of gifts, but the same Spirit. There are differences of ministries, but the same Lord. And there are diversities of activities, but it is the same God who works all in all. But the manifestation of the Spirit is given to each one for the profit of all; . . .

You will see here a spiritual expansion of Exodus 31, where the gifts given were artistic things for the actual building of a building, now the function of the church is going to require people doing something different than actually building a building. But do not ever let this thought of building something escape your mind. You are building, with God's help, the church of God.

I Corinthians 12:8-11 . . . for to one is given the word of wisdom through the Spirit, to another the word of knowledge through the same Spirit, to another faith by the same Spirit, to another gifts of healings, by the same Spirit, to another miracles, to another prophecy, to another discerning of Spirits, to another different kinds of tongues, to another the interpretation of tongues. But one and the same Spirit works all these things distributing to each one individually as He wills.

He has gifted each and every person in order to carryout the spiritual function within the church just like He did the physical function in the building of the Tabernacle. There is a parallel at work here and it has something to do with wisdom. The very first thing that He said that He gave to Bezalel was wisdom. We saw in the definition that it defines skill in art.

The parallel is very clear between Exodus 31 and the building of the Tabernacle, and the construction of the church, except now the construction is flesh and blood, and moving toward a spiritual Temple for the Lord.

I Corinthians 12:18 But now God has set the members, each one of them, in the body just as He pleased.

Everybody is gifted and placed in the body. Now we are going to go from here to the book of Ephesians as we continue to construct this platform.

Ephesians 4:7-13 But to each one of us grace was given according to the measure of Christ's gift. Therefore He says: "When He ascended on high He led captivity captive, and gave gifts to men." Now this, "He ascended"—what does it mean but that He also first descended into the lower parts of the earth? He who descended is also the One who ascended far above all the heavens, that He might fill all things. And He Himself gave some to be apostles, some prophets, some evangelists, and some pastors and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of ministry [service], for the edifying [building up] of the body of Christ, till we all come to the unity of the faith and the knowledge of the Son of God, to a perfect man, to the measure of the stature of the fullness of Christ.

We there we see in very concrete terms, brief but nonetheless very clear, what we are building toward so that we all come to the measure of Christ to a perfect man, built of spiritual things. We have a platform there that we are going to continue on, that will be our foundation, so that provides the beginning of this sermon.

One of the aspects that we have been learning from this study into Ecclesiastes, is that the wisdom that Solomon is promoting throughout his life (but most especially in these last few chapters that we have covered), is that it is indeed sagacity, but it is a narrow intensely practical spiritual sagacity.

We have a tendency to think of wisdom in the sense that it is a quality that is possessed by those of higher educational levels. In other words it belongs to people who have achieved high levels of college attainment, maybe written some books, and have a whole string of distinguishing letters that follow their name. They are identified usually in a public place as doctor so and so, and this person is of such and such institution, or such and such a field of study, thus they are accorded a great deal of respect from their fellows and are given, as we might say, the highest seats that are available in our public position.

That distinction may be true and earned quite honestly, but that is not what Solomon is interested in. The reason is that though these people may indeed have rightly earned the respect of their fellows, the areas that Solomon is concerned about is day to day living of life regardless of whom one is as their life unfolds. That is important, so regardless of their station in life, this wisdom that he is talking about is applicable to their life.

In other words, biblical wisdom is achievable by anybody called of God, because God is

the One who gives it. When I say anybody, I mean anybody who is capable of reading, writing, and meditative thinking and doing. So if this is so, what I said is capable of anybody, because the source is God Himself and He does it within a relationship that He has called these people to. And just as sure as He gave it to Bezalel and all those who worked on the Tabernacle, He has gifted you to enable you to carry out the functions that He has appointed for you to carry out.

What we see here in the book of Ecclesiastes is biblical wisdom at its narrowest application. Though useful to anybody in all walks of life, it is primarily intended for those who already have a relationship with God. It is not really available to the world, this book. I have said many times, the book of Ecclesiastes is intended for *you*, and as I said many times in the past, it is not an easy study. It is a difficult book. Perhaps this will help you to think of this: God chose the man who might have been the most intelligent man who ever walked on the face of the earth to write it.

It is not an easy book. For most of us it is pretty difficult and requires a great deal of meditative thought regarding it, and research for others who have done quite a bit of study into it as well.

I began with the term sagacity, which entered the English language from Latin by way of the French language, but it appears to have much earlier roots in the Greek language. It basically indicates quickness of perception, soundness in judgment, and farsightedness.

If you remember, I began by saying biblical wisdom is indeed sagacity, but it is a very narrow application of sagacity that is pertaining to life as it is lived day by day. We are not talking about collegiate sagacity, we are not talking about sagacity pertaining to ordinary human relationships within a community. We are talking about biblical sagacity, and biblical sagacity indicates quickness of perception, soundness of judgment, and farsightedness.

It generally pictures a mind that is able to cut through the unimportant fluff of misleading false flags, and of a situation and grasp the essentials to the solution of a problem. We are talking mostly about spiritual problems, social problems, family problems—those kind of things that impact upon our life in Jesus Christ.

To the Christian it is essential that he understands that the wise solution in life is to always humbly submit to God in faith, even if we do not know what exactly the answer is. If we know enough, if we have faith enough to believe in God, we do what He says anyway and depend upon Him to reveal the details of the answer later, and He will. But when we do not know for sure, obey Him anyway, because it is going to be wise even

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though we do not know it is wise. We protect our faith by doing the right thing simply because He says so. God will educate us more deeply.

As we have been seeing in several of these last chapters, Solomon is giving us real-life examples of circumstances that arise in the world that present the Christian with choices that are either wise or foolish.

Often to one's carnality the foolish may appear more attractive on the surface. Now what Solomon has been doing for us in the entirety of his writings—the whole thing from the beginning—is showing us in bold strokes what godly wisdom is, and is not. He always eventually makes clear that which is wisdom, and that which is not, and he most frequently appears in those chapters in which he makes direct comparisons.

You might recall that chapter seven is a comparison chapter. That is where we left off, and we are on another comparison chapter. What Solomon does by saying this is better than that—what may not appear on the surface is why is this better than that—is he does not often tell us exactly *why* this is better than that. He simply makes a statement, this is better than that, and we have to fill in the details. That is where this book is kind of deep. I will tell you this: most of the time the answers are in the Scriptures somewhere else.

When we get to comparing scriptures with scriptures we can find the answer. So this is better than that, but he may not tell us flat-out why. Godly wisdom does not always appear on the surface to be the wiser, practical way, but it always is the wiser despite common human opinion.

Ecclesiastes 7 may be the book's most controversial chapter. This is because Solomon makes a number of confounding statements that run counter to common opinion. I will give you five of them right off the top that just appear in this one chapter.

1. The day of one's death is better than the day of one's birth.
2. It is better to go to the house of mourning than to the house of feasting.
3. Sorrow is better than laughter.
4. It is better to hear the rebuke of the wise than the song of fools.
5. The end of something is better than its beginning.

We are coming close to a paradox. In Ecclesiastes 7:15, he raises an issue that seems opposite of what things should be when he reports to us that he has seen the righteous die young, and the evil prosper and live to old age. He also warns us in that same group of scriptures, of being overly-righteous, and conversely not being overly-wicked. What does that mean? Is he saying that it is alright with God that we can be a *little* wicked, just do not get overly-wicked?

This what I mean that he says things that are confounding. There are logical and true godly answers to these seeming conundrums, these riddles that he poses. We may have to think deeply and may have to put aside a previously held opinions. We have already looked at the first five of these in previous sermons, but this study from this point on we are going to be looking into the last one, the paradox.

It is going to take the remainder of today and the next sermon which I will probably give January 17, it will take me that long to organize it. Please turn to Ecclesiastes 7:15.

Ecclesiastes 7:15 I have seen all things in my days of vanity: there is a just man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness. Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise: why should you destroy yourself? Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish: why should you die before your time? It is good that you grasp this, and also not remove your hand from the other; for he who fears God will escape them all. Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers of the city. For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin. Also do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. For many times also your own heart has known that even you have cursed others.

The situation stated in verse 15 is a paradox. It is an irregularity from the way that one would normally think would exist in a relationship with God. The sinner prospers but the righteous has all manner of difficulty in life.

Now would it not be more normal and natural for one to think that it would be the sinner who would have difficulty and the righteous one a prosperous and smooth running life? This circumstance may have the potential to establish a situation that makes the carnal conclude that being evil, because it can be very profitable, is the better way of life. This especially seems so when the evil one's life goes on to old age in relative quiet, he is honored by the world, and seems to have more than sufficient wealth, while in contrast a righteous person dies early and even that may follow a long period of difficult

persecution by those in a position to do so.

If this is the way it is going to be why worship God, why be righteous? You see the conundrum is building. This is one of those passages that sets preachers and other researchers to pacing the floor in their studies. I can tell you that I did a bit of research, more than I normally would have to do to come up with an answer that seems to be fitting to the context that we are dealing with, and I think that it is a right one.

When you run into this kind of a passage, the temptation in a preacher is very strongly to say, "Oh well, we didn't need that anyway, we won't even talk about it, we'll come back a little later or something, maybe when I have more ideas about how to do it, how to explain it." Either that or most commentators, people who search into the Bible, actually kind of brush it off with an easy answer.

Solomon is talking about self-righteousness, but it is such a narrow area of self-righteousness and yet when we go through it you are probably going to say you experienced it. As we go through it, there is a lot of ground laying here so we can understand it. You probably did not realize that you actually may have come to the right answer because God gave it to you, at least enough to get by at the time.

Most of these commentators do not have the contact with God to really find the right explanation. Some of them have, I am convinced that they got the right answer, and you have experienced it.

I will give you a series of varied translations of just one verse, the tail end of verse 18, that helps you to understand the difficulty that we are dealing with here.

Ecclesiastes 7:18 [New Revised Standard Version] "It is good that you should take hold of the one without letting go of the other for the one who fears God shall succeed with both of them."

What you are going to have trouble with is the antecedents. What are they talking about? Not only that, there is also trouble with the way they are translated.

Ecclesiastes 7:18 [New International Version] "whoever fears God will avoid all extremes."

One of the extremes was to be a little *unrighteous*. We do not ever want to be a little evil.

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The bad translation is just avoid all extremes. On the other hand, you do not want to avoid being as righteous as you can. Was Christ extreme in His righteousness? He was right on, yet He did not live a life that was extreme.

The New International Version adds a footnote on that verse, “or will follow them both.” What does that mean? You have to know the antecedents. If you do not rightly interpret the antecedent it is not going to make any sense at all.

Ecclesiastes 7:18 [New American Standard Version] “For the one who fears God comes forth with both of them.”

By now you are probably confused, and it is understandable. Look how much trouble they are having translating this verse. The way Solomon wrote, and the context that he put these things in, it is not easily found what he meant. It is not very clear to what the one and the other refers to. Is it referring to the righteousness of verse 16, or the wickedness of verse 17? Does this mean that one is to follow both righteousness and wickedness? What is one to do when there is such a substantial disagreement regarding even translation?

As you are probably beginning to see, this section can raise all kinds of questions in one’s mind and this is why I said that this is probably the most difficult chapter in the whole book because it raises so many issues that seem contrary to the way one would normally think.

Another thing that we might ask here is, “Where is God in this picture where the unrighteous prosper and the righteous are not prosperous?” Is God being unfair? Does He care about the circumstance that His people are in?

I hope I am helping you to see that there is more to the circumstance that Solomon is writing on here than meets the eye. The reason why I said earlier that the book of Ecclesiastes requires a great deal of meditation and research to understand what is probably the most intelligent man who ever lived had in his mind when he was writing these things. Yet God got him to write the book of Ecclesiastes for you and me—the answers are in the book—and we will begin to see as we go through this that others who followed Solomon followed what Solomon said, and they gave answers to these things.

I have read that commentators of some prominence claim this is in relation to prospering, that God has not given promises of prosperity under the New Covenant.

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Here these commentators are thinking of the New Covenant and they are not really thinking of the Old Covenant as being connected to the rest of the Bible, but it is just as much a part of God's Word as the New Covenant is. God is God, He is faithful, He is true, and what He says in one part of the Book, unless it is completely canceled by Him in His Word, is still applicable in the New Covenant.

That is the way you have to approach God. Unless *He* has done away with it, it is still there for our good. That is why Jesus, at the very beginning of His preaching, said to not think that He came to destroy the law or the prophets, not even one little jot or tittle is done away. It is still valid and it is still to be used by God's people. It may not be absolutely essential for salvation, but it is there for our good so that our full understanding is made complete by stuff that we do, or even not do, like wear tassels. That is there for some good solid reason, not that we have to follow through with it in actually doing it at this time but there is a bit of wisdom that is gracious and good for life.

That is where we have to find answers to what we are talking about here—it is scattered in other parts of the Bible. God completed the Book, He filled in the answers for these things like this, so that we can understand and make use of this conundrum that we find here in Ecclesiastes 7:15.

God's promises regarding prosperity live and abide forever, so the reason I have gone into this in some detail is that the prosperity issue in verse 15 applies to right now. It applies under the New Covenant, and it is just as possible for a person who is a Christian to be going through a bad time and seems to be being punished, seems to be getting all kinds of terrible things happening, but where is God? God promises to prosper, why is not taking care of these people when “Joe the gambler” has everything is going well for him?

A carnal person will look at that and he will say, it is better to be evil, why mess with God? It all depends on what is important. If a person does not have faith, then they can be easily pushed aside by the very kind of circumstance that we are reading about.

Whatever is happening in verse 15 is dangerous to a Christian. Why do I say that? Because two times Solomon says, “why will you destroy yourself?” There is a danger here. It is in a narrow area of life but it is dangerous if we do not handle it correctly.

The first thing we have to understand is this: we have to begin to build on this by understanding where God is in this picture? God is sovereign over His creation, and we saw this very early in the book of Ecclesiastes as we were going through it, especially chapter 3, where Solomon shows very clearly that God is doing, He is working.

He established that way back in chapter 3 so that there would be a foundation for the people of God, studying the book of Ecclesiastes. God is never out of the picture and if there is a righteous person who appears to be being punished and he is going through great difficulty in his life, but his neighbors, who are wicked, are prospering, God is first of all very, very much aware of it. He is never out of the picture, He is aware of what the righteous are going through.

One thing that has to be resolved is that when the righteous are going through a great difficulty it is highly unlikely they are being punished. It is just a test. It might be very difficult but they are not being punished, and there is a good spiritual reason that I can show you, when we get there, that they are not being punished. They are being tested, just as surely as any of you went through college and as you went through each year the tests got more difficult, the studies got more difficult, there was more required of you as you were going through them than there was when you were in eighth grade.

So are you being punished because the courses are difficult? No, it is just difficult. For the place that God has put you into the body it requires the kind of difficulty that He is leading you through and *you are not being punished*. That has to be clearly anchored in your mind, because if it is not, your faith is going to weaken and you might just quit. This is where the danger comes, by misinterpreting the difficulty of the test that you are going through and think you are being punished and instead you just give up, lose your faith.

This is why twice, Solomon warned us, “why will you destroy yourself?” Why will you die? Do not misinterpret this conundrum, this riddle of why the wicked prosper and the righteous do not. The first thing is, if you find yourself in this kind of a situation, you do not want to miscalculate God's involvement. He is there, “I will never leave you, nor forsake you” is what He says. He is there, but He is putting you through a difficulty for your own good and for the good to serve in the ministry to the church. You have a place there and it is to be fulfilled, and it is something that you need training in spiritual areas to go through. Do not make that miscalculation that you are being punished.

One more thing that I want to make sure you understand is, when you see a situation like Solomon is describing here, God is *directly* involved. He tells us that His eye is on the sparrow. If His eye is on the sparrow, do you think He does not know what His *children* are going through? That is not thinking righteously, it is not thinking wisely. That is why Jesus gave that illustration so that we would understand that if His eye is on the sparrow, He *never* loses sight of His children.

He is there, He is involved, He knows exactly what we are going through and He knows the psychological pressures that are coming on you as a result of all the wicked people

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around you seeming to prosper, and are in good health, and everything is going along fine, they have plenty to eat, they are laughing and having a good time, and here you are struggling.

Point number one, is that if you find yourself in that position, God knows very well what you are going through. He promises He will never leave us nor forsake us. What this leads to is, we do not want to be guilty of misjudging His involvement. This can go one of two ways: we misjudge it and accuse Him of not caring, or we misjudge it in the sense where He is not being fair upon us. Either way we can lose, and either one is a misjudgment.

Our judgment then must begin fully knowing that there is no complacency in His government at any time, or in any place, and though the righteous one may die early in life, who knows the totality of the judgment that lies beyond the grave for either the righteous one or the wicked. There is a time and a place for judging but we have to stop short of being in a spirit of accusation either toward God or, in a sense, underestimating our own lack of faith. There might be a lot more there than we think.

We can make a bit of a conclusion here. The basic instruction in this verse is to be cautious about making judgments regarding a person's spiritual standing before God, and the morality of what we might see them in their day-to-day surroundings. This supplies us with a clear insight as to why Jesus cautioned us regarding judging. We can only go so far in our judgment, whether it is an individual or a circumstance that is going on.

A very clear example of the pitfalls contained in doing this is found in the Parable of Lazarus and the Rich Man. In that particular case the one man was well off and could easily have been judged as being favored by God because of his apparent prosperity, but which man was the one truly favored by God? It was Lazarus. The one who looked down and out, the poor guy, the beggar.

There is a powerful lesson there, which is we have to draw a line in our judgment and make sure that we do not go too far, and take it into a wrong conclusion. Thus the major lesson can be drawn beginning in verse 15, that we do not allow ourselves to be drawn into self-righteous conclusions regarding the people and misjudgment involving God's involvement. Yes He is there, Yes He is fully aware, Yes He knows what you are going through. He knows what the other person is going through, and He is having His opportunity to do some creating that might be beyond our sight, beyond our minds, but it is going on.

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I am going to go back into Ecclesiastes 7 once again, only I am going to go back to verse 13, and I am going to read the whole thing because it is essential for building a platform for understanding another aspect of verse 15.

Ecclesiastes 7:13-22 Consider the work of God . . .

That is what we were just talking about, this paradox that is going on, and we have to give thought to God, what is He doing? Is He aware? Did He form this circumstance or is He just judging what our reaction is going to be to it?

Ecclesiastes 7:13-22 . . . for who can make straight what He has made crooked? In the day of prosperity be joyful, but in the day of adversity consider: Surely God has appointed the one as well as the other, so that man can find nothing that will happen after him. [This is leading into the paradox.] I have seen all things in my days of vanity: There is a just man who perishes in his righteousness, and there is a wicked man who prolongs his life in his wickedness. Do not be overly righteous, nor be overly wise: why should you destroy yourself? Do not be overly wicked, nor be foolish: why should you die before your time? It is good that you grasp this, and also not remove your hand from the other; for he who fears God will escape them all. Wisdom strengthens the wise more than ten rulers of the city. For there is not a just man on earth who does good and does not sin. Also do not take to heart everything people say, lest you hear your servant cursing you. For many times, also, your own heart has known that even you have cursed others.

Understanding what we are looking into here it is helpful if we understand that there is a sub-theme that runs through much of this book. Recall that Solomon stated right from the beginning that vanity of vanities, all is vanity. That is an overall judgment regarding the way life appears to be.

I want you to reflect on that for just moment. At the beginning of this chapter Solomon gave us several unusual statements regarding some of life's experiences and you know what they were, all of those are true within Solomon's theme but still they remain as unusual statements. In the statement in verse 15 and the following remaining verses there is another parallel circumstance for which there is no easy answer. So it is another place where it seems that life is just simply another vanity.

There is something else that Solomon is saying here. Through the entire writing Solomon is explaining something that we all grasp vaguely, but we need support for us to understand. It is this: the general way of life now is the way God intends it to be. God rules, God is aware of what is going on, God has the power to change things, but if God is doing any changing He is allowing it to get worse. Life now is the way God intends that it be.

I do not know how long God planned for what happened in 1991-92, but God makes it very clear to me that He blew the Worldwide Church of God apart. It was not Satan, God did it. Nobody could do that except that God organized it so that it could be done. He made it go in that direction by releasing the restraints that He had on those who were tearing the church apart, and allowed them to work on their plan and blow it apart. He did the same thing to Israel. You can read it in the book of Lamentations, especially in chapter 2. He really makes it clear, He said, "I did it," "I" blew Judah apart, they thought the Babylonians did it, all they were was a tool. God makes it clear, "I" blew it apart.

The way things are now, God blew the Worldwide Church of God apart. I think I know part of the answer why. The reason was He wants to see where you and I stand. Is our faith in Him or is our faith in man? Is our faith in a congregation or is our faith in Jesus Christ? Where is our faith? He wants to see where we stand, He wants to see whether we are going to continue in the faith regardless of the way it looks on the surface.

That may seem to you like a conundrum, like a paradox, that God would blow it apart, but this is where we have to begin our thinking. Nobody can do what happened to the Worldwide Church of God, if indeed it was the true church, except God Himself. No Satan could blow it apart, unless He gave him permission to do it. Therefore it came from God, it was His will.

That is what we are dealing with here. Please turn to Ecclesiastes 3. This is one of the first things that Solomon puts down here so that we can understand a little bit more with more faith in what is going on.

Ecclesiastes 3:9-11 What profit has the worker from that in which he labors? I have seen the God-given task with which the sons of men are to be occupied. He has made everything beautiful in its time. [When God does something it is done right.] Also He has put eternity in their hearts, except that no one can find out the work that God does from the beginning to the end.

Who rules? God does, that is lesson number 1. Our faith is in Him. He can do things perfectly, and He will do it when He wants to do it, He is never out of the picture. If it is paradoxical to us, that is where we start. God is on the job, God rules, God is aware, we cannot misjudge this thing. Continue on with life and grow in understanding so that we can see more of what He is doing.

Ecclesiastes 7:23 All this I have proved by wisdom. I said, "I will be wise" but it was far from me. As for that which is far off and exceedingly deep, who can find it out? I applied my heart to know, to search and seek out wisdom and reason of things, to know the wickedness of folly, even of foolishness and madness.

Ecclesiastes 7:29 Truly, this only I have found: That God made man upright but they have sought out many schemes.

Solomon did not know all of the answers, and that is a parallel of what he said In Ecclesiastes 3:11.

Ecclesiastes 8:16-17 When I applied my heart to know wisdom and to see the business that is done on earth, even though one sees no sleep day or night, then I saw all the work of God, that a man cannot find out the work that is done under the sun. For though a man labors to discover it yet he will not find it; moreover, though a wise man attempts to know it, he will not be able to find it.

What am I telling you? The sub-theme that runs through the book of Ecclesiastes: Solomon is telling us we are never going to know all of the answers. Why? There is an answer to why. Because God does not give us all of the answers, it forces us to prove to Him that we believe Him even though we do not have answers. That is the issue.

You know very well when you were a little child, five and six years old, when mom and dad were doing things, they were doing things that were above your pay grade, and you did not know what was going on. That is transferable in type to God Himself and if things look bad in the world now, it is the way God wants them to be right now. It is His creation and sometimes that is hard to bear because it is so miserable out there. We have to deal with it, that is one of the paradoxes of life. That principle fits into verse 15. There are reasons why the righteous perish when they are young and they are not

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being prospered, while the wicked people seem to go right on swimmingly, smiling, everything is going their way. God is aware, God knows.

We will put a nail in this thing about what kind of a circumstance that we have to operate under. He has gone through all this stuff in the book of Ecclesiastes, then he says, let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter.

Ecclesiastes 12:13 Let us hear the conclusion of the whole matter: Fear God and keep His commandments, for this is man's all [the whole duty of man].

That is the heart and core of our life with God. Even though we do not have all of the answers we know Him, we know His love, we know His kindness, we know what He is doing in terms of our life and He has a great future for us, and we are not going to get the answers completely until the time comes for Him to reveal it.

So He says, in the meanwhile fear God and keep His commandments, for this is the whole duty of man.

Ecclesiastes 12:14 For God will bring every work into judgment, including every secret thing, whether it is good or evil.

God is going to give us the answers but it going to come in His good time. Lesson number 1 in this sermon is this: the paradoxes are there, the conundrums are there, the riddle is there. Do not worry that we do not know a complete answer. The complete answer will not come until God is ready to give it to us. In the meanwhile, we continue to live by faith.

It is natural for a man, woman too, that we do not want to give our all unless we already know why. With God we will not always know why, except in a generality, and that is He is requiring this of us because it is good for us and it is good for His purpose and that is far as He is going to go right now.