



CHRISTOPHER J. H. WRIGHT



HEARING THE
MESSAGE
OF ECCLESIASTES

QUESTIONING FAITH IN A BAFFLING WORLD

A PDF COMPANION TO THE AUDIOBOOK

ZONDERVAN

Hearing the Message of Ecclesiastes

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Zondervan, 3900 Sparks Dr. SE, Grand Rapids, Michigan 49546

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THE MEANING OF LIFE— IS THERE ANY?

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Have you ever been asked (or asked yourself) the key question of 1:3? What sort of answers have you come up with? Why does the question matter?
2. Discuss the different ways that Qoheleth tried (and failed) to find meaning and satisfaction in life in 1:16–2:11. What are the modern equivalents of these? And what others would you add that people try today? Why do they not provide any ultimate meaning for life?
3. There is a tension between Qoheleth's *emotions* in 2:17–18 and his *convictions* in 2:24–25. Do you ever feel the same tension? Do you know people who express the same kind of tension or confusion? How can we live with it?

MYSTERIES OF TIME AND INJUSTICE

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. Do you find the rhythms of life (times and seasons, 3:1–8) reassuring, or just boring—or what? Why so?
2. In what ways do you find among non-Christian friends and colleagues that “God has put eternity in their hearts”? And how can we respond to that?
3. Why were injustice and oppression so troubling to Qoheleth (3:16–4:3)? Should they be more troubling to us than they usually are? And, in the face of global injustice, can we overcome the tension between the faith conviction of 3:17 and the pessimistic uncertainty of 3:19–21?

AMBIGUITIES OF WORK, POLITICS, WORSHIP, AND WEALTH

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. What evidence or examples have you seen in the world of work of the kind of evils that Qoheleth observes in 4:4–8? How can we resist such dangers in our own working lives, whether in the world “out there” or in our so-called Christian work?
2. How do the warnings of 5:1–7 challenge our own church’s practices of worship and our participation in them? What might “the sacrifice of fools” mean?
3. Would you agree with 5:10? How can we guard against the uncertainties and dangers of wealth that Qoheleth uncomfortably exposes—and yet still affirm 5:19?

THE DARKEST HOUR

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION OR DISCUSSION

1. Ecclesiastes 7:1–10 lists several paradoxes, where something negative can be surprisingly “better” than its opposite (when you think about it). Have you found other examples in your own experience where that is true to life? Has it led you to a better conclusion than Qoheleth offers in 7:14?
2. In the light of Qoheleth’s words about the tensions and dangers of political life in 8:1–9, can you identify and discuss some current issues in which Christians involved in public and political life have to cope with conflict between their principles and the circumstances surrounding them?
3. Discuss your reactions to Qoheleth’s brutal frankness about death in 9:1–6 (please be sensitive as you do so to any bereaved members of your group). Do you find it:
 - Refreshingly honest?
 - Repellingly insensitive?
 - True, but not the whole truth?

REJOICE AND REMEMBER!

QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION AND DISCUSSION

1. In our evangelism, are we too glib in the assurances and promises we make to people without acknowledging the unpredictable stuff of life, from which believers are not exempt (10:1–11:6)? In what ways?
2. What would it look like for us to live as Christians in the world, as people who can enjoy life responsibly (11:8–9) and who also remember and share the story we are in (12:1–7)? What picture of God would such a way of living offer to the watching world?
3. The book of Ecclesiastes, and especially its ending, challenges us to *accept and live with* the tension between what we firmly believe (e.g., 12:13–14) and what we see and experience in the world (e.g., 12:8). In what ways is this important?
 - **Pastorally:** How does it help us be more sensitive, and less glib, to others in their real struggles?
 - **Evangelistically:** How does it help us to be “real” and handle the questions people throw at us—which are often exactly the ones Ecclesiastes asks?
 - **Personally:** How has this study affected your own faith in the midst of life’s journey?