

May 31

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Ecclesiastes 3, 11 & 12 & 1 Kings 11

There is 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, P

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. (Ecclesiastes 3:1-8 NIV84)

"Turn! Turn! Turn! (to Everything There Is a Season)", often abbreviated to "Turn! Turn! Turn!", is a song adapted entirely from the Book of Ecclesiastes in the Bible (with the exception of the last line) and put to music by Pete Seeger in 1959. Seeger waited until 1962 to record his own version of it, releasing the song on his *The Bitter and the Sweet* album on Columbia Records.[1]

The song became an international hit in late 1965 when it was covered by the American folk rock band The Byrds, reaching #1 on the Billboard Hot 100 chart and #26 on the UK Singles Chart. Many biblical scholars believe that Ecclesiastes 1:1 implies King Solomon (born c. 1011 BC) as the book's author, but regardless of its precise origins, The Byrds' version of the song easily holds the record for the number 1 hit with the oldest lyrics.

As you read Ecclesiastes you have explored further the world of the philosopher who reasons without the benefit of God's revelation. Remember as you are reading this Book, that while it contains many accurate observations and much honest truth, that truth is given to us from the perspective of the man who reasons without the benefit of God's revelation. Solomon knew God, he knew about God's revelation, but he is writing this as a worldly philosopher who has chosen to explore all the other possible avenues of providing purpose and meaning for his life. That is why the phrase "under the sun" keeps recurring. "Under the sun" is a kind of code phrase for that which can be understood, and that which can be discovered, without the benefit of God's special revelation.

I wonder if you noticed verse 11 of chapter 3 as you were reading? The preacher says, "He has made everything beautiful in its time. Time is mentioned in ten different ways in verses 1-11. Solomon reviews the cycles of life and then he looks out to eternity or time after this life.

He writes, "He has also set eternity in the hearts of men; yet they cannot fathom what God has done from beginning to end." Whatever the verse means, it certainly means that we, all of us, by nature, have an understanding of God that simply cannot be erased by sin, or by culture; it is there -- we have this longing for the God who created us.

Today we finish the Book of Ecclesiastes, and hopefully we have fit together the main parts of that Book and the main ideas that the preacher has been trying to communicate to us.

For the purpose of helping us to remember the message, let's see if we can recall together some of the main theme of his quest for meaning 'under the sun.' Remember that phrase, 'under the sun,' refers to the knowledge and the experience and the understanding that can come by considering all of life from the viewpoint of a human being without the benefit of special revelation that comes from God. 'Under the sun' is the realm of creation apart from revelation.

Today you read I Kings chapter 11 and came to the sad conclusion of the life of King Solomon. Yesterday we closed with the observation that Solomon did not finish well. It could be said of Saul, Solomon, to a lesser extent it could even be said of David, Samuel and Eli. They all finished with less strength than they should have. In the case of the latter three, it was because they failed to do a good job in rearing their children.

What went wrong? He was the wisest man in the world, and by the end of his life he is horribly off track!! What happened? You may remember the verses I pointed out to you some time ago from the Book of Deuteronomy in which the future kings of Israel were warned not to multiply wealth, horses or wives. Well Solomon didn't pay much attention to that -- in this he greatly sinned.

His wisdom was a marvelous gift from God, but he relied on it too much. He relied so much on the gift, that he forgot the Giver. His wealth created the very same problem. Instead of remembering that God was the source of his wealth, he came too much to believe that his wealth could purchase anything he needed. Though he put a great deal of wealth into the Temple, he clearly believed that he had the right to keep most of it for himself. That too was a very big mistake, a mistake for which his son paid in full. He should have shared his wealth with his people. Rehoboam, following his father's example, felt no compulsion to do that either. His wives were the biggest mistake of all, for they led King Solomon into idolatry.

I have to believe it didn't start that way. I believe that probably, at the beginning, it was just a cultural accommodation to a Sidonian princess who really wanted to have just a little place where she could, then the Ammonite wife wanted a place to worship Molech. We know that human sacrifices were involved in the worship of Molech, though I doubt they were ever allowed in Jerusalem. Then came the princess from Moab and she wanted a place to worship Chemosh, the detestable god of the Moabites.

Then one temple came to be built for nearly everyone of Solomon's foreign wives and the whole thing was out of control. Jerusalem, which should have been the center of worship to the One True God, became a virtual supermarket of gods and goddesses, with temples scattered all over the hills. What a travesty!

God gave Solomon so many, many precious gifts. They were his to use, his to keep, but always there was to be the understanding that they were on loan from the One who is the giver of all gifts. Honor and worship was to be given to that One. Each of the gifts was to be used with the understanding that ultimately, though they were Solomon's on loan, they were to be used for the glory of the One who had given them. That is what Solomon forgot. At some point along the way, he began to think that the gifts were his and his alone. The gifts had been given to him, and he had no obligation to use them for the glory of the Giver. When Solomon began to think that way, he sealed his fate. Solomon fell victim to the sin of presumption.