

IV. The Great Themes of EcclesiastesA. Coming to this section

Much of the rest of our time in this course is spent under this general and rather ambiguous heading. We treat the major themes, some special concepts, some particular passages for exegesis, a few of the "tough" texts, and run through some supplementary material. It is a time for reading, discussion, and thinking through the message of the book and eventually we will come up with some suggested sermon outlines.

B. A Necessary reminder

The essential clue to the understanding of any biblical book is in the repeated reading of the text and the fuller understanding of the historical and contextual materials. The text is sufficiently re-read when the student can reconstruct it in one's own mind. This is different from mere memorizing (I am not opposed to that) and is an attempt to have such a firm mental grasp on the material that one knows how it is arranged and organized in the bounds of one's thinking. When this is done, perhaps only a few readings are necessary, the major understanding problem is within solution. This concept of reading and re-reading cannot be overstressed.

C. The Major themes of Ecclesiastes

I enumerate four major themes which will be treated quickly...in the order in which I feel competent to treat them! Certainly there are more than four ideas but these are major concepts of special interest to the original writer and to those of us who study his work today.

1. Life Needs are Not Met By Human Enterprise

Again, we are not saying that no needs are met by these things. But by life needs we mean the necessary materials that give life a sense of satisfaction and completeness, a concept of fulfillment and attainment, and the conclusion of the writer is that the enterprise in which we indulge do not give this to us. They may meet material needs and temporal requirements...but these are passing and you may die, unhappy, in the midst of the actual fulfillment of many of these materials. In fact, you may live unhappy and yet be surrounded by them. I am reminded of Commodore Vanderbilt's son, heir to a massive estate and builder of the largest private residence in modern history, and his sad note that he had not known a happy day in his entire life. (The estate is Biltmore in Asheville, NC and the account is given in a paper prepared by the estate for visitors.) But we must be more particular with "human enterprise" and so we note the following areas, most of which are familiar to us.

a. Learning

To our chagrin we discover that education does not fulfill the life need. If anything it may take from it. Following are a few key scriptures that attest to this fact. These are in summary of the mass of material the writer presents to this point.