

Under the Sun

This post has been revised considerably with the addition of scriptures from I Kings which demonstrates a common attitude of people concerning God. Revision date: 30 May, 2008

For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. (*Ecclesiastics 9:5*)

The above is one of those terribly misused verses by some for the support of certain doctrines. Most notably, the Jehovah's Witnesses use it to justify their doctrine of annihilation of the soul. There are a number of ways to argue against this doctrine, and considerable Scriptural evidence exists to refute it. However, with this regard to the usage of this verse to support any doctrine that states the dead cease to exist, or are not conscious of anything at all, all that is required is a careful examination of Ecclesiastics and the immediate context of the verse.

Before beginning, we must understand that everything in Scripture has a context. Primarily, there are two contexts that man is familiar with which are expressed in Scripture: Physical and Spiritual. Along with these two contexts come perspective, or point of view. What may look one way to one person, may appear totally different to another, even though they are observing the very same object, but from different perspectives. Even so it is in Scripture. There is the point of view, or perspective of man, and the point of view of God. The Scripture is faithful to relate both points of view to us, with the LORD God's perspective being preeminent.

For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the LORD. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my

thoughts than your thoughts. (*Isaiah 55:8-9*)

Since the vast majority of the Scriptures are from the perspective of the LORD God, most folks take it that all the Scriptures are from the perspective of the LORD and then apply that accordingly, just as they try to make the Scriptures entirely physical or entirely spiritual and then interpret them. However, this is not the case with the Scriptures. While it is absolutely true that all Scripture is by the inspiration of the Holy Ghost, not all Scripture is focused exclusively on things from the LORD's perspective, just as not all Scripture is spiritual in its context, or all physical. Were the Scriptures to be all from the perspective of the LORD, we would have little connectivity, or relationship with the things expressed in Scripture as we do not think like the LORD God at all.

This is the difference with Ecclesiastes. Ecclesiastes begins, and is permeated with a single phrase that establishes its context: *under the sun*. This phrase occurs 27 times in the book of Ecclesiastes, and is found in all but three chapters. Moreover, this particular phrase appears only in Ecclesiastics, and nowhere else in Scripture. In the three chapters in which it does not appear, chapter seven is plainly focused on the actions of men and mentions that wisdom is profitable to them that see the sun, chapter eleven mentions that we know not what evil is upon the earth, and that light is sweet and it is a pleasant thing to behold the sun, and chapter twelve focuses upon the finality of death and reminds the youth to remember their Creator while they are young.

By the above, it is plain to see that the focus of Ecclesiastes is man's perspective. Even though we find considerable mention of God in Ecclesiastes, we never find the terms "LORD," or "LORD God" once. This indicates the addressing of God in an almost "generic" sense. There seems to be no personal relationship with the LORD, or personal knowledge of Him. Instead, we see the LORD addressed as God in

the sense of knowing about God, but not knowing Him in the personal way that His children know Him. This really should not surprise us as Romans, chapter one does plainly tell us that everyone knows that God exists, whether they wish to acknowledge it or not as the LORD put that knowledge in man:

For the wrath of God is revealed from heaven against all ungodliness and unrighteousness of men, who hold the truth in unrighteousness; Because that which may be known of God is manifest in them; for God hath shewed it unto them. For the invisible things of him from the creation of the world are clearly seen, being understood by the things that are made, even his eternal power and Godhead; so that they are without excuse: Because that, when they knew God, they glorified him not as God, neither were thankful; but became vain in their imaginations, and their foolish heart was darkened. (*Romans 1:18-21*)

We find additional evidence for the way man commonly addresses God in a generic sense in I Kings, chapter 18 when Elijah challenged the priests of Baal before the children of Israel:

And Elijah came unto all the people, and said, How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him. And the people answered him not a word. Then said Elijah unto the people, I, even I only, remain a prophet of the LORD; but Baal's prophets are four hundred and fifty men. Let them therefore give us two bullocks; and let them choose one bullock for themselves, and cut it in pieces, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: and I will dress the other bullock, and lay it on wood, and put no fire under: And call ye on the name of your gods, and I will call on the name of the LORD: and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken. (*I Kings 18:21-24*)

In the above passage, it is clear that the children of Israel could not decide who was actually God, whether it was the LORD

God of their fathers, or Baal. The wording of Elijah's challenge is significant: "How long halt ye between two opinions? if the LORD be God, follow him: but if Baal, then follow him." Moreover, the last part of Elijah's test reinforces the significance of Elijah's initial challenge, and the people's acceptance of that challenge: "and the God that answereth by fire, let him be God. And all the people answered and said, It is well spoken." It is clear that the children of Israel we used to referring to Baal as God, and treating Baal with the same worship and respect as the LORD God. Further evidence of the referring to Baal is God was also provided when the LORD God consumed, not just the sacrifice, but everything pertaining to it:

And it came to pass at the time of the offering of the evening sacrifice, that Elijah the prophet came near, and said, LORD God of Abraham, Isaac, and of Israel, let it be known this day that thou art God in Israel, and that I am thy servant, and that I have done all these things at thy word. Hear me, O LORD, hear me, that this people may know that thou art the LORD God, and that thou hast turned their heart back again. Then the fire of the LORD fell, and consumed the burnt sacrifice, and the wood, and the stones, and the dust, and licked up the water that was in the trench. And when all the people saw it, they fell on their faces: and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God. (*I Kings 18:36-39*)

When the fire fell, it demonstrated that Baal had no power as a god, but the LORD God indeed had power to consume everything, including the water. When the people responded, their statement proved how they referred to anyone or anything they considered to be God. The distinction they made here was to specify that the LORD God was the One True God:

. . .and they said, The LORD, he is the God; the LORD, he is the God. (*I Kings 18:39b*)

Therefore, if we take what the Scripture shows us in Romans, along with the event at Mount Carmel, it is plain that man has a generic reference to God, in which there is no specific identity attached to God, only that "God" exists and is capable of creating, destroying, judging, etc. This reference to "God" is not necessarily the same as the LORD, or LORD God of the Scriptures in which the LORD has a specific and express character and nature. Instead, now as then, when individuals refer to "God" the character and nature of the "God" to which they refer deviates widely from the character and nature of the LORD God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. This being the case, when people refer to God, we cannot assume that they particularly mean the LORD God.

So then, based the evidence presented in Scripture, the focus of Ecclesiastics is clearly man's perspective on life. Moreover, it was written by the wisest man that ever lived and from the perspective of what he could determine about life and its purpose using all the wisdom and understanding he possessed, without the benefit of the LORD's perspective. This being the case, if we now examine Ecclesiastics 9:5 in context, we should be able to readily discern what Solomon is referring to:

For to him that is joined to all the living there is hope: for a living dog is better than a dead lion. For the living know that they shall die: but the dead know not any thing, neither have they any more a reward; for the memory of them is forgotten. Also their love, and their hatred, and their envy, is now perished; neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done **under the sun.** (Ecclesiastics 9:4-6)

Notice the verse in question sits squarely in the context of the living versus the dead based upon man's point of view. Please note the sentence following the verse in question is a continuation of that verse as it uses the word "Also" to directly tie the rest of verse six to verse five. In verse six, the context of verse five is made expressly plain:

neither have they any more a portion for ever in any thing that is done under the sun.

Therefore, the interpretation of verse five is simply this:

When someone dies, as far as the physical world and this earth are concerned, and as far as their relationship with this world is concerned, they do not know anything, they cannot communicate with us, they labor no more, they gain no more reward, and the memory of them will be forgotten over time.

This is man's perspective without the aid of the Scriptures, faith, or any other portion of the wisdom and understanding of God. It is the predominate view of this world. However, it is dead wrong, and to base an understanding of life after death on the misinterpretation of this verse is to seriously risk consigning yourself to everlasting torment.