

There have been moments...when I have pondered the
meaninglessness of my life and the apparent absence of God from it.

- an appreciation for sacred time
- a hope in the ultimate triumph of God's love
- a focus on the continuing ministry of Christ
- a concern for health and wholeness
- a commitment to truth.

Ah, you say, but of course you see your convictions in this text. And I say . . . thank you to the Sabbath tent and the missionaries . . . teachers, textbooks, classes, conversations . . . and to students like Joel, who shaped and continue to shape the way I read Scripture as an Adventist.

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Reading Scripture Imaginatively

Proverbs vs. Ecclesiastes

By Casey Butterfield

Of all Bible books, I have appreciated Proverbs the most. I have loved its bits of wisdom. They have seemed like quick fixes for spiritual hunger. Flipping open the Bible to Proverbs, I could immediately find something I could apply today.

However, since I have read Ecclesiastes, I think we might have a new winner. I love the pessimistic side of Ecclesiastes. It gives us such a bleak view of life. The writers must have been bitter. They probably had a good excuse to be that way. They were in exile, living rough, dismal lives. God was not making his presence obvious, so the authors of Ecclesiastes had a good excuse to question God's involvement in everyday life.

Both Ecclesiastes and Proverbs take the stance that wisdom is the key to a successful life. In Ecclesiastes 7:25, this insight is placed in a short blurb that contrasts wisdom and foolishness. In this respect, as well, Ecclesiastes and Proverbs are similar. Ecclesiastes 9:13-10:20, is another section about the wise and the foolish.

But the books are not alike in their views of the balance between actions and consequences. Whereas Proverbs sees that evil is punished and good rewarded, Ecclesiastes takes the stance that righteousness is not always rewarded and that sin isn't always punished.

In this respect, Ecclesiastes applies to today's culture. I like the facts not only that I can relate to its take on life and wisdom, but also that I can apply it today. In today's world, good is not always the winner. Sometimes good people lose. There are many cases in today's world where the bad guy wins. Today, evil is often rewarded.

This is why I appreciate the approach to life taken



David being made King of Judah.

in the book of Ecclesiastes. There have been moments in my life when I have pondered the meaninglessness of my life and the apparent absence of God from it. No matter how hard or how frequent I tried to pray for help, no answer ever came.

We pray for justice. We want justice. But today, justice is rare, even for the innocent. Given today's sociohistorical context, Ecclesiastes speaks to me. I am naturally a pessimistic person. I always plan for the worst. I realize that punishment and justice do not always come to those who deserve them. And justice is not always given to the righteous.

I love the ideal in Ecclesiastes of not worrying about things, but rather accepting them for what they are (5:8-6:12). For everything there is a season. For everything there is a reason. This simple truth can save us much stress and heartache. Acceptance is the key to surviving hard times.

Finally, there is a core truth behind all: Everything is meaningless. At first, this declaration may sound extreme. But the author makes a valid point. Isn't it true that God above is what's important? What about faith? Why care about the wisdom and pleasure of the world? What can these things gain a person?

Because of these insightful statements and ideas, I must say that I now prefer Ecclesiastes.

Casey Butterfield wrote this paper as a senior communication major at Columbia Union College. He lives in Silver Spring, Maryland, and is now working on a short film

A Play on the Word *House*

2 Samuel 7:1-17

By Rosezanne DaKanay

It is a wonder how a Bible author comes up with a theme for a Bible passage. It is indeed only through the wonder of the Spirit. Such is an example found in the book of 2 Samuel. In 2 Samuel 7:1-17, the author plays with the word *house*, which carries different meanings in different parts of the passage—from being a palace, to being a temple, to being a dynasty.

In this passage, King David is enjoying the fruits of his labor and wishes that the ark of the covenant be given a permanent home. The ark has been carried from one place to another. King David feels it isn't right for him to live in a "house of cedar" while the "ark of God stays in a tent" (verse 2).

If I were in David's position, I would certainly wonder about where the ark of the covenant should be placed. I would feel, no doubt, a sense of duty—as he did—to the ark of the covenant, a powerful symbol of the presence of God.

Being in a close relationship with God, as David was, God was able to converse with him. In verse 8, God gives David an answer: "I took you from the pasture, from following the sheep to be prince over my people Israel." God tells David directly that he has made it possible for David to be king. It was God's doing that made it possible for him to live in a house of cedar. God puts David in his place.

In verse 5, God questions David about his desire to build a house for the ark of the covenant. "Are you the one to build me a house to live in?" seems like a sarcastic question from God. David is climbing the ladder of success. God questions David effectively and reminds him of the fact that it is God who establishes and destroys kingdoms.

It is within this context that the author wonderfully interweaves plays on the word *house*. In the first two verses of the chapter, the word represents a palace. In verses 5, 6, 7, 9, and 13, *house* is a temple. In verses 11 and 16, the word refers to a dynasty.

It is important to remember that, upon the establishment of a kingdom, the ruling party naturally wants it to last. David equates the lasting of his kingdom with the presence of God. So long as God is in the midst of the kingdom, the kingdom that he has allowed to come into existence will continue. The author is trying to stress a significant thought by playing with the word *house*. To a king, it is important

