

UPWARD CALL

Brethren, I do not regard myself as having laid hold of it yet; but this is my one aim: to forget everything that's behind, and to strain every nerve to go after what lies ahead. I press on toward the finish line, where the prize waiting for me is the upward call of God
IN KING JESUS.

(Philippians 3:13-14)

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Ecclesiastes 3:11—Obscurity in Man's Heart

He has made everything beautiful (appropriate) *in its time*. Also, ***he has put eternity into man's heart***, yet so that he cannot find out what God has done from ***the beginning to the end***. (Ecclesiastes 3:11 ESV (NASB) [bold italic added])

People often quote this verse with emphasis on eternity in one's heart, and they generally stop there without consideration of what preceded this or what follows. Of course, this goes along quite well with the gospel of today that emphasizes eternal life (as life outside of time) and dying and going to heaven (as a disembodied spirit or an immortal soul or with a new body—take your pick); a gospel that is not emphasized in scripture. What is emphasized is *the adoption (placement) of sons, the redemption of the body* through resurrection and transformation (Romans 8:23; Philippians 3:20-21).

For a moment, consider what this translation is saying. Eternity is put into man's heart so he can't figure out what God is up to. Does this make sense to you? How does eternity block out knowledge of what God has done? Using most people's concept of eternity (endlessness), why would God do such a thing? What is the purpose of scripture, then, if God doesn't want us to have some (not all) level of understanding of His plan from the beginning to the end? Surely, scripture tells us a lot about God's plan to achieve His ultimate purpose. How do we resolve this apparent paradox? Perhaps the answer lies in the translation.

In the Hebrew, the word translated as *eternity* in many translations comes from the word ***olam***, which generally refers to what is ***obscure***. The comparable Greek word is ***aion***, which refers to ***ages***. Thus, some make the point that *olam* and *aion* should be translated as referring to long durations of time like *ages* that, by the way, often appear obscure to man since they can stretch on for unknown durations.

However, in reviewing other translations, it seems that the translators struggled over how to word this verse. In the place of *eternity*, other translations use the words *world, knowledge, understanding, or obscurity*—words with completely different meanings. Consider these translations.

He hath made everything beautiful in its time; also, ***he hath set the world [olam]*** in their heart, so that man findeth not out from the beginning to the end the work that God doeth. (Ecclesiastes 3:11 DNT [bold italic added])

God makes everything happen at the right time. ***Yet none of us can ever fully understand [olam]*** all he has done, and he puts questions in our minds about the past and the future. (Ecclesiastes 3:11 CEV [bold italic added])

The whole He hath made beautiful in its season; also, ***that knowledge [olam]*** ***He hath put in their heart without which*** man findeth not out the work that God hath done from the beginning even unto the end. (Ecclesiastes 3:11 YLT [bold italic added])

Everything, hath he made beautiful in its own time,—also, ***intelligence [olam], hath he put in their heart***, without which men could not find out the work which God hath wrought, from the beginning even unto the end. (Ecclesiastes 3:11 Rotherham [bold italic added])

Setting the world in one's heart, as in the Darby (DNT), makes no contextual sense. Interestingly, Young (YLT) and Rotherham place the subject in the positive, not the negative. Knowledge or intelligence was given to man so that he *could figure out* what God is doing, not to keep it hidden from him. This is a rather appealing interpretation that makes sense in light of other scripture along this line (e.g., Isaiah 46:10-11; Amos 3:7). However, the CLV seems more accurate in its use of the word *obscurity*.

He has made everything fitting in its season; however, ***He has put obscurity [olam] in their heart*** so that the man not find out His work, that which the One, Elohim, does from the beginning to the terminus. (Ecclesiastes 3:11 CLV [bold italic added])

In English, ***obscure*** means "not easily perceived, hidden, not well-known or easily understood." This actually makes more sense in light of the context of the verse and the ones that precede it. The first ten verses of chapter 3 are all about time: ***There is an appointed time for everything. And there is a time for every event under heaven—A time to....*** Simply, Solomon believed that some of what God has done and is doing in time from beginning to end is obscure to man. Can anyone truly say that they understand all that God has done since He began to make the ages (of time) through His Son? Surely not! However, this does not mean man can never know what God has done or is doing through the ages. In fact, I propose that Solomon's wisdom has been superseded, even made obsolete, by Paul.

In 1 Corinthians, Paul wrote of ***the wisdom of God, a mystery*** and a hidden wisdom which God had ***predestined before the ages*** and which none of ***the rulers of that age*** had understood, for if they had understood it, they would not have crucified Jesus, the Lord of glory. Then Paul quoted from Isaiah 64:4: ***According as it has been written, "Eye has not seen, and ear has not heard," nor has it risen up into the heart of man, the things which God has prepared for those that love Him.—and that's what God has revealed to us through His spirit*** (1 Corinthians 2:9-10).

What Solomon saw as obscure, Paul saw as a mystery. The difference between the two men is that the mystery of the ages was revealed to Paul. This mystery is the wisdom of God, and it is expressed and explained in a person. **His name is Jesus!**

In some respects, Solomon pointed to Jesus as he personified wisdom in the opening chapters of Proverbs. But Paul most clearly unveils this wisdom to all in his preaching of ***the light of the gospel of the glory of the Messiah Jesus***. We are no longer in the darkness of obscurity when it comes to God's ways and the ages to come. Jesus explains it all. O, we might not know the details of God's plan, but we have something much greater. We know God's overall plan and His purpose of the ages, and it is all in relation to His Son.

In the king, and through his blood, we have deliverance—that is, our sins have been forgiven—through the wealth of his grace which he lavished on us. Yes, with all wisdom and insight he has made known to us the secret of his purpose, just as he wanted it to be and set forward in him as a blueprint for when the time was ripe. ***His plan was to sum up the whole cosmos in the king—yes, everything in heaven and on earth, in him.*** (Ephesians 1:7-10 Kingdom-NT [bold italic added])

We have discovered what God's plan from beginning to end is all about. Now and throughout the ages to come, His Son is all in all! We who believe do not have obscurity in our heart. **Jesus is in our heart!**